**Recognizing the Unseen: Emotional Violence and Feminist Influence in Mexico (2016–2021)**

**From Silence to Awareness: The Impact of Feminist Discourse on Emotional Violence Recognition in Mexico**

**Reframing Harm: How Feminist Movements and Digital Campaigns Changed Women's Recognition of Emotional Violence- IPV- in Mexico**

**From Normalization to Recognition: Feminist Movements and the Changing Perception of Emotional Violence in Mexico (2016–2021)**

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**Abstract**

1. **Introduction**

Emotional and psychological violence in intimate relationships is a form of gender-based violence that often goes unnoticed, unreported, and unchallenged. In Mexico, despite increasing public awareness of violence against women, emotional abuse remains one of the most prevalent yet least recognized forms of harm. According to INEGI and UN-affiliated reports, approximately 49 % of women aged 15 and older report having experienced emotional violence. However, a significantly smaller proportion interpret these behaviours as violence. This invisibility matters—not only because it delays access to support and justice, but because it perpetuates a cultural tolerance of abuse disguised as love or concern.

In recent years, feminist movements and digital activism have expanded the public discourse in Mexico to include not only physical and sexual violence, but also psychological, economic, and symbolic forms of harm. In 2020, mass mobilisations such as, the 8M marches, Un Día Sin Nosotras, and online campaigns like #MeToo brought unprecedented visibility to emotional abuse and coercive control. These efforts, especially on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, introduced new narratives that challenged romanticized ideas of jealousy, manipulation, and surveillance. Feminist influencers, NGOs, and collectives developed digital content—memes, story templates, and testimonial videos—that provided language and tools to name emotional abuse. Despite this cultural shift, there is still limited empirical research on the impact of these movements: specifically, on how they have affected women’s ability to recognize emotionally abusive behaviours as violence.

This research emerges from a personal and professional commitment to improving how violence is understood and addressed. As the co-founder of a digital chatbot designed to help young people identify healthy and unhealthy relationship dynamics, I have seen firsthand how difficult it can be for women to recognize emotional abuse—particularly when it is framed as affection or protection. This confusion between harm and love is one of the main reasons why emotional violence remains invisible, both to victims and to institutions.

The objective of this research is to assess the extent to which feminist movements and digital campaigns have influenced Mexican women’s ability to recognize emotional violence in intimate relationships. Using data from National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships in Mexico (ENDIREH) from 2016 and 2021, the study identifies the percentage of women who report experiencing emotionally abusive behaviours but do not define them as serious responding instead that such behaviours are unimportant. It then examines how sociodemographic factors such as age, education, and geography correlate with this under-recognition. In doing so, the project contributes to broader conversations about data justice, gender inequality, and the limitations of awareness campaigns when structural and cultural barriers to recognition persist. The space between experience and recognition is where this research is grounded.

By focusing on recognition—not just prevalence—this project offers a new lens through which to understand how gender-based violence operates at the intersection of lived experience and public discourse. It highlights how feminist movements have reshaped cultural understandings of abuse, and how these shifts are reflected—or not—in women’s interpretations of their own experiences. Ultimately, this research not only informs the design of more effective interventions but also lays the groundwork for future evaluations, particularly in the context of the upcoming 2026 round of ENDIREH.

**1.1 Hypothesis:**

H1. Feminist movements and digital prevention campaigns between 2016 and 2021 contributed to a shift in how women in Mexico recognise emotional in intimate relationships.

* Younger and more educated women with greater digital access are more likely to identify abusive behaviours as violence, whereas older, less educated women and those with limited internet access are more likely to misrecognise or normalise them, as feminist movements and digital campaigns have primarily targeted the former group.
* Mexico City exhibits a lower proportion of unrecognized emotional violence in 2021 compared to other regions due to the strength and visibility of feminist movements in the capital.

**1.2 Research Question**

"To what extent—and for whom—have feminist movements and digital prevention campaigns improved the recognition of emotional violence among Mexican women?"

**2. Literature Review**

**2.1 Emotional Violence as an Underrecognized Form of Abuse**

*Definitions and effects*

"Emotional violence" and "psychological violence" are often used synonymously, referring to non-physical behaviours intended to control, isolate, or harm another person's emotional state and psychological well-being. While some differentiate them by suggesting that psychological violence is a more specific form of emotional violence, the core impact on the victim's mental health and sense of self remains similar.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) encompasses any behaviour by a current or former partner that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm. This includes acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, emotional abuse, and controlling behaviours (World Health Organization, 2021). While physical IPV tends to be more visible and reported, psychological and emotional forms of IPV are often hidden, subtle, and chronic.

Emotional and psychological abuse is increasingly recognized as a core dimension of IPV, yet it remains among the least acknowledged forms in legal frameworks, public discourse, and policy. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) defines emotional abuse as the intentional use of verbal and non-verbal acts—such as humiliation, intimidation, isolation, and threats—aimed at hurting or controlling a partner. Scholars emphasize that these actions must be viewed not as isolated incidents, but as sustained patterns of domination.

Long-term psychological effects of emotional abuse are profound although there are no physical wounds. Women who have experienced emotional abuse often experience depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and diminished self-esteem (Ali & Naylor, 2013). Victims describe their wounds as “invisible,” with trauma that persists long after physical violence ends. refer to this as psychological entrapment, where the victim doubts her own reality. ()

*Recognition*

While many women experience emotionally abusive behaviours within intimate relationships, not all interpret these experiences as violence. Understanding why some women do not label emotionally abusive behaviours as violence is key to addressing its invisibility. As Hamby and Grych (2016) explain, recognition is not merely about the presence of harm, but about having the language, cultural framing, and psychological safety to name that harm. Abuse in relationships often begins with psychological violence, which is difficult to detect because it is frequently disguised as affection—even when it manifests as controlling or restrictive behaviours (Serrata et al., 2020).

Another critical distinction in the recognition of emotional violence lies in whether the abuse is truly invisible or simply unacknowledged by the social environment. Gracia (2004) emphasizes that underreporting does not always imply unawareness—violence may be known by others, but social norms, fear of involvement, or the privatization of family issues prevent action. In many cases, people close to the victim—such as friends, neighbours, or relatives—may recognize the harm but choose silence. Supporting this, a Eurobarometer survey by the European Commission found that 11% of respondents knew a woman affected by domestic violence in their workplace, 18% in their neighbourhood, and 19% in their family or friend circle. Likewise, many acknowledged knowing perpetrators in the same settings (European Commission, 2010).

A study points out that many people consider intimate partner violence (IPV) primarily in cases involving physical injuries but often overlook its less visible manifestations. The authors argue that “patients with an acute IPV injury represent the tip of the iceberg,” while many others seek care for unrelated symptoms that are complications of prior physical, sexual, or emotional abuse (Anglin & Mitchell, 2004). In this context, they introduce the iceberg model to illustrate how most violence remains submerged and invisible—unrecognized, unmeasured, and untreated.

Surveys by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) estimate that around 40% of women worldwide have experienced emotional or psychological violence. However, this figure only reflects those who both experienced and recognized such behaviours as violence, meaning the actual prevalence is likely much higher.

As D’Ignazio and Klein (2020) argue in Data Feminism, what is not measured is often treated as non-existent. Emotional abuse, because of its intangible and relational nature, has historically been excluded from official data collection, legal frameworks, and public health strategies. This exclusion reflects injustice: a failure to recognize and validate forms of suffering that fall outside dominant norms of what violence “should” look like. As a result, emotional violence is often not perceived as serious—either by institutions or by the women who experience it—further reinforcing its invisibility and normalization.

As Kelly (2003) notes in her concept of the “continuum of violence,” there are no sharp boundaries between microaggressions and more severe abuse—only variations in visibility, recognition, and response. Jewkes et al. (2015) argue that emotional violence frequently precedes physical or sexual harm, making early recognition critical to effective intervention.

*Approaches*

To better capture the recognition gap of emotional violence, researchers have adopted multiple methodological approaches. Vignette-based surveys—where participants are presented with hypothetical relationship scenarios—have been used to assess how serious women perceive violence (Erickson, Jonnson, Langille, & Walsh, 2017). These designs allow researchers to isolate interpretation from experience.

Lists experiments, also indirect questioning, have emerged as a quantitative tool for reducing social desirability bias in survey responses. Participants are presented with several non-sensitive statements and asked how many, not which, apply. A subgroup receives an additional sensitive item (e.g., a question about emotional or intimate partner violence). The difference between groups allows researchers to estimate the prevalence of sensitive behaviours without requiring direct disclosure. Gilligan et al. (2025) found that, in Ethiopia, prevalence estimates of intimate partner violence using a list experiment were unexpectedly lower than those from direct questions, potentially due to “fleeing” behaviour by respondents avoiding any association with violence. These findings underscore the complexity of measuring emotional violence, and the need for tools that account for social and psychological barriers to recognition.

**2.2 Mexico**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the leading cause of violence against women in Mexico. Emotional abuse in this context must be understood within the broader framework of structural machismo and deeply entrenched gender norms. Cultural expectations often tie women’s worth to their ability to maintain harmony within relationships—even at the expense of their own wellbeing (Lagarde y de los Ríos, 2005). This ideology not only legitimizes male control and jealousy as signs of love but also silences women’s experiences of harm by framing endurance as virtue.

As Aguayo (2011) note, these machismo ideologies are perpetuated through institutions such as family, religion, and media, where women are socialized to accept pain in silence and men are rarely held accountable for controlling behaviours. In this context, emotional violence thrives not in isolation but as part of a system that continuously reinforces gendered power imbalances.

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2013), intimate partner violence in Mexico is often reproduced as a normalized form of coexistence, justified by prevailing cultural and social norms. However, the recognition of this issue depends largely on the woman's perception of the situation, as in many cases, women who experience violence believe they deserve the abuse they receive.

In Mexico, being a young woman (Castro et al., 2006; Villarreal, 2007), having low levels of formal education (Ávila-Burgos et al., 2009; Jaen Cortés et al., 2015; Rivera-Rivera et al., 2004), and belonging to a lower socioeconomic class (Castro et al., 2006; Castro & Casique, 2008) are among the most significant predictors of IPV. Relationship-level factors also increase risk, particularly being partnered with a young man (Casique & Castro, 2014), especially one who exhibits controlling behaviours (Frías, 2017), uses alcohol or drugs (Mojarro-Iñiguez et al., 2014), has a history of either experiencing or perpetrating violence (de la Rubia and Rosales, 2013), or is unemployed (Valdez-Santiago et al., 2013). These findings reinforce the understanding that IPV is not solely a matter of individual pathology but emerges from the intersection of structural inequalities, social norms, and relationship dynamics.

*Key Mobilisations*

In recent years, feminist activism in Mexico has played a pivotal role in reshaping public discourse on gender-based violence. Movements such as 8M, Me Too, Un Día Sin Nosotras, among others, have mobilised thousands across the country, expanding conversations around violence beyond physical and sexual harm to include emotional, symbolic, and economic dimensions (Marcos, 1999; Alcaraz Alonso et al., 2022). These mobilisations have been especially impactful among younger generations, whose engagement with feminist narratives on platforms like TikTok and Instagram has brought emotional abuse into the cultural mainstream (Cerva Cerna, 2020).

LINEA DEL TIEMPO

2013- una protesta en la cdmx por una encarcelada por matar a su aggressor sexual

2015- llego de Argentina #NiUnaMenos en la cdmx y edo mex y fue enorme. 8 de marzo y 25n dia internacional de la eliminacion de laviolencia contra la mujer

2016 – ecatepec al angel entra trump denigrando a las mujeres

2017 – feminicidio lesli en CU. Me too movement

2019. marchas al zocalo mas intensas cdmx con jovenes

2020 – tomaron la fiscalia y se lleno de gente,

The first mass demonstrations in Mexico were 8M on March 8th which is International Women’s Day and took place in 2015, in response to machismo violence in the country. However, it was until 2018 that the movement gained viral momentum, evolving into a digitally empowered fourth wave that reframed the public conversation around gender-based violence. This wave, characterized by the strategic use of social media and online platforms, expanded feminist discourse to include not only physical and sexual violence, but also emotional, psychological, economic, and symbolic harm (Ortolá, 2022).

Feminist influencers and collectives used platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok to circulate educational content, survivor testimonies, and interactive tools to identify abuse—often reaching millions of users (Ramirez Ruiz, 2024). This digitally driven activism was closely linked to large-scale offline activism, including the 8M marches, which drew over 80,000 participants in 2020 in Mexico City, and the national women’s strike “Un Día Sin Nosotras” held the following day (El Universal, 2025).

Although the 2021 march saw reduced attendance (around 20,000 people) due to COVID-19 restrictions, the feminist conversation remained active online. Scholars and journalists have noted that this new wave of activism not only made emotional violence more visible but also introduced a new vocabulary to interpret and name previously normalized behaviours.

A graph of colored lines

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

Hashtags have provided survivors with language to name their experiences and foster solidarity through storytelling, memes, and feminist humour. Herrera (2021) and Salinas et al. (2021) show that such cultural production can help dismantle romanticized notions of control and jealousy, especially among adolescents in Mexico. Still, virality does not guarantee transformation.

Mexican feminist scholars have long called attention to the limitations of institutional recognition. Lagarde y de los Ríos (2005) argue that the Mexican state only began addressing emotional abuse and femicide after sustained pressure from autonomous feminist movements. This historical pattern underscores that the exclusion of emotional violence from legal and policy frameworks is not a passive omission, but an active reflection of patriarchal priorities.

*Relevant studies*

The growing visibility of emotional violence in Mexico reflects not only rising prevalence but also an increase in women’s capacity to recognize and name these experiences. In a 2021 press conference, Alejandra Ríos, emphasized that the most recent wave of the ENDIREH recorded the highest prevalence of violence since the survey’s inception in 2006. She attributed this increase, particularly in sexual, psychological, and community-based violence, to greater public awareness and women's growing willingness to report such experiences—likely influenced by the dissemination of rights-based discourse.

Using ENDIREH data, Valdez-Santiago et al. (2013) found that emotional violence affects a higher proportion of women in Mexico than either physical or sexual violence. Despite this, emotional abuse remains significantly less likely to be acknowledged or reported. This under recognition is especially evident among adolescents. López Rosales et al. (2013) highlight that common behaviours such as phone surveillance or social isolation are frequently perceived by young people as expressions of love or care rather than as indicators of control. The lack of formal emotional education in Mexican schools exacerbates this problem, leaving many adolescents without the tools to identify abusive relationship dynamics.

A journalistic analysis by Gatopardo (González, 2022) used ENDIREH 2021 to question whether the rise in reports of emotional violence reflects a real increase or a greater ability to recognize it. By focusing on retrospective accounts of childhood abuse, the authors argue that the 6% increase in psychological violence reports likely signals a cultural shift in awareness, rather than changes in actual conditions—supporting the idea that recognition evolves over time.

Strasser Ceballos and Haensch (2021) conducted a machine learning analysis of psychological intimate partner violence (IPV) using ENDIREH 2021 and 2016, they found that childhood exposure to violence—both by the woman and her partner—was a key predictor of experiencing psychological IPV. Factors such as age, age at sexual initiation, women’s autonomy over economic and professional decisions are contributing factors to IPV of women with children. (Torres Munguía and Martínez-Zarzoso, 2022)

Despite progress in public awareness, empirical studies that analyse the gap between experiencing and recognizing emotional violence remain limited, especially in Mexico. Existing research has tended to focus on prevalence or on survivors’ narratives, without linking these insights to large-scale patterns of misrecognition.

**2.3 Sociodemographic Factors**

*Age*

Feminist activism resources are widely spread through digital platforms and social media, making age an important contributing factor to the recognition of abusive behaviours (,). Adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable to under recognised emotional violence, as they often internalize cultural myths of romantic love—such as jealousy as a sign of commitment or control as a form of affection (Lozano et al., 2024). Francis and Pearson (2021) argue that young women, despite being more exposed to emotionally abusive behaviours, are frequently less likely to identify them as harmful.

Young people increasingly engage with digital spaces where contradictory messages about relationships abound—ranging from feminist educational content to romanticized portrayals of control and jealousy (Salinas et al., 2021). While access to social media can promote awareness, it can also blur boundaries between love and violence, leading to confusion and normalization.

Aday et al. (2017) and Storey et al. (2024) show that older adults are more likely to avoid reporting psychological violence due to deeply rooted cultural norms, loyalty to family structures, or lack of exposure to modern definitions of abuse. Traditional gender roles and generational silence surrounding intimate relationships can reinforce these patterns, especially in communities where questioning a partner’s behaviour is socially discouraged. ()

Adolescents may normalize harm due to romantic myths or peer influence that they see online in social media platforms (Lozano, 2024), whereas older women may not recognize past abuse unless prompted by specific survey questions (González, 2022). This reinforces the importance of contextually grounded interventions that consider age-specific barriers to recognition.

*Education*

According to Khan & Qian (2021), women with greater educational exposure are significantly less likely to justify intimate partner violence in Bangladesh. This suggests that education fosters interpretive capacity, enhances critical thinking around gender roles, and increases self-efficacy in identifying abusive behaviours.

Similar findings have been observed in global demographic surveys, where higher levels of formal education correlate with reduced acceptance of emotional control and greater recognition of psychological abuse (UN Women, 2020; Baird et al., 2017). Women with lower levels of education may lack the vocabulary, resources, or confidence to name their experiences. This does not reflect a personal shortcoming, but rather structural barriers to recognition and support. (Castro et al., 2006; Brambila-Tapia et al., 2025).

In the aftermath of the #MeToo movement in Mexico, March 2019 marked a turning point in university spaces, as dozens of students publicly shared testimonies of abuse and harassment by teachers and classmates. This surge in feminist activism catalysed the formation of student-led collectives that remain active today, with some faculties of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) even undergoing feminist-led shutdowns at the time of writing. These collectives have not only challenged institutional inaction but also redefined what counts as violence, explicitly naming emotional and psychological harm in their demands.

Actions such as the "tendedero" (clothesline protest), where women anonymously post experiences of violence besides the name and picture of the person who violented them—including manipulation, gaslighting, and verbal degradation—have helped surface forms of emotional abuse often dismissed as private or insignificant in different schools and universities in Mexico (Cerva Cerna, 2020). Education is a double site of transformation: not only as formal access to knowledge, but also as a political and cultural space where feminist discourses empower young women to recognize and resist normalized violence.

*Geographic location*

The strength of feminist movements in Mexico is unevenly distributed across regions, with the most visible and organized activism concentrated in urban centres like Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Puebla, and Mérida. Mexico City hosts the country’s largest 8M marches and is home to most feminist NGOs, university collectives, and awareness campaigns. In these urban areas, women are more likely to encounter feminist discourse that names emotional and psychological abuse, which contributes to higher levels of recognition (Álvarez Enríquez, 2020).

Although emotional and economic violence are often assumed to be more hidden in traditional or rural settings, findings from ENDIREH suggest otherwise. According to official analyses, urban women are 1.6 times more likely to experience emotional violence compared to women in rural areas (INEGI, 2021). This higher prevalence in urban areas may reflect both greater exposure to controlling behaviours and a higher likelihood of recognizing and reporting such behaviours due to broader access to information, education, and institutional support. These results challenge the common assumption that rural women are necessarily more vulnerable to all types of IPV.

However, women in rural or economically marginalized urban areas still face greater barriers to accessing support services, digital infrastructure, and educational content. Casique and Castro (2014) found that in southern Mexico, women in geographically isolated communities were significantly less likely to recognize emotional abuse. This suggests that recognition is mediated not only by individual awareness, but also by structural and geographical inequalities.

Recognition of emotional violence is not uniform across populations. It is shaped by an intersection of structural, cultural, and individual-level factors (). Heise’s (1998) ecological model of violence offers a valuable framework for understanding how personal history, relationship dynamics, community context, and broader social norms interact to shape both the risk of experiencing violence and the ability to recognize it. In Mexico, this perspective is particularly relevant, as gender norms and structural inequalities continue to influence how abuse is interpreted or normalized and as feminism movements are soaring.

In sum, while existing literature has highlighted the psychological consequences of emotional violence, its cultural invisibility, and the conditions that enable it, empirical research remains limited in three keyways. First, most studies focus on prevalence and risk factors, without directly measuring the gap between experiencing violence and recognizing it as such. Second, while some research has analysed feminist mobilisations and digital campaigns, few have evaluated their quantitative impact on perception. Third, several international studies rely on indirect questioning techniques—such as vignettes or list experiments—to explore attitudes and mitigate reporting bias, but these methods often fail to capture how women interpret their own lived experiences in everyday relationships.

This study addresses those gaps by using ENDIREH 2016 and 2021, a nationally representative dataset that uniquely asks women both whether they have experienced specific emotionally abusive behaviours, and how serious or important they consider those behaviours. This dual-question format enables the construction of an empirical measure of under-recognition—the disconnect between lived harm and perceived severity. By analysing changes over time, across social groups and geographic contexts, and by applying a Differences-in-Differences approach, this project provides new evidence on how feminist movements and digital activism may have reshaped public understandings of emotional violence in Mexico.

1. **Methodology**

This research investigates whether Mexico’s growing feminist movement has contributed to a societal shift in how intimate partner emotional violence against women is perceived, through a temporal comparison using nationally representative data from 2016 and 2021. The objective is not only to document changes in the recognition of emotional violence, but also to assess whether these changes reflect broader cultural transformations—particularly the increasing visibility of feminist activism and public discourse around gender-based violence during this period. By analysing individual-level perceptions of emotional abuse across both survey waves, the study aims to identify measurable shifts in social awareness, patterns of normalization, and the sociodemographic factors that predict under-recognition.

**2.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a comparative cross-sectional design, drawing on two independent years of a Mexican survey to evaluate changes over time in the recognition and normalization of emotional violence. While the survey samples are not longitudinal (i.e., they do not track the same individuals), their nationally representative nature enables robust population-level comparisons across years. The analysis focuses on women aged 15 and older who have been in an intimate partnership, using logistic regression models and descriptive statistics to explore how variables such as age, education, digital access, and geographic location relate to recognition patterns, all related to the rise of feminist mobilisations.

To further assess the impact of contextual factors, a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) analysis was conducted, using Mexico City as the treatment group and the rest of the country as a control group. This allowed for a quasi-experimental estimation of whether observed changes in normalization rates were more pronounced in regions where feminist activism and awareness campaigns were especially visible.

**2.1.1 Overview of the Data Source: ENDIREH 2021**

This study uses microdata from the 2016 and 2021 waves of the Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares (ENDIREH), a national survey conducted by INEGI that targets women aged 15 years and older living in private households across Mexico. Both the 2016 and 2021 editions of ENDIREH were conducted in the last quarter of the year (October–November) using a probabilistic, stratified, tri-stage clustered sample, covering approximately 140,000 households in each wave and yielding interviews with over 110,000 women. In both years, one eligible woman per household was selected to respond to a comprehensive questionnaire on physical, sexual, economic, emotional, and patrimonial violence across five domains: intimate partner, family, school, work, and community. The instruments, consisting of over 1,000 items, were organized in thematic modules tailored to the respondent’s marital status.

The ENDIREH questionnaire is composed of multiple modules that cover both acts of violence and personal background characteristics. It asks about a wide array of specific abusive behaviour’s, including verbal aggression, controlling behaviour, humiliation, threats, physical aggression, forced sexual acts, financial control, and property damage. Respondents are asked about the frequency, timing, and location of each behaviour (e.g., in the last 12 months or earlier in life), as well as the relationship to the perpetrator—whether the aggressor was a current or former intimate partner, a family member, colleague, acquaintance, or stranger.

Although there is no specific question asking about if they consider violent acts as violence, the question of the severity of the situation is asked. This recognition item enables researchers to distinguish between the experience of violence and the recognition of it as such, particularly in the case of emotional or psychological abuse that is often normalised.

In addition to questions about violence, the survey includes rich sociodemographic data. It gathers detailed information on respondents’ age, education level, marital status, employment status, income, household structure, indigenous identity, language spoken, religion, disability status, geographic location (urban/rural), and access to digital technologies, including internet and mobile phone usage. This allows for the construction of models to identify patterns in both the prevalence of violence and the likelihood of recognizing it, and how these vary across generational, educational, geographic, and socioeconomic dimensions.

For the purposes of this study, three specific modules on each year were used:

1. TSDem (2016 & 2021) – Sociodemographic Data

This file contains individual-level information on all residents in the household, including age, education level, marital status, and employment. I used this dataset to generate key independent variables such as:

1. age (EDAD): from 15 to 97 years old
2. education level (GRA): how many years of education did you have – up to 9 years of education.
3. location (NOM\_ENT): identifies the state (federal entity) in which each woman resides. This geographic information is essential for capturing regional differences in public awareness, cultural norms, and exposure to feminist activism.

These variables were later used to analyse how socio-demographic factors correlate with the experience and recognition of emotional violence.

1. TVIV (2016 & 2021) – Household Data

This dataset provides information on household characteristics, including access to utilities, assets, and the number of residents. Household goods such as a radio, computer, laptop or tablet, landline, and mobile phone. These variables allowed us to approximate the level of access individuals had to digital and social networks.

1. Section XIII (2016) / Section XVI (2021) – Partner Relationship and Violence

These are the core modules for this study. They include information on the respondent's current or most recent intimate partner relationship, and the types of violence experienced within it—emotional, economic, physical, or sexual. I used the variables from this section to:

1. Identify whether women experienced specific types of emotional or physical violence (P13\_1\_x and P14\_1\_x)
2. Determine whether they perceived these acts as serious or minimized them (P13\_2\_x and P14\_2\_x)

The questions of emotional violence in the survey ask if their partner ever did the following:

* Shaming, insulting, or humiliating
* Emotional neglect or lack of affection
* Statements suggesting infidelity
* Inducing fear
* Threats
* Locking in or restricting movement
* Stalking or surveillance
* Controlling your actions
* Threatening with weapons or burning
* Threats of murder, suicide, or harm to children
* Destroying or hiding belongings
* Ignoring or silent treatment
* Monitoring phone or email

These modules enabled the central comparison in the thesis: analysing the evolution in the recognition (or normalization) of emotional violence between 2016 and 2021.

**2.1.2 Software and Tools**

All analyses were conducted in R (version 4.3.1) using:

* tidyverse
* dplyr
* readr
* tidyr
* ggplot2
* gtrendsR

**2.1.3 Data Cleaning and Preparation**

To ensure comparability across years and reliability in the analysis, data from ENDIREH 2016 and 2021 were carefully cleaned and harmonized. This process involved selecting relevant variables, constructing binary indicators of experienced and normalized emotional and physical violence, and merging these with sociodemographic and housing data to include age, education level, geographic region, and a proxy for digital access. The cleaning process also included merging violence, sociodemographic, and housing modules using ID\_PER (2021) or ID\_MUJ (2016) as the key identifier, cleaning IDs by trimming whitespace and extracting ID\_VIV where applicable and filtering out records with missing age group or other key variables. The resulting cleaned datasets were saved as data\_2016\_cleaned and data\_2021\_cleaned in both .csv and .rds formats.

After cleaning, both datasets were merged into a single combined file named data\_combined\_cleaned, which enabled direct year-to-year comparisons using the same constructed variables. This final dataset was also saved in .csv and .rds formats to ensure compatibility and efficient use in subsequent analyses.

**2.1.4 Variable Construction**

Created derived variables:

* violencia\_emocional\_vivida: 1 if the woman reported any emotionally abusive behaviour in the survey
* violencia\_emocional\_normalizada: 1 if she reported emotional abuse in the survey but considered it “not important”
* violencia\_fisica\_vivida and violencia\_fisica\_normalizada: same logic for physical abuse.

Grouped by categories:

* grupo\_edad: categorical variable for age group.
* acceso\_digital: count of available digital assets in the household (proxy for digital access). Digital access played a key role in circulating feminist discourse and raising consciousness around gender-based violence.

**2.1.5 Analytical Approach**

*Google trends*

As part of the analytical approach, Google Trends data were retrieved for key terms associated with feminist movements and gender violence in Mexico, including “violencia de género”, “8M”, “Marcha 8M” and “Me Too”. The analysis covered the period from January 2015 to July 2025, providing a temporal measure of public interest in these topics. Search intensity values, expressed on a relative scale from 0 to 100, were processed to replace missing or “<1” values with zero and plotted over time. This exploratory step was used to identify temporal patterns and peaks in public attention that may coincide with major feminist mobilisations, offering contextual evidence for the observed changes in women’s recognition of emotional violence between ENDIREH 2016 and 2021.

*Comparative analysis*

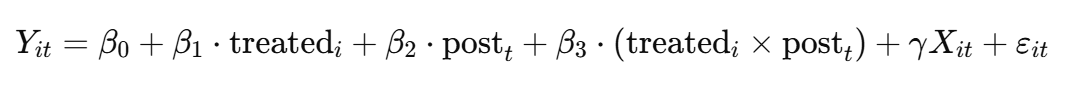
Descriptive statistics and visualisations were produced to examine changes in the prevalence and normalisation of emotional and physical violence between ENDIREH 2016 and 2021. Binary indicators were used to identify whether women had experienced specific types of emotional violence (13 behaviours) and whether these incidents were perceived as “not important,” indicating normalisation. The analysis included year‐to‐year comparisons of overall prevalence, disaggregation by type of emotional violence, and calculations of the percentage of cases normalised among those who had experienced each behaviour. Also, a plot showing the percentage of normalisation of emotional violence with age groups was created.

*Regression Analysis*

To assess changes in the normalization of emotional partner violence over time, a logistic regression model was estimated, restricting the analysis to women who reported experiencing at least one form of emotional violence. The dependent variable equals 1 if the respondent considered the experienced emotional violence ‘not important’. The main independent variable, post, equals 1 for 2021 (high exposure period) and 0 for 2016 (low exposure period). Interaction terms with age group, years of education (GRA), and digital access were included to capture heterogeneous changes across demographic profiles. The model estimates log-odds, which were subsequently transformed into odds ratios for interpretation.

*Difference in Differences*

To test H3, a Differences-in-Differences (DiD) model was estimated, comparing Mexico City (treatment group) to the rest of the country (control group) between 2016 and 2021. The DiD specification is as follows:



Where ​ is the binary indicator for normalized emotional violence, *treated* equals 1 if the respondent lives in Mexico City, *post* equals 1 for observations from 2021, and  is a vector of control variables including age group, education level, digital access, and urban residence. The coefficient ​ captures the DiD estimator of interest.

**2.1.4 Identification Strategy**

The objective of this study is to estimate the causal effect of exposure to feminist movements and digital campaigns on the recognition of emotional violence among Mexican women. A key challenge in identifying this effect is that exposure is not randomly assigned: women more engaged with digital platforms or feminist networks may already differ systematically from less exposed women in ways that also affect their recognition patterns. This introduces the risk of confounding and reverse causality.

To address this, time is used as a fuzzy instrumental variable for exposure. Specifically, 2016 corresponds to a period of low probability of exposure to feminist mobilization and digital discourse on gender-based violence, whereas 2021 corresponds to a period of high probability of exposure. This quasi-experimental variation arises from the substantial increase in feminist protests, online activism, and media coverage between these years, notably driven by the global #MeToo movement and nationwide 8M marches. While not all women in 2021 were exposed, the probability of exposure increased markedly at the population level, making time a plausible source of exogenous variation in exposure.

The identification assumption is that no other major nationwide factor independently shifted recognition of emotional violence over this period in a way that would confound the estimated effect. Unlike a traditional difference-in-differences (DiD) design, this approach does not require strict parallel trends across demographic groups. Instead, it assumes that, absent the surge in feminist mobilization and digital campaigns, changes in recognition would have been driven by slow-moving societal trends rather than sharp, differential shifts across groups. This makes it possible to attribute observed changes in recognition, particularly among subgroups with higher digital access, to increased exposure rather than unrelated shocks.

Formally, the empirical strategy estimates recognition as a function of time (2016 vs. 2021), subgroup characteristics (e.g., age, education, digital access), and their interactions, controlling for geographic and demographic covariates. The interaction between time and subgroup variables captures the heterogeneous effects of increased exposure across population segments. Robustness checks include examining whether patterns hold when excluding groups likely affected by unrelated contemporaneous shocks and testing for consistency across alternative recognition measures.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Hypothesis** | **Method** | **Main Variables** |
| H1. Feminist movements and digital campaigns between 2016 and 2021 contributed to a shift in how women recognise emotional violence in intimate relationships in Mexico |  |  |
| H1.1. Younger and more educated women with grater digital access are more likely identify abusive behaviours as violence while older, less educated women with limited internet access will tend to normalise or overlook those behaviours. | Descriptive Comparison and Logistic Regression | NIV, EDAD, |
| H1.2. Mexico City exhibits a lower proportion of unrecognised emotional violence in 2021 compared to other regions due to the strength and visibility of feminist movements in the capital. | DiD Regression | treated, post, treated x post |

**Table 1**

To date, no published studies have used ENDIREH 2021 data in direct comparison with the 2016 wave to assess the potential influence of feminist activism and public awareness campaigns in Mexico on women’s recognition of emotional violence. This study is the first to adopt this approach.

**2.2 Ethical Considerations**

As an autonomous public institution, INEGI follows rigorous international standards and ethical protocols, especially when dealing with sensitive topics such as gender-based violence. The methodology for ENDIREH is designed to ensure safety, confidentiality, and reliability. All interviews are conducted face-to-face by trained female enumerators, who follow strict guidelines to ensure the privacy of respondents during the questionnaire. Enumerators are instructed to postpone or reschedule interviews if the respondent is not alone or if the environment is unsafe or compromised by the presence of partners, family members, or others. The interviewers also receive gender-sensitive and trauma-informed training to handle disclosures of violence ethically and respectfully.

The analysis is based entirely on anonymized secondary data made publicly available by INEGI. No personally identifiable information was used. The research complies with LSE’s ethical standards for secondary data analysis.

Violence and that is all anonymous

Decir que ethics approved were granted

**2.3 Limitations**

Not going to extreme cases, feminisides and homocides

TREATING ALL WITHOUT COUNTING MIGRANTS, PEOPLE AT HOSPITALS ETC.

EFFECT IN FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Not the same women on 2016 than in 2021

Risks of going through ipv depression suicide

% of Assumptions of exposure to feminist ideas and movements

No es que lo reconozcan pero que ya lo aceptan

No 2011

No direct exposure to feminism available

Self-Reported Data: Responses may be subject to social desirability bias, memory limitations, or fear of disclosure, especially for stigmatized behaviours.

Unmeasured Variables: Factors such as mental health, partner's behaviour, or exposure to media are not captured, yet they may influence recognition.

1. **Results**

Understanding how women perceive, and report violence is not only a matter of statistics — it reflects deeper shifts in cultural awareness, public discourse, and the effectiveness of social movements. Between 2016 and 2021, Mexico experienced a wave of feminist mobilisations and digital campaigns aimed at making gender-based violence more visible, particularly forms of abuse that had long been normalized or ignored. This section examines whether those efforts translated into measurable changes in how women identify and interpret emotional violence from their intimate partner. Using nationally representative data from ENDIREH, we explore both prevalence and normalization patterns across the two most recent survey waves.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Total Women Surveyed** | **Experienced Emotional Violence** | **Experienced Physical Violence** | **%Normalized Emotional Violence** | **%Normalized Physical Violence** |
| 2016 | 111, 256 | 38, 610 | 18, 953 | 61% | 23% |
| 2021 | 110, 127 | 35, 656 | 18, 015 | 56% | 17% |

**Table 2**

As stated in Table 1, a general comparison of partner emotional and physical violence across the 2016 and 2021 ENDIREH waves reveals notable trends in both prevalence and normalization. The total number of women surveyed was similar in both years, allowing for a robust comparison. Emotional violence was more commonly reported in the survey than physical violence in both years. More striking, however, is the persistence of normalization—understood here as the percentage of women who reported the violence but stated it was "not important.". We can observe that in both years, physical violence is perceived as more severe than emotional violence. proving how common is to misrecognise those actions of abuse as violence when there is no physical evidence.

These initial findings suggest a modest reduction in both the experience and normalization of violence over time, particularly for emotional violence, potentially reflecting growing societal awareness or shifts in perception. The modest decrease in the normalization of emotional violence suggests that broader cultural, social, and political shifts may be slowly influencing how women interpret abusive behaviours.

A graph of blue and orange bars

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The disaggregation of emotional violence into specific behaviours reveals further nuance in how normalization has evolved across types. As shown in Figure 1, the percentage of women who minimized or normalized each form of emotional violence—by stating that it was “not important” despite having experienced it—declined between 2016 and 2021 in every category. The most normalized behaviours in both years include “ignoring or silent treatment,” “controlling your actions,” and “monitoring phone or email,” reflecting how these forms of control have historically been overlooked or misinterpreted as benign.

Notably, even among the most normalized behaviours, we observe a visible drop: for example, normalization of “monitoring phone or email” decreased from over 44% in 2016 to under 35% in 2021. These reductions, although modest, are significant because they suggest not just changing experiences but changing interpretations of violence—an important indicator of shifting cultural norms. The fact that women are increasingly less likely to view these behaviours as “not important” points to a rising collective consciousness around emotional abuse, likely influenced by public campaigns, feminist discourse, and greater access to information on gender-based violence.

**Age**

**A graph with lines and a red line

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Figure 2 reveals a clear and consistent decline in the proportion of women who normalized emotional violence across all age groups between 2016 and 2021. Notably, younger women—particularly those under 20—show the highest rates of normalization in both years, though their levels decreased slightly over time. This pattern supports findings by Lozano et al. (2024) and Francis and Pearson (2021), which suggest that adolescents and young adults often struggle to identify emotional abuse. Despite growing up in a more digitally connected era, the persistence of high normalization rates among this group indicates that exposure to feminist discourse has not fully translated into recognition of abuse.

In contrast, older women exhibit a sharper decline in normalization rates over time, with the most significant drop observed among women over 80—from approximately 55% in 2016 to 41% in 2021. This suggests a gradual shift in recognition even among groups traditionally seen as less exposed to public awareness efforts. However, the relatively lower initial levels of normalization among older women may reflect different dynamics, such as underreporting or generational silence, as described by Aday et al. (2017) and Storey et al. (2024). While both younger and older women normalize emotional violence, the underlying mechanisms differ: the former due to socialization into harmful relationship ideals, and the latter due to enduring cultural norms and limited access to updated definitions of abuse.

While younger women consistently display lower normalization rates, the most pronounced reduction between 2016 and 2021 occurred among older women, especially those over 80. This partially contradicts the initial hypothesis that changes would be concentrated among younger, digitally connected women. The pattern suggests that feminist campaigns and discourse in recent years may have reached a broader audience, including groups historically less exposed to them.

These trends highlight the complex relationship between age and recognition. The overall decline from 2016 to 2021 may point to the cumulative effects of public campaigns, social movements, and increased dialogue around gender-based violence. Yet, persistent age-based disparities remind us that recognition is mediated by structural, generational, and informational barriers that require tailored interventions.

**PONER DEL ACCESO DIGITAL**

**Educacion**

**Regression**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable** | **Odds Ratio** | **Interpretation** |
| Intercept (Baseline) | 2.79 | Baseline odds of normalizing emotional violence for women <20 in 2016 |
| Post (2021) | 0.79 | Odds of normalization in 2021 are 21% lower than in 2016, holding other factors constant |
| Age 20-29 | 0.68 | 32% lower odds than women <20 in 2016 |
| Age 30-39 | 0.52 | 48% lower odds than women <20 in 2016 |
| Age 40-49 | 0.43 | 57% lower odds than women <20 in 2016 |
| Age 50-59 | 0.38 | 62% lower odds than women <20 in 2016 |
| Age 60-80 | 0.36 | 64% lower odds than women <20 in 2016 |
| Age >80 | 0.40 | 60% lower odds than women <20 in 2016 |
| Education (GRA) | 1.00 | No effect found |
| Digital access | 1.04 | Slight, non-significant increase in odds |
| Post x Age 20-29 | 1.07 | Small interaction effect (NS) |
| Post x Age 30-39 | 1.13 | Small interaction effect (NS) |
| Post x Age 40-49 | 1.12 | Small interaction effect (NS) |
| Post x Age 50-59 | 1.09 | Small interaction effect (NS) |
| Post x Age 60-80 | 0.97 | Small negative interaction (NS) |
| Post x Age >80 | 0.71 | 29% lower odds in 2021 vs 2016 for this group |
| Post x Education (GRA) | 1.00 | No effect |
| Post x Digital access | 0.99 | No effect |

**acceso\_digital = 1.04**

**Por cada unidad adicional en acceso digital (de 0 a 4), el odds de normalizar violencia emocional aumenta en ~4%.**

**Esto es contra-intuitivo si esperabas que mayor acceso disminuyera la normalización.**

**Puede ser porque el efecto real es muy pequeño o porque acceso digital está correlacionado con otras variables (como edad).**

**Poner mapa de calor folch**

**DID = 2016 -2021**

This period coincides with the emergence of some of the most powerful feminist movements in Mexico’s recent history, including massive demonstrations, university occupations, and widespread digital activism denouncing gender violence. These efforts, particularly visible in Mexico City but echoed nationally, likely contributed to reshaping public discourse and challenging previously accepted forms of emotional abuse. While the overall prevalence of emotional violence remained high, the decline in normalization may indicate early signs of cultural change — that more women are beginning to recognize these experiences as unacceptable.

In 2021, women in Mexico City were significantly less likely to normalize emotional violence compared to women in other Mexican states. This difference coincides with the period of heightened feminist activism and visibility in the capital, suggesting a potential causal relationship between the feminist movement and shifts in perception.

**A graph with a blue line

AI-generated content may be incorrect.**

To further understand the impact of contextual factors on the recognition of emotional violence, a differences-in-differences (DiD) analysis was conducted comparing women in Mexico City to those in other Mexican states, using 2016 as the baseline and 2021 as the post-treatment period, focused exclusively on women who reported having experienced such violence.

As the analysis was restricted to women who had experienced emotional violence, Mexico City reported lower levels of normalization than other states in both years, and this gap widened in 2021. offers a more focused picture of how survivors’ perceptions have evolved. These findings indicate that awareness is occurring among those directly affected. The sharper decline in Mexico City may reflect the impact of local mobilisations and awareness campaigns, particularly in the aftermath of the 2019 wave of feminist protests.

**To test whether these observed changes were statistically significant, a series of DiD models were estimated. The first controlled for age group and the second included additional covariates such as educational attainment and digital access. In the baseline model with age controls, the interaction term (treated × post) was statistically significant and negative (β = -0.072, p < 0.001), suggesting that the reduction in normalization was more pronounced in Mexico City than in the rest of the country after 2021, even after accounting for generational differences. As expected, younger women were significantly more likely to normalize emotional violence than the oldest age group (>80), with the 20–29 cohort showing the strongest positive association (β = 0.058, p < 0.001). This aligns with prior literature suggesting that although younger generations are more digitally connected, they may also internalize romanticized forms of abuse (Lozano et al., 2024; Karakurt & Silver, 2013).**

**The extended model further confirmed the robustness of these findings. After controlling for years of schooling (GRA) and household digital access, the DID interaction remained significant and negative (β = -0.072, p < 0.001). This indicates that the observed decline in normalization in Mexico City is not solely attributable to improvements in education or digital exposure. Interestingly, higher education was associated with a small but significant reduction in normalization (β = -0.002, p = 0.0001), reinforcing the role of educational attainment as a protective factor. Conversely, digital access was positively associated with normalization (β = 0.0019, p = 0.001), highlighting the dual nature of digital environments, which may simultaneously promote awareness and perpetuate harmful romantic norms (Salinas et al., 2021).**

**Taken together, these findings suggest that even after controlling for age, education, and digital access, Mexico City's reduction in normalization of emotional abuse appears distinct. This supports the hypothesis that localized interventions, feminist mobilisation, or city-specific information campaigns may have played a role in shaping attitudes between survey rounds.**

1. **Discussion**

**The results indicate an overall improvement in the recognition of partner emotional violence in Mexico, with a reduction in the proportion of women who considered it “not important” after experiencing it. However, contrary to the original hypothesis, the largest decrease in normalization was observed among women aged 60 and older—particularly those over 80—rather than among younger women. This finding aligns with Aday et al. (2017) and Storey et al. (2024), who note that older adults are more likely to avoid reporting psychological violence due to entrenched cultural norms, loyalty to family structures, and limited exposure to contemporary definitions of abuse. Traditional gender roles and generational silence around intimate relationships can perpetuate these attitudes, especially in contexts where questioning a partner’s behavior is socially discouraged.**

**This pattern contrasts with Salinas et al. (2021), who suggest that younger people are more active in digital spaces, where they are exposed to a mix of feminist educational content and romanticized portrayals of control and jealousy. While social media can enhance awareness, it can also blur the boundaries between love and abuse, leading to mixed interpretations and, in some cases, normalization.**

**The logistic regression results partially support the age dimension of the hypothesis. Younger groups consistently showed lower odds of normalization compared to women under 20 in both survey years. Yet, the interaction terms reveal that the most substantial relative decline between 2016 and 2021 occurred in the oldest age group. One possible explanation is that these women began with a much higher baseline level of normalization in 2016, so the shifts in public discourse, feminist mobilization, and broader societal awareness during this period had a disproportionately larger effect on them.**

**Finally, education (GRA) and digital access, though theoretically relevant, were not statistically significant predictors in this model once age and survey year were accounted for. This suggests that their influence on normalization may operate indirectly—perhaps through age-related differences in exposure and generational attitudes—rather than exerting a strong independent effect.**

So the hypothesis that

The invisibility of emotional violence is compounded by social norms that equate love with control, jealousy, or emotional manipulation, particularly in intimate relationships. As the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) emphasizes, psychological violence is both widespread and underrecognized, often normalized in cultural narratives around sacrifice, loyalty, or romantic idealism.

The generational patterns uncovered in this study further illustrate how recognition varies by age. While younger women report slightly higher exposure to digital technologies and feminist messaging, they are also less likely to recognize abuse, This supports Ali and Naylor's (2013) argument that emotional abuse is a "contested terrain," particularly for youth who may lack both conceptual clarity and life experience to label their experiences as harmful.

**Yet, the persistence of high levels of invisible violence—particularly in more urban and educated areas like Mexico City—suggests that structural change in discourse does not automatically produce cultural or psychological change at the individual level. Recognizing violence is not simply a matter of “being informed,” but of having the cultural tools, educational resources, and symbolic frameworks to identify it in one's life.**

These women represent thousands of individuals nationally. The very invisibility of their experiences makes their identification urgent, and the consistent demographic trends observed—particularly by age and education—suggest that targeted awareness and prevention efforts could improve recognition.

Given the increasing public attention to gender-based violence, strengthened feminist activism, and expanded access to digital campaigns and legal resources, it is likely that the recognition of emotional violence will continue to rise in the coming years BECAUSE LEARNING TO IDENTIFY THIS IS A CONTINUOUS WORK.

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APENDIX

LIST EXPERIMENT: EXPLICAR CADA UNO de los métodos con un ejemplo

F SI ES ENTRE ZERO Y UNO