



# Photojournalists in Central America bring women into focus with **gender fellowship**

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Free Press Unlimited supported a gender fellowship for photojournalists in Central America. Fellow Danilo Ramirez investigated the underreported issue of obstetric violence in Guatemala.

Before Ramirez, 34, participated in the gender fellowship by Free Press Unlimited partner Fundación Latitudes, he had never heard of obstetric violence. “I chose to work on it because I wanted to find out more. It’s not very well reported in my country,” he recalls.

Obstetric violence is a type of gender-based violence. It encompasses disrespectful, abusive or neglectful treatment of women during pregnancy and birth. “Often, the treatment women get in hospital isn’t dignified,” Ramirez explains.

“The classic phrase [medical staff] use to justify this violence is by saying, ‘If opening your legs was okay for you, this should be okay too’” - Danilo Ramirez

Ramirez, a photographer for Guatemalan newspaper *Diario de Centro América*, investigated the issue of obstetric violence during four months in 2017. He spent time at maternity wards. He also photographed a woman who told him about her experiences giving birth. “She was given a medicine which was administered incorrectly. It made her lose her eyesight for a few minutes. She told me how they left her alone in a cold room for the night,” Ramirez says.



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*Danilo Ramirez spent time at maternity wards to capture the issue of obstetric violence.*

## Male-dominated profession

Photojournalism is a highly male-dominated profession all over the world. In a global survey of more than 1,000 photographers conducted by World Press Photo in 2018, more than 80 percent of participants identified as male. The images produced by these photographers shape how societies view themselves, says Fundación Latitudes co-founder Enayda Argueta: “Journalists influence a society through their words and images. Many of them don’t realise how much responsibility this brings.”

She created a gender fellowship for photojournalists from El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Honduras, which received financial support from Free Press Unlimited. Violence against women is a

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major issue in these countries: El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are among the four countries with the highest femicide rates in the region.



*Newborn babies in a maternity ward in Guatemala.*

Participants of the gender fellowship were mentored by Argueta on how to create stories through still images that challenge gender stereotypes and address women's rights. The fellows are also trained on their photography technique.

"When you're a photojournalist chasing after your daily news photo, you might not have time to think of concepts such as gender balance, or female empowerment," Argueta says. "The gender fellowship taught photographers how to create in-depth photo essays that put women in focus."

Ramirez concluded the fellowship with a series of impactful photos that capture the issue of obstetric violence. The photos were published in a magazine and exhibited in El Salvador. It's just a first step

for Ramirez: “[This investigation] really affected me personally. I’m hoping to continue working on it for my university thesis.”

*Photos: Danilo Ramirez*



*Although obstetric violence is widespread in Guatemala, it is underreported in the country's media.*

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## CONTACT DETAILS

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Weesperstraat 3

1018 DN Amsterdam

The Netherlands

T: +31 20 8000400

E: info[at]freepressunlimited.org

IBAN: NL92 INGB 000 000 7676



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