



Kevin Zapata Celestino

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Valeria and the bear

The death of a young woman has reignited the conversation about the dangers of being a woman in Mexico, writes Kevin Zapata-Celestino.

In May 2024, [Valeria Márquez](#) was murdered while she live streamed on TikTok. Márquez was a young Mexican influencer who posted videos about beauty and makeup. Her death has become international news because it painfully revives the ongoing issue of violence against women in Mexico.

With little confirmed information and no suspects currently detained (despite a man's face appearing at the end of the stream), several media outlets began speculating about the motives behind her killing. Many focused on an alleged romantic relationship between Valeria and [a member of a criminal organisation](#). This speculation quickly spread across social media, where misogynistic commentary proliferated, comments that blamed and dehumanised Valeria written with a disturbing lack of shame: "She brought it on herself," "She knew what she was getting into," "Now suddenly she's the victim?".

This reaction echoes a [viral debate](#) from just a few months ago, one that also revealed the deep fear and everyday violence women face. It began with a deceptively simple question: "If you were alone in the woods, would you rather encounter a bear or a man?"

Countless women online answered the bear, despite the obvious danger the animal posed. The debate went viral, prompting outrage among many men who called the choice irrational. According to their logic, a bear means certain death. They accused women of vilifying men purely based on gender. One of the most common refrains was, "Not all men are like that," as if the conversation were about individual guilt instead of systemic fear. For them, the issue was framed as an exaggerated, even hostile, attack on men.

Women responded with chilling clarity, explaining why they preferred the bear. Their reasons came in the form of testimonies shaped by a lifetime of trauma: “At least the bear won’t film me without my consent and share it with his friends,” “If the bear attacks me, no one will say I enjoyed it,” “I won’t have to see the bear again at the next family gathering,” “No one will accuse me of ruining the bear’s future.”

For many women, violence is a constant companion, so much so that facing a wild animal can feel less terrifying than encountering a violent man. Globally, two out of three women have experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence, according to [UN Women](#). In Mexico, the situation is even more dire: around 70 per cent of women have endured some form of violence, and one in two has experienced sexual aggression, according to [INEGI](#). Stats from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean indicate that [around 11 women are killed](#) every day in the region.

In response to these statistics, it’s not uncommon to hear men assert that they, too, suffer from violence, often adding that their pain is ignored. And while it’s true that men also face violence and their suffering deserves recognition, it’s equally important to acknowledge that in Mexico, the vast majority of victims of sexual abuse, domestic violence, human trafficking, and child exploitation are women. These figures come straight from Mexico’s own state-level prosecutors that feed the [Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System](#).

Even when we consider homicide, the one crime where men are the majority of victims, it is still overwhelmingly men who are the perpetrators. And when women are killed, it’s also mostly by men, frequently in their own homes and often by someone they know. Men tend to be murdered in public spaces; women are killed where they should be safest: in private, at home, by intimate partners or relatives.

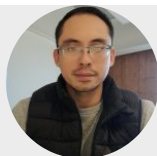
Given this context, it’s no surprise that Valeria’s murder has reignited the conversation about the bear. Sadly, instead of prompting serious reflection on the systemic violence women endure and the societal structures that enable it, many men on social media have responded with the same misogynistic tropes we’ve heard before.

As philosopher [Kate Manne](#) of Cornell University argues, our society fosters a sense of male entitlement, a belief that men are owed women’s bodies, time, care, and reproductive labour. This entitlement underpins much of the reactionary, anti-feminist rhetoric that dominates parts of the internet known as the “manosphere.” To them, the idea that women would rather risk death by a bear than submit to a man is not just irrational, it’s unacceptable.

Valeria is dead. And many men are celebrating her death. Maybe Valeria would still be alive today if she had met the bear instead.

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About the author



Kevin Zapata Celestino has a PhD in Social Policy from the University of Edinburgh and is currently an LSE Fellow at the Department of Social Policy. Kevin's work focuses on international social and public policy, with a focus on Mexico and Latin America.

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