

# SUBVERTING CONVENTIONAL GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE REPORTING PROTOCOLS: CLOTHESLINE COMPLAINTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN MEXICO

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## ABSTRACT

While international conventions with a gender perspective exist, at national level countries such as Mexico have also developed policies and programmes in favour of women's access to a life of equality and free of violence. Such policies have been translated into institutional protocols to curb gender violence. Despite these policies, data seem to indicate that violence against women continues (UN Women 2020) and gender inequality persists. This article explores the significance of a social gender activist movement that began in 2019 called "clothesline complaints" in one of the most prestigious universities in Mexico. The article also seeks to assess the impact of this movement in other institutions using a documentary analysis research approach. Results show that the selected institutions reported a large number of complaints regarding gender violence. The article concludes that by adopting unconventional grievances reporting procedures of the "clothesline" rather than the traditional institutional protocols, more cases of gender violence can be revealed. We recommend the adoption of the clothesline approach as well as other novel ways of reporting gender-based violence. The clothesline movement presents an opportunity to re-examine the current gender violence reporting structure in higher education institutions in Mexico. Because of the global nature of gender-based violence, we also consider implications for policy and structural review of gender violence reporting protocols in South Africa and other parts of the world. Of key significance is how to integrate informal gender-based violence reports into the formal protocols of reporting without diminishing the original force of appeal which animate the informal reports.

**Keywords:** higher education, clothesline, gender-based violence, reporting protocols, Mexico

## INTRODUCTION

Mexican cultural tradition assigns to women the responsibility of hand washing, scrubbing, and pounding the clothes on riverbanks to remove dirt particles. This is part of the domestic chores that have confined women in the private sphere. Despite being an arduous practice for those who perform it, it is needed for both personal and social hygiene. While scrubbing and pounding clothes, Mexican women find time to interact and perhaps make new friends with women who are going through the same burden, thus providing a platform for solidarity as they share their social burdens. Once the dirt is removed, the clean clothes are hung on *clotheslines* to dry. This has become part of the entrenched gender roles, which continue to limit the progression of women into the public professional domain. The concept of the clothesline has been metaphorically adopted by gender-based violence activists, particularly women, to champion the cause for gender equality in their struggle against gender-based violence in public spaces such as higher education institutions (HEIs).

This article explores the significance of a social gender activist movement that began in 2019 called “clothesline complaints” in one of the most prestigious universities in Mexico in order to understand institutional responses to gender-based violence complaints by female students and female staff. The purpose of the clothesline movement was to expose the forms of violence that the female students and staff experienced and begin to “clean” their HEI. Given the hurdles in the current channels of reporting gender-based violence, clothesline was perceived as a more user-friendly avenue to report gender-based violence. Even though it was not a formal channel, at least it publicly magnified the challenges of female staff and students and forced some institutions to take action. The clothesline has become a metaphorical statement, which highlights the daily existential struggles of women in an unequal gender context. It was a statement by women who were frustrated by the unproductive established formal channels of reporting gender-based violence, thus women adopted novel and unorthodox approaches to challenge established institutional practices. The article describes and analyses the clothesline movement as a potentially powerful and innovative strategy in the fight against gender-based violence and inequality in institutional settings.

Following the spark of clothesline complaints in 2019, the movement spread rapidly in 2020 in many HEIs. The process involved women coming together in one university and writing down their grievances and particular experiences in which they were abused. In such writings they indicated the date, day, time, place, name of perpetrator, his position, and what happened. These writings were then shared with other women and hung on a clothesline created at a public place within the institution. In this way the gender-based violence perpetrators were made

public. Anyone could pass by the clothesline and read what was displayed. The media had access to such information and, with the power of the internet and social media, some people shot pictures and shared these with friends and the public. Under such circumstances, the leaders of institutions were forced to respond.

The movement helped women speak up and make (in)formal accusations; at the same time, they interacted with other women while venting the difficulties encountered in their experiences. We note that the protocols for reporting gender-based violence in HEI exclude the voices of hundreds of women crying out for justice. The main question is then: How do women experience gender equality in HEIs in Mexico? This question is followed by subsequent questions such as what channels or protocols do women have to air their complaints in cases where their rights are violated? How does the HEI respond to complaints of gender-based violence? How have clothesline complaints been handled by institutions in Mexico? While many gender-based violence cases have been reported officially through established protocols, this article attempts to move away from such knowledge as it seeks to explore the novelty inherent in the clothesline movement. The women in this article employ the clothesline, an instrument of their daily exploitation, into a powerful weapon to destabilise the traditional reporting structures of gender-based violence.

## **CONTEXT AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORK**

Mexico, similar to other countries in the world, has agreed to protect women from violence and promote women's rights. According to the UNESCO Consultative Council Declaration (2015), gender-based violence is a serious violation of human rights – regardless of age, social status, geography or culture. Violence against women is a public health problem that has adverse health consequences worldwide. The United Nations (UN Women 2017) reports that women and girls face sexual harassment and violence in public spaces, in public transport, in the streets, places of recreation (i.e., parks) and markets, both in developing and developed countries.

A paradox is when gender-based violence occurs in HEIs. HEIs are at the forefront of developing cutting-edge research knowledge and interventions that should help curb gender-based violence. These are spaces which are assumed to be very knowledgeable and as such should be exemplary leaders in curtailing gender-based violence. Paradoxically, they seem to be in the forefront in defeating the course of gender justice. Within the context of Mexican higher education, Masinire and Sanchez-Cruz (2020) have noted how male professors and students in selected institutions have acted as impediments to gender justice by blocking the implementation of gender justice frameworks in their workplaces.

Based on data from UN Women (2020), 35 per cent of women have experienced physical

or sexual violence by an intimate partner, or sexual violence perpetrated by a person other than their partner. In addition, reports indicate that in 2020 at least 137 women are killed by members of their own family. Despite the data, less than 40 per cent of women who experience violence seek some kind of help (UN Women 2020). In a specific context, such as at school, UN Women (2020) reported that one third of the student body aged 11 to 15 had suffered bullying from their classmates on one or more occasion. The situation is delicate because gender-based violence is an obstacle to universal schooling and the right of girls to education.

In Mexico, as in the rest of the world, violence can occur in any public or private space. The National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships (ENDIREH) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [National Institute of Statistics and Geography]) (INEGI 2016) observed that 66 per cent of Mexican women aged 15 years and over have been victims of violence or have suffered at least one incident of violence at some point in their lives. The report added that 43.9 per cent of women aged 15 and over have been victims of violence by their love partners; while 3,752 women were killed with presumptions of homicide or femicide in 2018 (INEGI 2019).

To promote women's rights and gender equality, international organisations have established instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention of Belém do Pará. On the one hand, CEDAW establishes that women have equal rights to education, including vocational training and guidance, continuing education, sport and scholarships. On the other hand, the Convention of Belém do Pará (1994) establishes the right of women to live a life free of violence and defines violence as a violation of human rights and fundamental freedom.

The importance of signing and ratifying international treaties is that, according to article 1,336 of the Mexican Constitution, federal laws and international treaties are considered the supreme law of the nation; therefore, they have the same legislative hierarchy in the Mexican legal system (Cámara de Diputados 2007). Thus, by signing and ratifying international treaties such as CEDAW and the Convention of Belém do Pará, Mexico has pledged commitment to promote the rights and protection of women. At the local level, Mexico established the General Law of Access of Women to a Life Free of Violence (LGAMV) (Official Gazette 01-20-2009), which grants women the right to live a life without violence in places like their homes, jobs or schools.

It is against the above international and national frameworks on gender equity policies and women's rights that this article seeks to ascertain the extent to which women's rights are being observed at the level of practice in HEIs

## TRADITIONAL GRIEVANCE STRUCTURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Despite the political international and national framework in favour of women's safety, 4,336,710 women had never reported the violence experienced in the school environment until the moment of the interview carried out by Endireh (INEGI 2016). In other words, they went through school and continued their academic training in silence. INEGI (2016) revealed that Mexican women did not report or request help for the physical and/or sexual violence they experienced at school because it was something minor and normal that did not affect them (49.3%); for fear of consequences or threats (11.0%); because those were/are the customs (10.3%); out of shame (9.8%); not knowing how and where to report (9.8%); and because they thought no one would believe their stories or because they thought they would be blamed (9.7%) (INEGI 2016).

Not speaking out against violence is not accidental. The circumstances under which speaking out happens are usually unsafe conditions and this might expose and victimise the victims who dare to speak out. This raises a key question with regard to the relevance and effectiveness of institutional structures and policies which are in place. Do these higher education structures support female students and do they provide adequate protection to those who report incidences of violence? Female students' statements reveal an ominous attitude of the authorities, who even engage in complicity or concealment with the accused (Varela Guinot 2019). On the other hand, it is also noted that universities have not defined the way in which they have to act when a situation like this arises, and have been more focused on minimising the effects than on taking measures that really reduce the problem (Varela Guinot 2019). In South Africa, Collins et al. (2009, 34) noted how in one higher education institution, the Risk Management Services refused to document incidences of gender-based violence. They also report of the presence of the Gender-Based Violence Lobby Group a coalition of students and staff committed to speak out against violence. It is important to note how such structures like the above lobby group help to magnify the magnitude of gender-based violence even though they are not officially sanctioned structures mandated within the university protocol. Like the clothesline movement in Mexico, we note how the Lobby Group represents an informal structure but a safe space to report gender-based violence. Whether such informal structures should be acknowledged by the institution remains an issue which this article seeks to pursue.

In addition, the victims who dare to file a formal report have been punished and/or received threats from the authorities, for example, if they are teachers, they could be fired, as was the case of one professor (El Sol de Parral 2018); while for students, they received threats about being expelled from school (Ramírez Cuevas 2018). In addition, if complaints are made, the authorities in charge would consider the case as "different" types of academic experiences

(Ramírez Macías 2017) which means that no action would take place. In some other cases, the formal investigation processes are so long that the students give up due to lack of attention or because the institution happens to conceal the reports (Sanchez Cruz 2012). A common reported aspect has to do with the lack of responsiveness from university authorities to these phenomena (Varela Guinot 2019). So far, the consequences received by the complainants and the environment of impunity that exists within higher education institutions are striking. From the above, one may conclude that the current reporting structures of handling cases of gender-based violence have not served the victims of violence. Instead, these structures are occupied by men who comply with perpetrators of gender-based violence.

A very disturbing incident of gender-based violence was one of Lesvy Rivera who was found within the National Autonomous University of Mexico's campus (UNAM) with a telephone cord wrapped around her neck. The authorities described it as a suicide, despite visible traces of violence on her body (Bautista 2017). The case is peculiar due to the way authorities tried to conceal her murder as suicide, which reflected the general indifference of the institution towards violence against women in higher education. Her death sparked indignation among students and members of the academic community, who mobilised collectively to report her death not only as murder, but also as femicide. In Mexico, only 24 per cent of the 3,892 femicides identified in 2012 and 2013 were investigated by the authorities and only 1.6 per cent resulted in a sentence (Bautista 2017). While Lesvy Rivera's murder might appear as an isolated incident, in essence it points to the gravity of gender violence, particularly in higher education spaces across the world. In South Africa, Davies (2020) notes that many cases of gender-based violence remain unreported. More perplexing is the inadequacy of institutional responses to the cases reported. Therefore, the execution of a sentence for Lesvy's attacker was a collective action achievement. Given the above reporting environment, it is unlikely that the institution will devise pro-gender violence reporting structures in the immediate future. Instead of waiting for a solution from the authorities, women in Mexico have taken the problem into their own hands and converted the clothesline into a vehicle for reporting incidences of gender-based violence.

### **TRADITIONAL "CLOTHESLINE": BETWEEN COMPLAINT AND VISIBILITY**

UNAM has played a leading role in the history and in the training of internationally recognised academics. The substantive tasks of this public, autonomous and secular institution are teaching, research and the dissemination of culture. During the 2019–2020 school year, UNAM had the capacity to serve 360,883 students, distributed in 15 faculties, 5 multidisciplinary units and 9 national preparatory schools, 5 campuses of the College of Sciences and Humanities, 34

institutes, 14 centres and 12 programmes for university students and had a total of 41,332 academics in 2020 (UNAM 2021). In addition to being the most prestigious university in the country, in the academic world it is recognised as a university of excellence as it is ranked number 100 in the QS World University Ranking (2021). The QS World University Ranking takes into account the following five metrics: Employer Reputation, Faculty/Student Ratio, Citations per faculty, International Faculty Ratio, and International Student Ratio. In 2019 UNAM scaled the national headlines as the clothesline movement hit the institution. Given the international and national recognition of UNAM, its responses to the clothesline movement remain critical as it has the reputation of influencing the responses in other institutions.

The clothesline complaints in Mexico originated in 1978 with the feminist artist Mónica Mayer. Mayer invited 800 women to complete the sentence: “As a woman what I dislike most about the city is ...” on pieces of pink paper to open a dialogue about the violence experienced by women in public space. Each of the responses was mounted on a structure that alluded to a clothesline, as a reference to a daily activity that is considered feminine (Museo de Arte Contemporáneo n.d.). In 2019, UNAM female students adopted Monica Mayer’s example and took the initiative to point out their daily experiences of gender-based violence (Expansión política 2020).

It all started on October 23, 2019, in a UNAM campus that had registered at least 77 complaints since 2015, without an official response from the institution. From there, other students dared to speak about their own stories of harassment using clothesline complaints to expose abuse and rape (Arteta 2019). Later, students from different faculties of UNAM exhibited notes to denounce their harassers (teachers, colleagues and administrators) and even hung photographs of their attackers on traditional clotheslines. However, the initiative was not considered as a wake-up call for the prestigious institution. The authorities at UNAM ignored the complaints on the basis that no proper reporting protocols had been followed.

The events escalated and 11 schools and faculties of UNAM went on strike and the institution faced a wave of protests against sexual harassers such as teachers and students (Arteta 2019), while at the same time, clothesline complaints were displayed in each of those schools and faculties. The physical facilities were “taken over” by female students; a situation that lasted for more than three weeks in some faculties. Still, the most important and prestigious institution in Latin America did not offer an official position. So, a peaceful march was organised to demand a response on the problem of sexual harassment experienced and raised by female students. The peaceful marches continued with denunciations and complaints of gender violence which, in addition to the hundreds of notes exhibited, finally resulted in five official complaints against a male professor, who was demoted from his position, but was not

dismissed from the institution (Arteta 2019).

During the strike, the students wrote a 21-page petition: (Students of UNAM 2020) (<http://www.economia.unam.mx/igualdaddegenero/docs/PLIEGO%20PETITORIO%201.pdf>). In the petition, students described situations of gender power abuse in which many female students found themselves in the course of their studies. In their demand 10, female students requested that alternative forms of complaint (other than the formal) should be recognised; and in their demand 17, based on the fact that formal complaint forms had shown limited effectiveness, students requested that the authorities initiate an investigation of the complaints that had been made public through various alternative spaces of the student community. Female students promoted other forms of complaints so that everybody's voices could be listened to. The "best" a western critic (citizen) can do is "open-up" the way he/she listens and understands. Maggio (2007) suggests that an effective way to do this – to "translate" the non-western – is to try to understand all actions as a form of communication, and to construct such communication on its own terms. In other words, consider female students' clothesline complaints as a formal way of appeal for help.

The clothesline collective action gained strength in 2020 throughout the whole country and the students of various universities took advantage of March 8 as a call to carry out the activity again. On some notes of the clotheslines one could read: "Enough is enough!", "We want to study safely!", "They will never have the comfort of our silence again", "Report your aggressor", "We did not speak for x years because of fear". And others like: "The shorter the skirt, the higher the rating", "If we had been alone, you would have passed", and "Hello my love, while he caressed my back" (Expansión política 2020). The notes were loud statements which depicted the gender toxic environment in which female students learned. Their safety was at risk and the statements fell on deaf ears when presented through the official platform.

Tarrow (1997) suggests that collective action can take three main forms: violent, conventional or disruptive. This collective action has three sources of power: the ability to challenge the authorities, to generate uncertainty, and to encourage solidarity; and its success depends on the possibility of exploiting political opportunities and creating frameworks for collective action. According to Molyneux (1985), the relevance of popular women's movements in Latin America has led to the rise of a "social feminism"; for this reason, the collective social demands enjoy a wide range and a wide popular participation.

With this framework, HEI women found the clothesline complaints a form of disruptive action to transform the condition of their experiences, while at the same time challenging the status quo of male domination and unresponsive institutional posture through publicity and solidarity. The clothesline movement is a consolidated collective action which did not conform

to the established grievance protocol and yet generated grassroots power to champion the political demands for gender justice. The clothesline complaints have spread even to Father's Day to demonstrate irresponsible paternity in economic abandonment, care and upbringing (Figueiras 2021).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher in order to give voice and meaning to a research problem (Bowen 2009). The analytic procedure entails looking for information, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesising data contained in documents. A qualitative document analysis was used because it can provide data on the context within which research participants operate, bearing witness to past events. In addition, documents provide background information as well as historical insight (Bowen 2009).

Considering that the clothesline complaints have had a greater echo in the media, especially in the digital media (Varela Guinot 2019), eight universities were purposefully selected and their responses to the clothesline movement were monitored, with the words: clotheslines, gender violence, harassment and the name of the university. Such information and insight can help researchers understand the historical roots of specific issues and can indicate the conditions that impinge upon the phenomena currently under investigation. The emergence of virtual documents, stored electronically rather than on paper, heralds a new age for documentary-based studies. Documents contain text (words) and images that have been recorded without a researcher's intervention (Bowen 2009) in order to identify the official responses that the institutions gave to grievances displayed on the clothesline.

Three aspects were analysed. The first was if there were clotheslines during 2019 and 2020. According to Quadratin (2021), a call for a virtual clothesline was made, but the characteristics between a virtual and a physical clothesline are different, and considering that no clothesline was going to take place, 2021 was excluded. The second aspect was to identify which of the selected universities already had some kind of formal instrument (gender-based violence protocol) that would establish the procedure to follow in case a complaint was made. The third aspect was the official response that the institution provided to the clothesline complaints. Document analysis yields data – excerpts, quotations, or entire passages – that are then organised into major themes, categories, and case examples specifically through content analysis (Labuschagne 2003).

To delimit the study, the eight public universities in Mexico were chosen according to a national ranking (Mextudia 2020), without taking into account the UNAM ranked in the first

place. In addition to UNAM, this ranking included the University of Guadalajara (UdeG), the Autonomous University of Nuevo León (UANL), the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN), the Veracruzana University (UV), the Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM), the Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo (UAEH), the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico (UAEMEX), and the Benemérita Autonomous University of Puebla (BUAP).

Six out of the eight universities reported clothesline complaints during 2019, while the following year all of these universities reported complaints (Table 1). The only university without a Gender-Based Violence Protocol was the UAEH. The media did not report any clothesline complaints for the UANL and the UAEH during 2019. The fact that the number of institutions reporting complaints increased, implies that the victims found their own way to talk about the violence that they have lived within university institutions (Maggio 2007).

**Table 1:** Institutional Reports of Clothesline Complaints

University	Clothesline complaints 2019	Clothesline complaints 2020	Gender-Based Violence Protocol
UdG	X	X	X
UANL		X	X
IPN	X	X	X
UV	X	X	X
UAM	X	X	X
UAEH		X	
UAEMEX	X	X	X
BUAP	X	X	X

With regards to the formal responses to the clothesline complaints, UdG was the only university which considered the clothesline complaints as a new form of formal reporting about gender-based violence. Rodríguez (2020) described a teacher named Eduardo X who first went to see the clotheslines and made fun of a note where his name appeared by saying: “This is a jealous woman, because I did not touch her”. Later, through social networks, he showed his pride at being pointed out as a stalker on the clotheslines. Apparently, there was no formal complaint against the teacher but, according to Rodríguez (2020), the university took preventive measures and an investigation was launched. At the same time, other investigations were initiated against other professors accused in the clotheslines. The institution invited students to formally accuse their stalkers; however, they were told that investigations into the names hung on the clotheslines had already started.

Before March 8, 2020, the IPN dean had recognised that gender violence is a reality that

unfortunately happens, but that a zero tolerance policy would be applied through a gender-based violence protocol. However, organizers of the clotheslines believed that this policy and its protocol are a simulation that aims to wash the hands of the authorities to prevent the situation from reaching a student strike (Román 2020). The UV publicly declared that it was impossible to do anything without a formal accusation, and commented that no formal accusations had been made (La Jornada Veracruz 2020). In other words, the accusations on the clotheslines would not be taken into account.

At UAEMEX, hundreds of complaints were displayed on the clotheslines describing acts of abuse, rape, and harassment (Barrera Baca 2020). The formal response was that no investigation could proceed without a formal complaint; however, UAEMEX installed assessment spaces to provide information on how to file a formal complaint. Despite the extensive number of clothesline complaints at UANL, UAM, UAEH, and BUAP, these universities offered no official statements.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The data collected describes a context that appears to protect women's rights and promote gender equity, especially, taking into account that there are international treaties and national policies that have been established for these purposes. Initiatives at the institutional level are reflected in the Gender-Based Violence protocols that exist in at least seven of the eight universities observed. However, in the eighth university, the HEI ensures that gender complaints can be made through the code of ethics. Despite this context, data show that the official means of reporting are not effective and seem to maintain the status quo (Varela Guinot 2019). It appears that university gender-based reporting protocols are ineffective in tackling the problem of gender-based violence (Varela Guinot 2019), considering the number of clothesline complaints presented.

Clotheslines are powerful means of expressing women's grievances (Rodríguez 2020; La Jornada Veracruz 2020; Barrera Baca 2020), but, in the end, they are not institutionally recognised channels of complaint (Maggio 2007). HEIs prefer to ignore (Varela Guinot 2019) the statements that describe a context of omission on the part of the authorities, who even collude in complicity or concealment. The exception was the UdG which, with or without a formal complaint, initiated investigations (Rodríguez 2020).

Despite the fact that through the follow-up in the press it was observed that no institution is exempt from this type of situation, many of the universities are not taking any special measures to deal with it (Varela Guinot 2019). These data show how in recent years a series of factors have come together that have allowed greater visibility of the problem and that, through

pressure from social and political actors, have been pushing the university authorities to take action, especially by modifying regulations and offering spaces for the complaint. The use of social media to make public complaints about the response of higher education institutions has contributed to exposing the issue on the public agenda (Varela Guinot 2019).

What is significant is the potential that the clothesline movement could have in future for collective action against gender-based violence. It provides a safe platform as well as a public space to steer action against gender-based violence. The incorporation of clothesline complaints into the grievances structure of UAEMEX is a notable move which other institutions could follow. A review of institutional gender grievance protocols is indeed required and co-option of new strategies such as the clothesline is recommended. The significance of women's solidarity is also critical in the clothesline complaints as well as taking advantage of the circumstances in which women live and work. Traditional forms of exploitation could be converted into powerful vehicles in championing the cause of gender equality.

## **CONCLUSION**

Higher education institutions are considered to be at the forefront of producing new knowledge and have long carried the flag of change and social justice. However, the elimination of violence against women within these institutions is still questionable. Despite evident efforts to implement gender protocols in favour of the elimination of violence, these instruments have been inefficient at best and, in some cases, the use of the protocols label those women who decide to speak up with severe consequences in terms of study or work.

The use of protocols, as some women stated, has worked symbolically to reflect that something is being done against gender-based violence but in essence not much has translated into meaningful reduction of gender violence in higher education institutions. In addition to implementing protocols, institutions need to work on their culture, the optimum implementation of initiatives against gender-based violence, securing women's integrity and providing support for new channels of expressing and reporting gender-based violence. Based on the findings from this study, women's integrity, studies, or even their work could be at risk if they continue to rely upon official protocols which usually leads to dead ends in their pursuit of gender justice. Given the changing context in which gender-based violence is happening now, as occasioned by social media, it becomes significant to explore and accommodate other ways of reporting gender-based violence.

This article has shown that women found comfort and assurance in the use of the clothesline complaints to make it part of the gender activism social agenda. Institutional responsiveness to such activism as demonstrated by the University of Guadalajara need to pay

attention to all forms of expression, mainly those which are new and appeal to women's daily experiences. Some of the benefits identified through this research were that the clothesline complaints offer a safe platform for those women who want to speak up, provide social support among those women who are "cleaning the dirt" together and, at the same time, it provides a public space to steer action against gender-based violence. Significant implications for policy, research and invention beyond higher education in Mexico may be extrapolated and higher education institutions in South Africa may be informed. For example, in South Africa we need to explore through research how a gender activist movement such as the Gender-Based Violence Lobby Group are positioned within the current formal channels of reporting incidences of gender-based violence. Lobbying for the recognition and inclusion of such platforms within the official grievance reporting procedures should also be taken up. What is particularly important is that victims of gender-based violence require support and assurance which is usually not available in the current formal structures, hence the high levels of under reporting of gender-based violence in public institutions. The fact that informal settings such as the "clotheslines", Gender based violence Lobby Group as well as lecture and tutorial spaces provide safe platforms for speaking out against gender-based violence suggest that such spaces may be used to better advance the struggle against gender-based violence. Thus, instead of ignoring and sanctioning unconventional channels of airing gender-based violence grievances institutions should find ways of incorporating these new ways of expressing gender-based violence. The complexity and magnitude of gender-based violence require that we embrace all opportunities that might help combat the spread of gender-based violence wherever it manifests.

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