**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 in Mexico**

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Capstone Project

MSc Applied Social Data Science

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**Los movimientos y asi cambiaron la forma o perspectiva en la que las mujeres de Mexico reconocen la violencia emocional**

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Word Count:

**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 mobilizations such as, the 8M marches, Un Día Sin Nosotras, and online campaigns like #AmorRománticoEsViolencia 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. Recent feminist movements and digital prevention campaigns have contributed to a shift in how women in Mexico recognize emotional violence in intimate relationships.

H2. Younger, more educated women with greater digital access are more likely to identify abusive behaviours as violence, thanks to soar of the feminism movement in Mexico since 2017, while older, less educated women and those with limited internet access are more likely to misrecognize or normalize them.

H3. 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.

**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.

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, Un Día Sin Nosotras, and others have mobilized 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 mobilizations 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.

Feminist mobilization in Mexico was 2015, the first mass demonstrations on March 8th which is International Women’s Day took place in response to machismo violence in the country. However, it was in 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.

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 mobilizations, 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 with colorful lines

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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).

Mujeres en universidades con movimientos feministas

*Geographic location*

MARCHA EN LAS CIUDADES, MOVIMIENTOS, DESAPARECIDAS Y QUE NADIE HABLA DE ESO, ESTADOS DONDE HAYA MUCHAS FEMINISTAS.

Como esta visto socialmente

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 entrenched gender norms and structural inequalities continue to influence how abuse is interpreted or normalized and as feminism movements are soaring.

1. **Methodology**

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

This study draws on data from the 2021 and 2016 National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships (ENDIREH), a large-scale, nationally representative survey conducted by Mexico’s National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI). INEGI is the country's official statistics agency, responsible for collecting, safeguarding, and publishing national data across various domains. As an autonomous public institution, INEGI follows rigorous international standards and ethical protocols, especially when dealing with sensitive topics such as gender-based violence.

INEGI’s 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 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. These behaviours are grouped under five main categories: emotional, physical, sexual, economic, and patrimonial violence. 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 it as violence, the question of the severity of the situation is asked. Violence by more than 80% of people is categorised as something severe and never as “not important”. 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, which is often normalized or dismissed. This study refers to those unrecognized cases as “invisible violence.” As D’Ignazio and Klein (2020) assert, “data is not neutral; it reflects power relations.” What remains uncounted in official statistics often reflects systemic decisions about whose pain is deemed worthy of acknowledgment and measurement.

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 complex multivariate 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.

With each a sample of more than 144,000 women aged 15 and older, ENDIREH 2021 and 2016 is one of the largest and most comprehensive instruments for measuring gender-based violence in Latin America. Its probabilistic, stratified, and multistage sampling design ensures representativeness at both national and subnational levels. The richness of the dataset enables not only descriptive statistics, but also advanced analytical techniques such as regression analysis, segmentation, and predictive modelling, making it an invaluable resource for social data science research. To date, no published studies have leveraged ENDIREH 2021’s data compared to 2016’s data to investigate invisible emotional violence. This project is the first to do so.

EXPLICAR VARIABLES QUE HAY

For the purposes of this study, three specific modules were used: the emotional violence section (Section XI), the household technology access module (TVIV), and the sociodemographic profile (TSDem).

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DIFERENCIAS ENTRE 2016 Y 2021

All visualizations were created with ggplot2, exported in .png format.

Logistic Regression

Odds ratios were calculated using exp(coef(model)). Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% and 10% levels.

7. Software

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

**8. Ethical Considerations**

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

Not going to extreme cases, feminisides and homocides

TREATING ALL WITHOUT COUNTING MIGRANTS, PEOPLE AT HOSPITALS ETC.

EFFECT IN FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Risks of going through ipv depression suicide

**Análisis y Resultados**

**Age**

**A graph with lines and a red line

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**The graph 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 due to internalized romantic myths and peer norms. 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.**

**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.**

ENDIREH data reveals that women aged 15 to 24 report high rates of controlling and humiliating behaviors from partners, but demonstrate lower rates of self-identification as victims (INEGI, 2021).

**Stick with your fixed‐effects Model 4 for reporting and inference. Use the mixed-model as a robustness check, but note in your thesis that “state‐level clustering explained negligible variance (ICC ~ 0.5 %) and did not improve model fit, so we retain the simpler fixed-effects specification.”**

**You can see that your LASSO‐penalized estimates at the “optimal” λ (the black dashed line at log(λ)≈–6.2) are almost identical in sign and magnitude to the unpenalized logit (Model 4), but shrunk slightly toward zero:**

**Your penalized model confirms the same story as the standard logit—age and digital access matter most—and shows that a mild LASSO penalty doesn’t change the substantive inferences, but gives you a way to scale up to higher‐dimensional feature sets down the road.**

**We estimated a series of logistic‐regression models on the subsample of women who reported having experienced emotional violence (N = 38 610), using normalization of emotional violence as the binary outcome. After fitting a baseline specification with age group, education level, state of residence, and digital‐access index (Model 4), we introduced normalized physical violence as an additional predictor (Model 5) to assess its incremental explanatory power.**

**Model 4 (age + education + state + access digital):  
• AIC = 50 756.2; McFadden’s pseudo-R² = 0.0173  
• Age‐group effects are strongly protective and highly significant:  
– 20–29 vs. < 20: OR = 0.70 (95 % CI 0.625–0.782, p < .001)  
– 30–39: OR = 0.53 (0.473–0.590, p < .001)  
– 40–49: OR = 0.44 (0.391–0.489, p < .001)  
– 50–59: OR = 0.38 (0.342–0.430, p < .001)  
– 60–80: OR = 0.37 (0.328–0.414, p < .001)  
– > 80: OR = 0.42 (0.344–0.509, p < .001)  
• Education coefficients hover around 1.0 and none reach statistical significance at α = .05, indicating no clear effect of schooling once other factors are controlled.  
• Each additional digital‐access medium raises the odds of normalizing emotional violence by 5 % (OR = 1.05; 95 % CI 1.03–1.07; p < .001).  
• State fixed effects vary (most ORs < 1), reflecting regional differences but no single state drives the overall pattern.**

**Model 5 (adds normalized physical violence):  
• AIC falls to 49 785.8 (a drop of ~970), and pseudo-R² almost doubles to 0.0362.  
• Normalized physical violence is by far the strongest predictor: OR = 3.69 (95 % CI 3.37–4.05, p < .001). Women who also normalize physical abuse are nearly four times more likely to normalize emotional abuse.  
• All other covariate effects remain directionally consistent with Model 4, with age groups still protective, education non‐significant, and digital access retaining a modest positive OR (~1.06).**

**Because Model 5 achieves substantially lower AIC and higher explained variance—while preserving the substantive interpretation of our core socio‐demographic and digital‐access effects—we adopt it as our final specification. The dramatic OR for violencia\_fisica\_normalizada highlights an “accumulation” effect: tolerance of one form of partner violence begets tolerance of another. These findings underscore the need for integrated prevention strategies that address both physical and emotional dimensions of gender‐based violence, rather than treating each in isolation.**

**DID = 2016 -2021**

**A graph with a blue line

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**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. Two versions of this analysis were implemented. The first included all surveyed women, regardless of whether they had experienced emotional violence. The second focused exclusively on women who reported having experienced such violence.**

**In the full-sample model, the results reveal a notable crossover: while Mexico City initially exhibited a higher proportion of women who normalized emotional violence, by 2021 the city experienced a sharper decline than the national average. This trend suggests a broader cultural shift potentially driven by heightened visibility, feminist activism, and targeted policy interventions in the capital. However, when the analysis was restricted to women who had actually experienced emotional violence, the trendlines did not cross—Mexico City reported lower levels of normalization than other states in both years, and this gap widened in 2021. This distinction underscores the importance of disaggregating the data. While the full-sample graph may reflect changing societal attitudes, the restricted-sample graph offers a more focused picture of how survivors’ perceptions have evolved. Together, these findings indicate that awareness may be expanding generally, but the most meaningful shifts are occurring among those directly affected. The sharper decline in Mexico City may reflect the impact of local mobilizations 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 mobilization, or city-specific information campaigns may have played a role in shaping attitudes between survey rounds.**

1. Prevalence and Recognition of Emotional Violence

Among the 8,518 women included in the final sample, 4,134 respondents (48.5%) reported experiencing at least one form of emotional abuse from a partner. Of those, 1,314 women (31.8%) did not recognize these experiences as emotional or psychological violence, thus falling into the category of invisible violence. This finding supports the hypothesis that a significant portion of women in Mexico endure abusive behaviors without identifying them as violence, despite their harmful psychological impact.

The cross-tabulation (see Table 1) shows that recognition is uneven: nearly 2,820 women (68.2%) who experienced emotional violence do acknowledge it, but the gap remains considerable, suggesting cultural normalization of controlling or degrading behaviors.

2. Invisible Violence by Age

As shown in Figure 1, the youngest age group (15–20) exhibits the highest rates of invisible emotional violence, with approximately 2.4% of total respondents falling into this category. Interestingly, this percentage declines among women in their 30s and 40s, before rising again in older age groups, peaking once more between ages 70 and 85.

A complementary plot (Figure 2) isolates only those who have experienced emotional abuse, revealing that young and elderly women are less likely to recognize it as violence, compared to middle-aged groups. This U-shaped pattern may reflect generational gaps in feminist awareness or sociocultural conditioning: younger women may lack life experience or education about healthy relationships, while older women may have internalized traditional gender norms.

3. Geographic Variation: State and Regional Patterns

Figure 3 shows the distribution of invisible violence by state. States like Guerrero, Querétaro, and Michoacán show the highest proportions, while Coahuila, Baja California, and Yucatán display the lowest. Although these results do not imply causal relationships, they suggest important territorial disparities in how women conceptualize emotional harm. These may be linked to differences in local policies, access to feminist movements, educational campaigns, or urbanization.

A regional comparison (Figure 4) further reveals that Mexico City (CDMX), despite being the most urban and resource-rich region, also displays the highest percentage of invisible violence. This surprising result could reflect higher prevalence, desensitization, or even a lag between policy frameworks and individual awareness.

4. Role of Age, Education, and Digital Access (Regression Results)

The logistic regression model (Table 2) evaluates predictors of invisibility among women who reported emotional abuse.

Key findings:

Education matters: Women with higher education levels are significantly less likely to experience invisible violence. Compared to women with no schooling (reference group), those with university-level education (escolaridad10) are 82.4% less likely to not recognize violence (OR = 0.18, p < 0.05). Other levels (e.g., escolaridad03, secondary) also show negative associations.

Internet access (P1\_4\_3) and age are not statistically significant predictors in this model, though the direction of the coefficients aligns with expectations (e.g., age has a negative effect).

Contribution to household income (P2\_16) shows a marginally positive association with recognition, but it is not statistically significant.

These results reinforce the hypothesis that education is a critical factor in enabling recognition of emotional violence, more so than mere access to digital tools. Emotional abuse may remain invisible unless women have both the conceptual language and sociopolitical awareness to name it.

Strengths and Limitations of the Methodological Design

Strengths

National Scope and Robust Sample: ENDIREH’s size and design offer a high level of external validity, allowing findings to be generalized across Mexican women aged 15 and older.

Variable Merging and Cross-File Analysis: This project merges microdata from three different modules (partner violence, sociodemographics, digital access), enabling multi-dimensional analysis.

Use of Logistic Regression: By estimating predictors of invisibility, the study moves beyond description to explore possible explanatory relationships.

Limitations

Cross-Sectional Nature: ENDIREH is not longitudinal; thus, causal inference is limited. For example, we cannot determine whether education caused increased recognition, or vice versa.

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

Missing Data: Approximately 3,800 observations were lost in the regression due to missing values. This may introduce bias if missingness is not random.

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

Discussion and Interpretation

The results of this analysis highlight a persistent disconnect between the experience of emotional violence and its recognition as violence among Mexican women. Despite progress in feminist discourse and national awareness campaigns, nearly one-third of women who report emotional abuse do not identify it as such—an indicator of the enduring invisibility of psychological harm.

This finding resonates with foundational work on invisible violence. As Walker (1979) theorized in The Battered Woman, emotional abuse often precedes physical violence, yet remains more difficult to detect due to its non-visible nature. 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, especially compared to women in their 30s or 40s. 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.

Meanwhile, older women may internalize traditional gender roles that downplay emotional suffering, reinforcing cycles of silence and tolerance. This U-shaped distribution found in age-related plots suggests that both ends of the age spectrum are especially vulnerable to misrecognition, albeit for different reasons—one due to a lack of symbolic resources, the other due to entrenched norms.

Most notably, the regression analysis points to education as the strongest predictor of recognition. Women with secondary or higher education are significantly less likely to misrecognize emotional abuse. Education not only increases access to information, but also shapes the frameworks through which individuals interpret their relationships. As D’Ignazio and Klein (2020) argue in Data Feminism, “data is not neutral; it reflects power relations.”

This reinforces the idea that “what gets counted counts”: the inclusion of a recognition variable in ENDIREH 2021 was not just methodological, but political. It allowed for a more accurate picture of how social change may (or may not) be shifting personal consciousness. 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.

Regional disparities also speak to the uneven reach of feminist and state messaging. States like Guerrero and Oaxaca, which show the highest levels of unrecognized emotional violence, may lack the institutional infrastructure or public campaigns needed to disseminate awareness. Conversely, the unexpectedly high rate of invisibility in Mexico City raises questions about whether awareness alone is sufficient to change deeply internalized narratives about what women deserve or should tolerate in intimate partnerships.

Ultimately, this study supports the view that emotional violence is both a private and political phenomenon—experienced intimately but shaped by broader social forces. 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.

While the proportion of women experiencing unrecognized emotional abuse appears numerically small, this does not diminish its significance. On the contrary, 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.

APENDIX

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