

***Espacios de Autocuidado: Awareness and Healing for Women in Iztapalapa, Mexico City***  
**Daniela Zamora Alcaraz'20, Mexico, Lewis and Clark College**

**Context:** Every day, 10 women are violently murdered in Mexico for the sole reason of being women.<sup>1</sup> Mexico is positioned among the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicides in the world. Gender-based violence is normalized in Mexican society and has become a part of the everyday lives of many women, depriving them from access to freedom, security, and most importantly, a peaceful life. According to the UN, femicides “reflect social norms and attitudes rooted in inequality and power imbalances between women and men”.<sup>2</sup> On average, more than half of girls and women aged 15 or above have experienced some type of gender-based violence in their lives, half of which is committed by their partners.<sup>3</sup> Another problematic aspect to this issue is its prevalence in marginalized areas. In areas of high vulnerability, women already lack access to resources, and, spaces for healing and awareness regarding gender-based violence.

**Project Location:** Iztapalapa is a municipality located on the east side of Mexico City. It is one of the most densely populated municipalities with the highest rates of inequality and the most alarming rates of gender-based violence against women. Between 2012 and 2016, Iztapalapa accounted for 22.6% of femicides in Mexico City.<sup>4</sup> According to the UN, violence against women has long term consequences for society at large and women in particular, hindering them from personal development and participation in society.<sup>5</sup> Violence is, thus, a stark indicator of the marginalization of women. In the case of women from Iztapalapa, they experience the intersection between violence and marginalization which puts them at a greater disadvantage compared to men. Currently, governmental and non-governmental efforts to eradicate gender-based violence have allocated their resources to contain the problem but minimal effort has been made regarding *prevention*. To bridge this gap, this project is directed to young women in marginalized neighborhoods in Iztapalapa. Young women should have access to spaces that encourage learning and personal development in light of the violent reality they live in.

**Project Goals:** This project aims to *prevent* gender-based violence in young women from the ages of 14 to 18 through two components:

1. **Awareness:** The project will provide a safe space for young women to engage in meaningful dialogue, learn about the root causes of gender-based violence (sexism, gender inequality, culture, etc.) as well as to identify, prevent and act in case of experiencing violence. The main focus of this component is to raise awareness of the structural nature of violence but most importantly, to provide useful resources where young women can seek help.
2. **Healing:** The project also aims to provide a space for healing through community building, art expression and empowerment through self-defense. This is an important component of the project as it contributes to the personal development of participants and to their empowerment in society.

**Local Partnerships:** As a student born and raised in Iztapalapa, I acknowledge that this project represents a big challenge if carried out alone. However, I have sought from help and collaboration from different local actors:

- **Local Government of Iztapalapa:** After I approached the local government for support, the Head of the Departmental Unit of Social Development, Planning and Citizen Participation, José Manuel Fernández Alejandro agreed to support this project by providing the Community Center El Cubo to carry out this project.
- **Red Latinoamericana y Feminista Red LATFEM** is a feminist organization that aims build and strengthen community spaces for self-care. They have experience in providing workshops to youth in marginalized areas in Mexico City. Their main goal is to provide techniques for self-care, self-defense and effective communication and expression of one's experiences. Red LATFEM has agreed to collaborate in this project by providing support with the building the curriculum and facilitating the sessions.

---

<sup>1</sup> Información sobre la violencia de las mujeres. Secretaria de Seguridad y Protección ciudadana. Mexican Ministry of Security. Published April 2019. Accessed November, 2019. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WWRcGRa6nj9eFvVhv\\_OshqCfrZWYyWQJj/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WWRcGRa6nj9eFvVhv_OshqCfrZWYyWQJj/view)

<sup>2</sup> No Woman Should Die Because of Her Gender, Deputy Secretary-General Says at Event to Launch Latin America Regional Anti-Femicide Programme | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. Un.org. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/dsgsm1224.doc.htm>. Published 2018. Accessed November, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Reporte Mexico 2017/2018. Amnesty International. Accessed November 2018. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/americas/mexico/report-mexico/>.

<sup>4</sup> Boletines. Observatorio Femicidio. Accessed November 2018. <http://observatoriofemicidio.blogspot.com/p/boletines.html>.

<sup>5</sup> What we do: Ending violence against women. UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women>. Accessed November, 2019.

**Project Format:** Given that this project is geared towards young women, it will take place once students go into summer break that, for most Mexican public schools, starts on July 6<sup>th</sup>. The format of the project is envisioned to be a 3-week summer course from July 6<sup>th</sup> to July 27<sup>th</sup> for 25 participants.

**Project Timeline**

Phase 1	Promotional Campaign	June 1-15	With the offered support from the government of Iztapalapa, I will launch a campaign to promote the summer course and the call for volunteer facilitators. There will be promotional flyers and banners in the community center and in-person promotion in neighboring middle schools and high schools.
	Curriculum Development	June 1-30	Both La Red LATFEM and I will be developing the curriculum for the summer course. La Red LATFEM already holds a week-long short course and we aim to expand it to fit the context of Iztapalapa. Their course is based on five pillars: community building, self-care, self-defense, art expression and theory.
Phase 2	Volunteer Selection	22-Jun	The Community Center <i>El Cubo</i> already hosts several community activities, my goal is to invite women leaders from <i>El Cubo</i> and other surrounding community centers to take part in the project. This will also ensure future sustainability of the project. Candidates will fill out a google form expressing their interest to participate in the project. Volunteers will be selected in the last week of June.
	Training	June 28-29	Weekend-long training workshop for volunteers facilitated by Red LATFEM and myself.
Phase 3	Summer Course	July 6- July 27	The summer course will take place every day Monday through Friday. Each day participants will have different activities within these three components: <b>1) Awareness-raising sessions</b> are focused to engage in meaningful dialogue and discussion to deconstruct attitudes that promote violence, gain skills and knowledge about resources women can when facing violence. <b>2) Arts and Crafts classes:</b> The art component of the course is aimed to encourage participants to use art as a form of expression. This component will have an arts and crafts professor. <b>3) Self-defense sessions:</b> a professional instructor will be hired to train participants in basic principles of women’s self-defense. The purpose of this component is to provide women with strategies about how to act in the case of street harassment and violence in general, but most importantly, it will provide them with confidence about their bodies.

**Project Assessment:** The impact of the project will be measured through a pre and post assessment of the participants’ awareness of violence, the abilities gained, level of confidence and their overall sense of community with youth women in their community.

**Documentation and sustainability:** In order to make this project sustainable, I will ensure that the curriculum and the activities carried out are documented in a comprehensive handbook for volunteers willing to take this course further. This handbook will be available online on a website specifically designed for this project. Moreover, the website will have access to a comprehensive list of resources and other organizations that women can approach if they are in violent relationships or risky situations. Additionally, a special fund was created for the sustainability of future summer courses. The proposed fund accounts for future training and materials required (See Budget Proposal).

**Qualifications:** I am a senior majoring in International Affairs and minoring in Political Economy. During her two-year residency in Mahindra United World College of India, I gained experience in leading youth groups. I was the project leader of “Community Theater Project,” a project aimed to aid students struggling with academics to find interest in the arts. I was responsible for leading a group of 10 volunteers; planning and facilitating street theater sessions. Moreover, I was a facilitator of the “Triveni Training Team”, a program aimed to provide project leaders with skills in non-violent communication, project management, among others, to develop successful projects. Lastly, I am a resident of Iztapalapa, Mexico City, which allows me and the project to have a greater insight on the problems and potential solutions within this context.