

## EVALUATION OF ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR RURAL WOMEN IN TEXCOCO, FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents a qualitative evaluation of the institutional performance of the Regional Prosecutor's Office of Texcoco, State of Mexico, regarding access to justice for rural women victims of violence. The research stemmed from the recognition that, despite legal advances in human rights and gender equality in Mexico, a gap persists between the legal framework and its implementation, limiting the exercise of rights for rural women victims of violence. The study seeks to highlight how structural inequalities of gender, territory, and class translate into discriminatory, ineffective, or exclusionary institutional practices. From a feminist and intersectional perspective, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 key informants (legal experts, public defenders, lawyers, legal advisors, police officers, women members of feminist collectives, and women victims of violence). The evaluation criteria used were: accessibility, effectiveness, equity, relevance, and application of a gender perspective. The results show low levels of effectiveness, practices of revictimization, systematic impunity, and a lack of relevant protocols, making it impossible to speak of an effective or equitable justice system. Despite some achievements, such as the presence of public defenders and the partial implementation of protocols, access to justice remains limited for rural women victims of violence. The evaluation identified critical areas for institutional improvement, including the creation of monitoring systems, the development of indicators, and the incorporation of participatory evaluations.

**Keywords:** Gender, Institutional violence , Participatory evaluation , Intersectionality , Revictimization.

### INTRODUCTION

In Mexico, gender-based violence is one of the most persistent, widespread, and complex structural problems. Despite the legal recognition of women's human rights and the establishment of multiple institutional mechanisms for their

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protection, the levels of femicide, disappearances, and impunity continue to reveal the State's ineffectiveness in guaranteeing the right to access justice. This situation is exacerbated when combined with other conditions of vulnerability, such as rurality, poverty, or belonging to ethnic groups. Within this context, rural women face specific structural barriers that place them in a position of double or multiple discrimination, both because of their gender and because of their place of origin or residence (IACHR, 2007; Lagarde, 1998).

The State of Mexico has become one of the epicenters of this crisis. In 2022 and 2023, it led the nation in femicides, disappearances of women, and domestic violence (INEGI, 2021; Publimetro, 2023; Ruido en la Red, 2022). Despite the issuance of two Gender Violence Alerts in the state (2015 and 2019), access to justice remains limited, and the institutions responsible for guaranteeing it have been accused of revictimizing women, acting with gender bias, or committing serious omissions (OCNF, 2023). In this context, the regional prosecutor's office in Texcoco was considered a representative case study for examining the contradictions between the legal framework, institutional policies, and daily practices in the administration of justice.

From a critical, feminist, and intersectional perspective, this evaluation argues that access to justice cannot be understood solely as the formal compliance with legal procedures, but rather as a process that must be effective, equitable, and sensitive to the conditions of structural inequality faced by rural women (Ferrer & Bosch, 2019; UN Women, 2021). Institutional evaluation means examining the fulfillment of the justice system's substantive functions: How accessible is the reporting process truly for a rural woman who is a victim of violence? What structural factors limit the progress of cases? Is there genuine reparation for the harm suffered? Is a gender perspective applied in judgments? These questions guide this work.

This article is framed within a qualitative institutional evaluation approach, focusing on the performance of the Texcoco Regional Prosecutor's Office in handling cases of violence against rural women, based on the principles of effectiveness, equity, accessibility, relevance, and a gender perspective. Unlike diagnostic or exploratory studies, this research seeks to assess the extent to which national and international regulatory commitments are being met, and how institutional and sociocultural conditions affect the realization of the right to justice.

Therefore, the central objective of this evaluation was to generate empirical and analytical evidence on the quality of the institutional response to gender-based violence in the rural context of Texcoco, State of Mexico. Through the analysis of testimonies, practices, and omissions, the study seeks to identify the achievements of the Public Prosecutor's Office in terms of access to justice, as well as the persistent challenges that limit the full realization of the human rights of rural women.

## REFERENCE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Access to justice for women, and particularly for rural women, is a complex field of study and action that encompasses legal, social, cultural, and institutional dimensions. This section develops the main concepts and frameworks that underpin the evaluation of the institutional performance of the Texcoco Regional Prosecutor's Office in providing services to rural women victims of violence. Five key areas are addressed: 1) the right to access justice from a gender perspective; 2) national and international legal and institutional frameworks; 3) institutional evaluation focused on equity; 4) structural and institutional violence against rural women; and 5) the intersectional approach as an analytical and critical lens.

The right to access justice is recognized in numerous national and international instruments as a fundamental human right. It implies not only the formal possibility of accessing judicial bodies, but also the existence of real conditions to do so without discrimination, with a guarantee of redress, and with a timely, impartial, and effective response (IACHR, 2007; UN Women, 2019). In contexts of gender-based violence, access to justice must also include the application of a gender perspective, understood as the consideration of the structural contexts of inequality in which the events occur, as well as the differentiated effects of norms and procedures on women and men (Ferrer & Bosch, 2019).

As the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (SCJN, 2013) has pointed out, gender-sensitive justice seeks to correct the historical and structural biases of the legal system, combating discriminatory stereotypes, guaranteeing conditions of equality, and promoting a judicial culture sensitive to difference. This vision is particularly relevant in the case of rural women, who, due to their geographic location, poverty, lower levels of education, and exclusion from public services, face greater obstacles in exercising this right (Lagarde, 1998).

In Mexico, women's right to a life free from violence is recognized in the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence (LGAMVLV), the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, and numerous international treaties ratified by the State. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention), and the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

The "Judging with a Gender Perspective" Protocol, issued by the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (SCJN) in 2013, is an operational tool for judges to integrate a gender perspective into their judicial decisions. This protocol was

designed in response to international commitments undertaken by the Mexican State and has been used as a normative framework in several landmark cases, such as that of Mariana Lima Buendía (OCNF, 2023).

At the state level, the State of Mexico has developed a series of specific laws, such as the Law on Equality between Women and Men of the State of Mexico and the Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence of the State of Mexico. However, the existence of these legal frameworks does not in itself guarantee their effective implementation. The gap between law and practice remains one of the major challenges in evaluating the justice system.

Based on the foregoing, the evaluative approach adopted in this work is grounded in the principles of equity-oriented evaluation (House & Howe, 1999; Scriven, 2007), which recognizes that public policies, programs, and institutions should be evaluated not only for their technical effectiveness but also for their capacity to reduce structural inequalities and promote social justice. In contexts of intersectional inequality, such as that faced by rural women, the evaluation must actively examine the State's capacity to guarantee fair, effective, and non-discriminatory access to justice services.

Based on the above, the following dimensions were proposed: accessibility, referring to the actual ease of accessing judicial bodies; relevance, addressing the cultural, territorial, and linguistic suitability of services; effectiveness, observing the capacity to resolve cases and guarantee reparation for damages; equity, identifying differentiated and fair treatment for people in vulnerable situations; and, as a dimension encompassing the previous ones, the incorporation of a gender perspective, identifying the active application, or lack thereof, of protocols and standards that consider historical inequalities. This involved analyzing not only laws and procedures, but also the concrete practices of judicial personnel (public prosecutors, judges, legal advisors, police officers, forensic experts from the judiciary, and lawyers) and the experiences of women interacting with the system. In this sense, the intersectoral analysis allows for the identification of elements present, or absent, in the justice system.

The concept of structural violence refers to those forms of systematic violence that stem from the very organization of society and that prevent certain social groups from fully exercising their rights (Galtung, 1990; Farmer, 2004). In the case of rural women, this violence manifests itself in the lack of access to health, education, justice, and employment services, as well as in the stereotypes that place them as second-class citizens within the state apparatus (Lagarde, 1998; IACHR, 2007). Added to this is institutional violence, understood as the set of practices and omissions by public institutions that violate human rights, especially when

individuals do not receive a timely, impartial, and fair response in legal processes (Vázquez, 2014).

Finally, this theoretical framework was based on the intersectional approach proposed by Crenshaw (1991), which allows us to understand how multiple systems of oppression (gender, class, ethnicity, place of residence, among others) interrelate to produce particular conditions of exclusion. In the case of rural women victims of violence, their experience in the justice system cannot be understood solely from the perspective of their gender, but also from that of their territorial location, their limited access to information, their lack of knowledge of the law, and their economic dependence. This approach sought to shift the analysis from the “individual case” to a structural and collective understanding of exclusion, paving the way for policies and evaluations that are more sensitive to the real living conditions of historically marginalized groups. In this sense, the present research evaluated the institutional performance of the Texcoco Prosecutor's Office by integrating these multiple dimensions to avoid reproducing a formalistic, punitive justice model that is blind to inequality.

## METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

The research was framed within a qualitative evaluation of institutional performance that, unlike diagnostic or exploratory studies, sought not only to describe situations but also to incorporate a critical assessment of the degree to which an institution fulfills its public purposes in relation to a set of predefined criteria (House & Howe, 1999; Scriven, 2007). In this case, the object of evaluation is the capacity of the Texcoco regional prosecutor's office to guarantee access to justice for rural women, in accordance with national and international legal frameworks.

The study, from a feminist and intersectional perspective, sought to understand how structures of gender, class, rurality, and power intersect in judicial processes (Crenshaw, 1991; Ferrer & Bosch, 2019). Furthermore, drawing on the tenets of critical theory (Schwartz & Jacobs, 2006), it identified power relations, institutional exclusions, and voices that have historically been silenced within justice systems.

For this purpose, the main techniques used were in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews, directed at key informants linked to the justice system of the municipality of Texcoco and to regional feminist activism, a total of 17 people were interviewed (11 women and 6 men), classified as 3 agents of the Public Ministry, 2 public defenders, 1 legal advisor, 1 judge, 2 lawyers, 1 graduate in expert testimony, 1 graduate in expert testimony, 2 women victims of violence, 2 police

officers and 2 women members of feminist collectives.

These key informants allowed us to capture the multiple dimensions of institutional interaction, as well as the differential effects of judicial practices on the lives of rural women. Based on the equity-oriented evaluation approach (House & Howe, 1999), the criteria and indicators for evaluating institutional performance, shown in Table 1, were established and guided this analysis.

**Table 1.** Criteria and indicators used to evaluate the institutional performance of the regional prosecutor's office of Texcoco.

<b>Evaluation criteria</b>	<b>Observable indicators</b>	<b>Source of information</b>	<b>Data type</b>
Accessibility	Physical presence of services in rural areas, waiting times, availability to handle complaints.	Testimonies of rural women, judicial officials.	Narrative, testimonial.
Effectiveness	Number of complaints that reach resolution, average process time, perception of results.	Internal reports, interviews with MPs, lawyers, judges.	Documentary and qualitative.
Equity	Differences in treatment between rural and urban women, existence of discrimination or institutional violence.	Interviews with victims, collectives, and judicial personnel.	Narrative, experiential.
Relevance	Cultural and social adaptation of the service to rural conditions (language, times, formats).	User testimonials, indirect observation.	Narrative, contextual.
Gender perspective	Application of gender protocols, staff sensitivity, use of the "Judging with a Gender Perspective" protocol.	Statements from judges, public prosecutors, human rights defenders, and collectives.	Testimonial and normative.

Source: Own elaboration adapted from House and Howe (1999).

These criteria were analyzed as interrelated elements that shape the institutional capacity to guarantee effective, equitable, and non-discriminatory justice.

The data analysis was developed at three levels: 1) thematic coding: emerging categories associated with the evaluative criteria were identified from the interview transcripts. These categories included: barriers to access, revictimizing practices, gender stereotypes, impunity, restorative practices, among others; 2) critical-interpretive analysis: the analysis was guided by the logic of critical qualitative interpretation, which seeks to understand the meanings attributed by social actors to their experiences and relate them to broader institutional and sociopolitical structures (Álvarez-Gayou, 2003; Ferrer & Bosch, 2019); and 3) triangulation: information from different sources (interviews with victims, judicial personnel, collectives) was triangulated and the data were compared with normative frameworks and official statistics (OCNF, 2023; INEGI, 2021), which allowed for the identification of discrepancies between institutional discourse and judicial practice.

Throughout the research process, the ethical principles of anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent were respected, principles that were especially

important given the vulnerable nature of the participants. To this end, fictitious names were used, and any information that could put the individuals involved at risk was avoided.

## RESULTS

The study involved fieldwork to identify progress and obstacles in the process of reporting, filing lawsuits, investigating, sanctioning, and providing reparations in cases of gender-based violence in Texcoco. The spaces for conducting in-depth interviews were arranged according to available time and in compliance with the protocols established by the relevant authorities (the Texcoco courthouse, the public prosecutor's litigation unit at the Texcoco prison, and the Texcoco regional prosecutor's office). Based on the information gathered, a series of institutional practices were systematized. While these practices demonstrate significant progress, such as the existence of protocols and trained personnel, they also reveal serious limitations, as outlined below.

### Evaluation of institutional achievements

The evaluation of the institutional performance of the Texcoco regional prosecutor's office identified a series of concrete advances that reflect efforts, albeit still insufficient, to guarantee the right of access to justice for rural women from a gender perspective. While these achievements do not compensate for the numerous existing structural barriers, they constitute a starting point for continuous improvement processes and represent the consolidation of years of feminist struggles for the recognition of women's rights (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Institutional achievements identified in the regional prosecutor's office of Texcoco (2023 evaluation).

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Identified achievement</b>	<b>Empirical evidence</b>
Access to legal defense	Presence of public defenders with a gender focus	2 interviews with women defenders + testimonies from women
Justice with a gender perspective	Insufficient use of the Protocol for Judging with a Gender Perspective	Judge's statements and document review
Immediate protection measures	Application of restraining orders within the first 24 hours after a complaint	Testimonies from the Public Prosecutor's agents and victims
Information dissemination	Creation of an infographic on complaint processes and rights	Product derived from a thesis (Juarez , 2023)
Interinstitutional coordination	Referral to state institutions (CJM, IMEM, CODHEM) for comprehensive care	Declarations of legal personnel

Source: Prepared by the author using field research data.

The three most outstanding achievements identified in the Texcoco Regional Prosecutor's Office are: First, the Texcoco Regional Prosecutor's Office has a staff of Public Prosecutors and legal advisors. At the Texcoco Courthouse, there are Public Defenders and forensic experts, all of whom have specialized training in human rights and gender perspective. This reflects state efforts to comply with the commitments stemming from the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence (LGAMVLV, 2007) and the Protocol for Judging with a Gender Perspective (SCJN, 2013). These professionals not only provide free legal advice and technical defense, but also act as sensitive companions, taking into account the particular circumstances of rural women, their precarious situation, their experiences of systematic violence, and the lack of knowledge many have of the legal system. The following comments from the interviewees are noteworthy in this regard:

*“[...] To provide the respective advice [...], to tell them what their rights and obligations are, and what obligations we have as public servants in order to provide them with comprehensive support” (Licensed Public Prosecutor, Marisol, Texcoco, 2023).*

*“The service we provide is completely free, it is paid for by the State” (Public Defender of the Judicial Branch, Johana, Texcoco, 2023).*

*“[...] We receive training at the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), we are constantly in courses, (...) in complete diploma programs, (...) the Judicial Branch provides us with training on the topics, on evidence, from psychometrics, from the protocols we use, (...) there are always discussion tables and analysis tables” (Clara, a graduate in expert testimony from the Judicial Branch, Texcoco, 2023).*

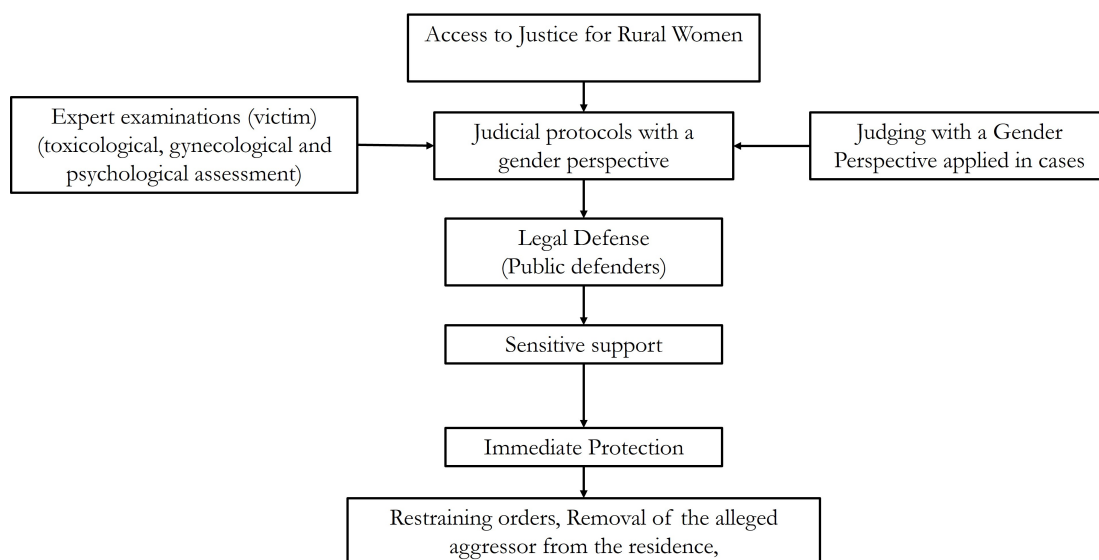
The second documented institutional achievement is the partial use of the Protocol for Judging with a Gender Perspective, issued by the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (2013). The document indicates that, in some cases, female judges in the Texcoco judicial district have begun to incorporate elements of the protocol when evaluating evidence and issuing sentences, recognizing the structural inequality faced by women victims and their rural context. Although this practice is neither systematic nor uniform, it represents an important step toward transformative justice, where laws are not only applied neutrally, but also with consideration for the power relations that permeate the case (Ferrer & Bosch, 2019).

The third is the implementation of immediate protection measures, in which a greater willingness was also observed on the part of some public prosecutors to issue protection measures immediately after a report of violence, such as restraining orders or referrals to shelters and psychological services. This contrasts with practices from previous years in which reports were postponed or minimized. In this regard, it was noted:

*“In this case, what we have requested is... a measure to remove the perpetrator of violence from the home. We do this through family law, before a criminal judge, even limiting visits to a certain distance or preventing the perpetrator from approaching the victims, or from going to the victim's workplace or other places they frequent. This is what has worked best for us.” (Private lawyer, Oscar, Texcoco, 2023).*

However, while these achievements are significant in normative and symbolic terms, their scope remains limited and often depends on the personal will of legal professionals rather than on a systematic institutional policy. Furthermore, their impact is diminished by structural inequalities, such as the low educational attainment of victims, the lack of interpreters in Indigenous communities, and the patriarchal resistance of some institutional figures.

In general, the identified achievements can be organized according to the interview findings, as shown in Figure 1. This diagram groups and interrelates the actions taken by the Texcoco Regional Prosecutor's Office to assist women victims of violence. The first category corresponds to the complaints and lawsuits initiated, which include sensitive support. The second concerns immediate prevention measures, limited to the terms under which the complaint and lawsuit are filed, or when a restraining order or the removal of the perpetrator from the home is requested as a precautionary measure. The third category involves the application of protocols, which do not always integrate the first two, although in theory they should. The diagram indicates the presence of one category with a delay or absence of the other, or combinations of omission and/or delay. A recurring issue is the inability to determine the specific progress of the actions taken or their impact.



**Figure 1.** Achievements in access to justice in the regional prosecutor's office of Texcoco.

In this regard, it is noted that gender-sensitive justice is not limited to the application of protocols, but rather implies a profound cultural and institutional transformation that challenges traditional power hierarchies (Ferrer & Bosch, 2019). Therefore, the progress documented in Texcoco must be consolidated as institutionalized practices, not as exceptional acts.

### Identified structural barriers

As noted above, despite some regulatory advances and the partial implementation of gender-sensitive protocols, rural women continue to face serious structural obstacles when trying to access justice. These obstacles are not incidental or solely attributable to individual factors, but rather stem from deeply rooted institutional and cultural patterns that constitute forms of structural and institutional violence (Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1990). Table 3 presents the main barriers identified in the research and highlights the regulations they violate, based on the findings from fieldwork.

**Table 3.** Structural barriers to access to justice for rural women in Texcoco.

Type of barrier	Description	Empirical evidence	Rules violated
Institutional patriarchy	Discriminatory treatment, delegitimization of testimonies, cultural stereotypes	Testimonies from victims and feminist collectives	LGAMVLV (2007), CEDAW (1979)
Revictimization	Moral judgments, unnecessary exposure, institutional mistreatment	Interviews with women and officials	NOM-046, SCJN Protocol (2013)
Impunity	Unresolved cases, lack of judicialization	Statements from the Public Prosecutor and lawyers	Right to effective judicial protection
Misinformation and abandonment	Lack of clear information, absence of interpreters, institutional neglect	Testimonies of rural women	General Law on Victims (2013), right to information

Source: Prepared by the author using data from the systematization of field information.

The types of obstacles identified in the administration of justice at the Texcoco regional prosecutor's office begin with Institutional Patriarchy. This concept refers to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, discrimination, and inequality within the justice system itself. The investigation documented numerous cases in which rural women were discredited or dismissed by judicial and ministerial personnel. Regarding this, one interviewee stated:

*“The lawyer from DIF told me not to even go to the Public Prosecutor's Office because they weren't going to pay attention to me because I wasn't raped, bloody, beaten, or with any sign of violence” (Testimony of female victim, Luisa, Texcoco, 2023).*

This type of discourse relates to what Lagarde (1998) conceptualizes as “cultural captivities”: gender mandates that position rural women as subordinate, dependent, and without legitimacy to act in the public sphere. Institutional personnel, operating under these logics, reproduce a system in which justice becomes a privilege rather than a right.

This is followed by revictimization, which is one of the main factors discouraging women from continuing legal proceedings. The research reveals that many of them suffer questioning, moral judgment, procedural omissions, and unnecessary exposure of their personal histories. Revictimizing practices were identified both in the taking of statements and in medical and psychological care. In this regard, one rural woman interviewed stated:

*“Yes, there were difficulties because, they assigned me a lawyer and they changed her about twice, then they would summon me and I would go and the lawyer wasn't there and I had to go back again, so that made the process longer and there were times when I had to go down for my file, review it, make copies and all the movement, she was the only one who explained to me how the case was progressing” (Woman victim, Aitana, Texcoco, 2023).*

This directly contravenes the provisions of national protocols, such as the Official Mexican Standard NOM-046-SSA2-2005, which requires unbiased care, as well as the Protocol of action for those who administer justice in cases involving the rights of people in vulnerable situations (SCJN, 2013).

Impunity, fueled by misinformation and neglect, emerges as one of the most structural barriers. The archive reports that a large proportion of complaints filed by rural women in Texcoco are neither prosecuted nor resolved, remaining as “open cases” indefinitely. Regarding this, a public prosecutor stated:

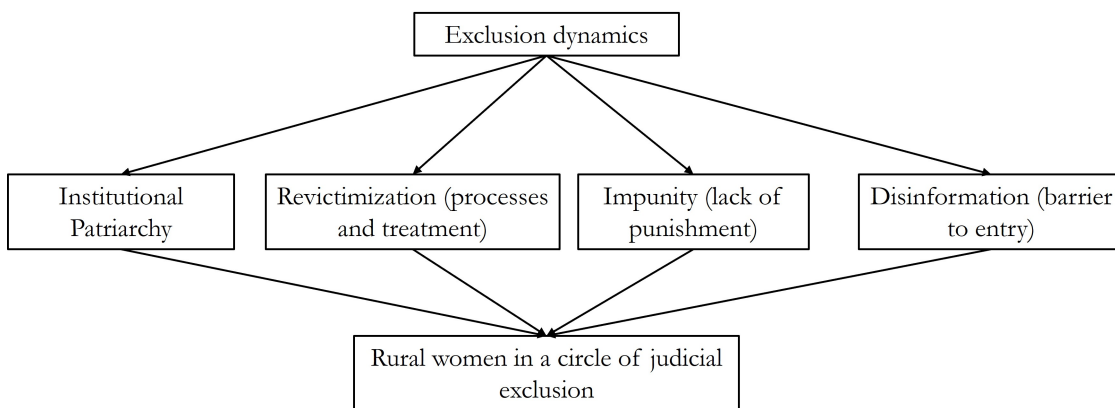
*“[...] Sometimes what happens in family courts is that we cannot hold hearings within the deadline, because of the large number of cases we have, and sometimes that means that if it is five days, we will not hold it and it will be in ten, fifteen or twenty days, because of the entire workload” (Judge of the Judicial Power, Itzel, Texcoco, 2023).*

The lack of follow-up and weak institutional commitment to punishing aggressors reinforce the structural distrust towards the justice system, especially among women most vulnerable due to their rural or impoverished condition.

Legal misinformation about judicial processes was identified as another significant barrier. Many rural women are unaware of their rights, their options when filing a complaint, or how to interpret legal procedures. This information gap is exacerbated by the lack of trained community outreach staff and the absence of interpreters or accessible materials in rural or highly marginalized areas. In this regard, one of the interviewees stated:

*“[...] I did receive advice. But it was very bad, because ultimately we as people do not have the knowledge of everything that the law implies, so the lawyers use too much technicality and try to explain it to us in their own way” (Woman victim, Luisa, Texcoco, 2023).*

While infographics and legal guides exist, many are not designed for audiences with low literacy levels, nor do they consider specific cultural contexts. This severely limits the effective exercise of the right to access justice. The information gathered in the interviews shows that forms of victimization can be a single occurrence resulting in judicial exclusion, or a combination of several, as illustrated in Figure 2 .



**Figure 2.** Dynamics of exclusion in access to justice for rural women .

In this sense, the results allow us to affirm that the Texcoco Regional Prosecutor 's Office operates within an institutional environment that reproduces discriminatory practices, even in the presence of progressive legal frameworks. The gap between law and practice is not circumstantial, but structural. As Farmer (2004) points out, institutional violence is masked as bureaucratic neutrality, but its effects are lethal in terms of human rights. The lack of sanctions, the abandonment of complainants, and the perpetuation of stigmas consolidate a cycle of judicial exclusion that undermines the transformative capacity of the rule of law. Evaluating these barriers from an intersectional perspective not only reveals their depth, but also the critical points from which action can be taken.

*“[...] One of the biggest challenges is that the women victims then don’t want to report it, that even after explaining to them the consequences, that we have to go to a public prosecutor to present this aggressor, they no longer want to report it, they regret it, because they have been living together for some time, because he is the one who contributes to the household, either to avoid conflict with the rest of the family and that is why they don’t want to report it (...) you can’t force them and it depends on many economic conditions, beliefs, etc.) (Citizen Security Police, Aldo, Mexico City, 2023).*

### Gap between the regulatory framework and its implementation

One of the central findings of this evaluation is the profound gap between the current legal framework and its actual application in the processes of access to justice for rural women in Texcoco. This discrepancy, identified both in interviews with judicial actors and in the testimonies of women and human rights defenders, demonstrates that the presence of laws, protocols, and institutional mechanisms does not guarantee their effective implementation or their translation into practices that transform the structural conditions of inequality and violence ( Table 4 ).

**Table 4.** Comparison between regulatory achievements and their implementation in Texcoco.

Regulatory instrument	Legal/institutional obligation	Evidence of lag
LGAMVLV (2007)	Guarantee comprehensive access to justice with a gender perspective	Denial of comprehensive care, fragmented care
SCJN Protocol (2013)	Application of a gender perspective in the interpretation of evidence and judgments	Judges and prosecutors are unaware of the protocol or only partially apply it.
Gender Violence Alerts (2015, 2019)	Extraordinary measures to prevent and punish femicide and disappearance	Lack of compliance indicators at the local level
CEDAW, Belém do Pará	Guarantee the right to a life free from violence and to justice without discrimination	Rural women face discrimination, revictimization, and a lack of interpreters.
General Law on Victims (2013)	It guarantees the right to clear information, advice, and redress for damages.	Women sign documents without understanding them, and receive no guidance or support.

Source: Prepared by the author using data from the systematization of field information.

Mexico has a robust legal framework for women's human rights, having ratified international instruments such as:

- The CEDAW (1979)
- The Belém do Pará Convention (1994)
- The General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence (LGAMVLV) (2007)

At the state level, the State of Mexico has enacted the Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence in the State of Mexico, in addition to having issued two Gender Violence Alerts (2015 and 2019), one of them focused on disappearances. The federal judiciary has developed technical instruments such as the Protocol for Judging with a Gender Perspective (SCJN, 2013) and the Protocol for Action for those who administer justice in cases involving the rights of people in vulnerable situations (2011), among others. At the local level, the Attorney General's Office of the State of Mexico has promoted the opening of specialized agencies for gender violence and the training of personnel.

Despite these regulatory advances, the interviews conducted reveal that these instruments are not applied systematically, in a coordinated manner, or effectively. The testimonies describe a series of institutional practices that contradict or ignore legal mandates, resulting in a fragmented, slow, revictimizing, and even punitive experience of access to justice for complainants. In this regard, one of the key informants stated:

*“They disregard the emotional aspect, the sensitivity, the tact needed to attend to a woman who is a victim of violence and to know what her needs are throughout the entire process, to protect her and to make her feel safe next to a Public Prosecutor or a legal advisor, who knows perfectly well that these two people will support her throughout the process, that she has no reason to be anxious or feel less, since she is an important being and we will uphold her rights” (Licensed Public Prosecutor, Marisol, Texcoco, 2023).*

In systematizing the information, four main areas of institutional shortcomings were identified. The first concerns the superficial or nonexistent knowledge of protocols, as many legal professionals have not been adequately trained in their use. In this regard, interviews revealed that some public prosecutors minimize the importance of the Protocol for Judging with a Gender Perspective or are even unaware of its existence. The second area is the lack of follow-up to Gender Violence Alerts (GVAs), which have resulted in symbolic actions rather than structural transformations.

It was identified that there are no effective mechanisms for compliance with these alerts at the municipal level. The third area is the inter-institutional fragmentation between the Prosecutor's Office, the courts, the Public Defender's Office, shelters, and feminist collectives, which is intermittent and reactive, weakening comprehensive support. The fourth is the cultural resistance within the justice system, where patriarchal institutional attitudes persist, hindering the full implementation of the regulations, especially for rural, Indigenous, or low-income women.

The gap between the normative and the operational constitutes a structural form of institutional violence that prevents women from exercising their rights under conditions of equality (Vázquez, 2014). In the case of rural women, this gap takes on an intersectional dimension, as it is amplified by poverty, geographical remoteness, and low levels of education. As Crenshaw (1991) argues, the intersection of oppressions creates situations where existing laws, although well-intentioned, do not reach those who need them most. Evaluating this gap is not a technical exercise, but an ethical and political one: it allows us to question the coherence between institutional discourse and its actual practice. In general, it is observed that the normative framework, when implemented as institutional practice, has two major

areas for improvement in preventing arbitrary application and systematic revictimization in rural women's access to justice in Texcoco (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Lag between regulatory framework and its implementation.

Laws	PG Protocol	Regulatory Framework				
		AVGM	Victims Law	LGAMVLV	CEDAW	NOM-046
<b>Institutional practice</b>						
MP Agents						Arbitrary application**
Public defenders						
Legal advisor						
Judge			Lack of follow-up on complaints			
Lawyers			Lack of knowledge of protocols*			
Experts						
Police						
<b>Systematic revictimization***</b>						

\* The systematized information indicates, among the different actors, the lack of knowledge of the protocols and laws in some part of the justice administration process and at different levels as one of the outstanding areas for improvement for access to justice for rural women.  
 \*\* Ignorance of the legal framework leads to an arbitrary application of justice.  
 \*\*\* As a final result, women experience systematic revictimization, in some or different parts of the process.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of data collected at the Texcoco Regional Prosecutor's Office reveals a series of structural tensions between the current legal framework and the institutional practices that mediate access to justice for rural women victims of violence. This discussion is structured around three central findings of the evaluation: 1) low levels of effectiveness and serious equity deficiencies in the service processes; 2) persistent inaccessibility and ineffectiveness of the justice system despite legal advances; and 3) the relevance of qualitative evaluation as a strategy for identifying critical areas for institutional improvement.

The assessment reveals that access to justice in Texcoco, in its practical dimension, is characterized by a low institutional capacity to resolve cases promptly, provide follow-up, and offer reparations, reflecting a lack of structural effectiveness. According to interviews with public prosecutors and public defenders, most complaints are not brought to court, and the case files remain "in process" or are archived without notification or resolution.

This effectiveness deficit is exacerbated by the lack of clear outcome indicators, weak inter-institutional coordination, and poor accountability. Significantly, this ineffectiveness is most acute in cases involving women living in

rural areas, in poverty, or with limited education, indicating a failure to uphold the principle of equity in institutional treatment (House & Howe, 1999).

Equity cannot be evaluated solely as formal equality of treatment, but rather as the system's capacity to recognize and correct the differentiated access conditions faced by women. As Ferrer and Bosch (2019) point out, equitable institutional attention requires adjusting processes, language, timelines, and procedures to the social realities of the users, and this principle is far from being met in the Prosecutor's Office analyzed. Furthermore, the persistence of practices of revictimization, moral judgments, denial of immediate protection, and contemptuous treatment of rural women, documented in the testimonies of this research, demonstrates that equity is systematically violated, and that rural women access a deeply stratified justice system.

The study also highlights a recurring phenomenon in the field of human rights public policy in Latin America: the gap between progressive legal frameworks and exclusionary institutional practices (Farmer, 2004; Vázquez, 2014). In the case of the State of Mexico, there are robust laws, current gender violence alerts, provisional measures, judicial protocols, and signed international treaties; however, these instruments do not translate into effective access to justice for rural women victims of violence, revealing a structural dissonance between law and practice. This gap is due in part to the lack of mandatory gender-sensitive training, but also to cultural resistance within the judicial system, where stereotypes, denial of contexts of inequality, and delegitimization of complainants persist. This pattern is consistent with what Crenshaw (1991) described, who warned that the intersection of gender, class, and territory deepens the barriers to accessing rights for women living on the structural margins.

Furthermore, the lack of cultural and territorial relevance of judicial services (for example, the absence of interpreters or accessible materials and the use of technical jargon directed at women) constitutes yet another barrier in a chain that produces multiple forms of exclusion. This set of structural omissions renders the judicial system, in practice, inaccessible to many rural women victims of violence, directly contradicting the provisions of CEDAW (1979), the Belém do Pará Convention (1994), and the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence (2007).

Thus, accessibility is not only physical or geographical, but also symbolic, institutional, and procedural. When a rural woman is treated with contempt, faces confusing procedures, receives incomplete information, or is subjected to harassment by state agents, her exclusion is reinforced, and a covert form of institutional violence is normalized (Vázquez, 2014).

One of the main contributions of this study is to demonstrate that qualitative institutional evaluation, when articulated with an intersectional approach, makes it possible to highlight not only improvements in institutional functions but also the impacts and repercussions on users. This perspective offers a transformative analytical view, as it moves away from purely administrative or numerical evaluations and focuses on the processes, meanings, and effects of public action (Scriven, 2007; Ferrer & Bosch, 2019).

Applying criteria such as effectiveness, equity, relevance, and gender perspective made it possible to identify critical areas for structural improvement in the Prosecutor's Office, such as:

- The need to institutionalize training in human rights and gender perspective with a territorial focus.
- The urgency of developing complaint monitoring mechanisms with public compliance indicators.
- The implementation of differentiated protocols that consider the particularities of rural and indigenous women.

Furthermore, the evaluation demonstrates that access to justice must be understood as a comprehensive process, not a one-off event. This implies ensuring support, protection, clear information, reparation for damages, and guarantees of non-repetition. From this perspective, the evaluation is not merely a control mechanism, but a tool for epistemic and social justice, as it recovers the voices of those who have historically been excluded from institutional processes (Fricker, 2007).

Finally, this evaluation reinforced the need to build a justice system that is no longer indifferent to structural inequality. It is not enough to enact laws or issue protocols: institutional will, budget, rigorous monitoring, and the active participation of women in transforming the judicial system are required. The case of Texcoco, while specific, is representative of many local realities in Mexico. Therefore, the findings of this study should be read as a wake-up call to the Mexican State: if justice does not reach rural women, Indigenous women, or women living in poverty, we cannot speak of an inclusive rule of law.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research revealed a deficit in guaranteeing the right to access justice for rural women. Despite the existence of national and international legal frameworks aimed at ensuring women's right to live free from violence, rural women in Texcoco do not have equal access to the justice system. This limited access is due to both external structural conditions (such as poverty, geographic remoteness, low levels of

education, and a lack of support networks ) and internal obstacles within the judicial system itself. This is exacerbated for women who, in addition to their rural status, face additional barriers due to age, education level, ethnicity, or disability. In this sense, current conditions do not allow us to speak of an effective or equitable system because one of the central findings of the evaluation is the contradiction between the formally guaranteed legal framework and institutional practices that, instead of operating from a human rights perspective, perpetuate logics of exclusion, punishment, and abandonment.

The findings highlight the urgent need to move towards a justice model that not only proclaims rights but is also capable of making them operational in unequal and adverse contexts. To this end, three priority areas for action are identified: strengthening institutional capacities, implementing monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and developing intersectional and culturally appropriate care protocols.

In summary, this evaluative exercise demonstrated that it is both possible and necessary to develop methodological tools that combine academic rigor with social sensitivity, in order to make visible the margins from which justice systems operate. Evaluating from a feminist and intersectional perspective is not merely a technical act, but a political exercise that challenges the status quo , reclaims women's voices, and demands structural solutions. At the same time, it reflected a reality that, with variations, is reproduced in many regions of the country, especially in those where inequality, classism, and institutional racism continue to define access to rights.

As a recommendation, based on the analysis conducted, the findings, far from being limited to a diagnosis, illustrate the opportunity to start from empirical evidence, the testimonies of the affected women, and the legal commitments of the Mexican State regarding human rights. Therefore, the following three key recommendations are proposed as strategies for continuous improvement: a) the design of a permanent institutional monitoring and evaluation system for access to justice with a gender perspective, and the provision of training in Human Rights and gender perspective to public servants; b) the establishment of quantitative and qualitative monitoring indicators on complaints, prosecution, sentences, and reparations; and c) the inclusion of participatory evaluations with rural women as active subjects of the evaluation process.

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