

# Incarcerated Women in Latin America

## Characteristics and Risk Factors Associated with Criminal Behavior

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In collaboration with the Wilson Center

Institutions for Development  
Sector

Innovation in Citizen  
Services Division

TECHNICAL  
NOTE N°  
IDB-TN-1409

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April 2018



Cataloging-in-Publication data provided by the  
Inter-American Development Bank  
Felipe Herrera Library

Safranoff, Ana.

Incarcerated women in Latin America: characteristics and risk factors associated with criminal behavior / Ana Safranoff, Antonella Tiravassi; editors, Eric L. Olson, Robert Pantzer, Gustavo Mauricio Bastien-Olvera, Jacquelyn Dolezal.

p. cm. — (IDB Technical Note ; 1409)

Includes bibliographic references.

1. Women prisoners-Latin America-Social conditions. 2. Criminal behavior-Sex differences-Latin America. 3. Criminal records-Latin America. I. Tiravassi, Antonella. II. Olson, Eric L., editor. III. Pantzer, Robert, editor. IV. Bastien-Olvera, Gustavo Mauricio, editor. V. Dolezal, Jacquelyn, editor VI. Inter-American Development Bank. Innovation in Citizen Services Division. VII. Title. VIII. Series. IDB-TN-1409

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## ABSTRACT\*

Based on an analysis of the *Survey of Convicted Prisoners* relating to eight Latin American countries, this document contributes to a deepening of the knowledge about women who have been imprisoned. First, the results of this in-depth study highlight the gender differences in terms of criminal behavior, as well as the level to which social exclusion is prevalent prior to imprisonment. Women tend to commit less violent and aggressive crimes, have a shorter criminal history, and are more likely to commit a crime while accompanied by a male figure on whom they are dependent. Similarly, women are found to have been far more vulnerable compared to men prior to entering prison. The proportion of women who are unemployed is not only higher than that of men, but childcare responsibilities typically fall upon the woman. Second, this report applies multivariate regression models to identify the risk factors associated with the criminal trajectory of imprisoned women; these indicate where intervention is required in order to prevent female delinquency. The report also emphasizes the fact that a girl's social interactions (primarily her peer group) can influence her criminal behavior, as do particular sociodemographic characteristics such as having children. Furthermore, the document suggests that such factors must be taken into account in terms of preventive measures as well as the uniqueness of incarcerated women when designing policies that relate to detention and social reintegration.

**JEL Codes:** H76, J16, K14, K42

**Keywords:** criminal career, gender differences, incarcerated women, Latin America, vulnerability

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\* Thank you to the penitentiary authorities of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Peru, for allowing us to use the surveys analyzed in this study.



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# INTRODUCTION

The number of individuals detained in Latin American prisons has increased considerably in recent years. When the imprisoned population is taken in its entirety, the representation of women within the criminal justice system indicates having doubled. It is therefore essential to question who these imprisoned women are in Latin America.

The first objective of this report is to map, in general terms, the population of women in prison. The initial section explores the characteristics of these women, including their criminal behavior, sociodemographic traits, socialization processes, and socioeconomic status at the time they entered prison.

The second objective is to identify what determines a woman's criminal behavior, specifically by examining various criminal trajectories. The report explores from among incarcerated women the risk factors influencing recidivism and/or the age at which a woman begins a career of crime (calculated by her age at the time of first arrest and prior experience in juvenile detention).

In Latin America, research on this issue is limited. This report, however, is unique in that it explores a topic that has not previously been studied at the regional level while approaching it from a quantitative perspective through a database referred to as the *Survey of Convicted Prisoners*. With the support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), this survey was carried out in eight countries in the region by the Center for Latin American Studies on In-

security Violence (Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos sobre Inseguridad y Violencia, or CELIV), National University of Tres de Febrero. The objectives of the report are achieved by applying two types of analysis: one in-depth and the other multivariate (logistic linear multiple regression models, depending on the nature of the dependent variable).

This work advances the body of knowledge that relates to imprisoned women, and significantly adds to the design of relevant public policies and programs (Goetting and Howsen, 1983). On the one hand, it is necessary to recognize the distinctive aspects of incarcerated women (*the first objective*) in policymaking that relate to prison, the re-entry into society, and crime prevention so as to improve their lives inside and outside of prison (Goetting and Howsen, 1983; Olaeta, 2016). On the other hand, little is known about the risk factors associated with women's criminal behavior (McQuaide and Ehrenreich, 1998). It is essential to identify these factors (*the second objective*) in order to prevent such behavior (Nguyen, Arbach, and Pueyo, 2011). This report thus highlights the significance of the second objective, given that it makes possible targeted preventative policies to benefit women in terms of design while focusing on specific risk factors. In summary, this study represents a small line of research that sheds light on the women entrapped within the criminal justice system, with a view to discarding traditional, androcentric bias (De Miguel Calvo, 2014).



## INVISIBLE WOMEN?

For years, women have been discounted within criminal justice prison systems (Goetting and Howsen, 1983), consistently having been relegated to the position of inferior (Yague Olmos, 2007). Empirical evidence supports this assertion in that there has been very little research carried out on women who have committed crimes (Aguilera, 2011; Ruidíaz García, 2011). Azaola (2005) notes as a significant disadvantage the fact that some countries, such as Mexico and Colombia, lack correctional facilities that are exclusive to women. Other authors emphasize the lack of specialized services for incarcerated women, such as gynecological or postpartum care (Bonta, Pang, and Wallace-Capretta, 1995). Along the same lines, Yague Olmos (2007) observes that prisons are operated by and for men.

Historically, women have constituted a small proportion of the prison population (Owen and Bloom, 1995); even today, fewer women than men are in prison. The female prison population, however, is growing at a faster pace than that of males in a large number of countries, reflected in Table 1 (McQuaide and Ehrenreich, 1998; Azaola, 2005; Moloney, van den Bergh, and Moller, 2009).

Despite this trend, very little is known generally and specifically about the needs of women and/or how women differ from men in the prison environment (McQuaide and Ehrenreich, 1998; Yague Olmos, 2007). The limited research indicates that although incarcerated women share some similarities with men, they also differ (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994; Olaeta, 2016). This report explores these differences in an effort to shed light on those women; it seeks to understand who they are and what risk factors are associated with particular criminal behaviors.

### Profile of Incarcerated Women

Over the past several years, the number of publications about incarcerated women has increased. This section provides a synthesis of the various studies in this field that originate primarily from North America (Goetting and Howsen, 1983; Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994; Owen and Bloom, 1995; McQuaide and Ehrenreich, 1998; Moloney, van den Bergh, and Moller, 2009). The number also has increased in Spain (Ruidíaz García, 2011; Almeda Samaranch, Di Nella, and Navarro Villanueva, 2012; Naredo Molero, 2007; Villagrà Lanza et al., 2011; De Miguel Calvo, 2014; Yague Olmos, 2007). In Latin America, however, research on women in jail continues to be scarce (Olaeta, 2016; Azaola, 2005; Antony, 2007).

Current literature differentiates an incarcerated woman based on four traits at the time she enters prison: *criminal behavior*, *socialization*, *sociodemographic*, and *socioeconomic*.

First, a number of authors have found that female *criminal behavior* differs from male behavior: women more often tend to violate drug laws, are less violent, are less likely to be rearrested, and begin their life in criminal at a later age. Women are placed in jail most frequently as a result of drug trafficking, as is the case in a number of countries: Mexico (Azaola, 2005), Argentina (Olaeta, 2016), Panama (Antony, 2007), Spain (Ruidíaz García, 2011; Almeda Samaranch, Di Nella, and Navarro Villanueva, 2012; Naredo Molero, 2007), and the United States (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994; Owen and Bloom, 1995), among others.

Men, on the other hand, are often involved in other types of criminal activities, such as robbery (Ruidíaz García, 2011). In Spain, 47 percent of incarcerated women are held for public health crimes (drug traffick-

TABLE 1: PRISON POPULATION ACCORDING TO SEX, AS WELL AS FEMALE AND MALE GROWTH RATE, 2005 AND 2011

COUNTRIES	2005			2011			GROWTH RATE	
	QUANTITY		PERCENT OF WOMEN FROM TOTAL	QUANTITY		PERCENT OF WOMEN FROM TOTAL	2005–2011	
	MEN	WOMEN		MEN	WOMEN		MEN	WOMEN
BRAZIL	351,417	20,065	5	477,322	34,963	7	36	74
COLOMBIA	59,386	3,727	6	86,698	6,689	7	46	79
COSTA RICA	7,816	637	8	10,663	676	6	36	6
CHILE	39,105	2,587	6	48,777	4,825	9	25	87
ECUADOR	10,330	1,151	10	14,207	1,213	8	38	5
EL SALVADOR	11,641	625	5	22,026	2,373	10	89	280
GUATEMALA	6,516	341	5	11,395	908	7	75	166
HONDURAS	11,188	403	3	11,556	429	4	3	6
MEXICO	193,466	10,220	5	215,453	10,244	5	11	0
PANAMA	10,788	814	7	12,455	942	7	15	16
PARAGUAY	5,971	291	5	6,714	447	6	12	54
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	12,621	447	3	20,685	583	3	64	30
URUGUAY	6,595	447	6	8,353	668	7	27	49
ARGENTINA	41,517	2,172	5	57,195	2,911	5	38	34

Source: Carranza, 2012; Argentina: National System of Statistics on Execution of Sentence.

Note: Results highlighted in red indicate countries where the growth rate of the female prison population exceeds that of the male population.

ing), while this percentage drops to 26 percent for men (Almeda Samaranch, Di Nella, and Navarro Villanueva, 2012). In Mexico, gender differences are even greater: 15 percent of men and 48 percent of women are in prison due to drug-related crimes (Azaola, 2005). Data on recidivism also reveals dissimilarities between men and women. For example, in Argentina, the overall percentage of inmates who are repeat offenders is 20 percent, while only 10 percent of female inmates commit further

crimes (Olaeta, 2006). In general, scholars argue that the criminal profile of a man is much more aggressive than that of a woman (Almeda Samaranch, Di Nella, and Navarro Villanueva, 2012).<sup>1</sup>

Second, studies of the *social interactions* of imprisoned women demonstrate that most have experienced complex childhoods, characterized by a lack of opportunity and devotion (Yague Olmos, 2007). Currently, the literature does not reflect gender variances that are sig-

<sup>1</sup> The literature describing gender differences in criminal behavior is broad. Women are less likely to commit violent crime than men (Moloney, van den Bergh, and Moller, 2009; Almeda Samaranch, Di Nella, and Navarro Villanueva, 2012; Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994; Goetting and Howsen, 1983) and they are less likely to relapse than men (Almeda Samaranch, Di Nella, and Navarro Villanueva, 2012; Naredo Molero, 2007; Olaeta, 2016; Yague Olmos, 2007; Goetting and Howsen, 1983). Their life in crime typically begins later (Antony, 2007; Naredo Molero, 2007; Owen and Bloom, 1995; Goetting and Howsen, 1983).

nificant, since jailed men may also have had similar experiences. The average profile of an incarcerated woman is one that reflects a vulnerable person who has been raised within a socially, economically disadvantaged environment (Ruidíaz García, 2011; De Miguel Calvo, 2014). Such women typically belong to large, unstructured social situations within the family, whose members are involved in crime and/or who have issues as a result of serious alcohol consumption and/or illicit drugs (Ruidíaz García, 2011; Yague Olmos, 2007; Owen and Bloom, 1995). Yague Olmos (2007) notes that in Seville, Spain, 70 percent of female prisoners have a relative in prison. In a study in California, Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen (1994) present similar findings, whereby 75 percent of women had a family member who was arrested at some point in time. Women are also found to have experienced a high rate of sexual abuse and intrafamily violence (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994; Owen and Bloom, 1995; Yague Olmos, 2007). A study carried out among women in Catalonia (Cruells and Igareda, 2005) indicates that 88 percent of those interviewed had experienced violence at some time in their life. In a study on violence during childhood, 29 percent of women in Californian prisons admitted to having experienced physical abuse, 31 percent to sexual abuse, and 40 percent to psychological abuse (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994). In terms of victimization, the literature finds gender differences nonexistent: women are more likely than men to have been physically or sexually abused in childhood as well as in adulthood (Moloney, van der Bergh, and Moller, 2009).

Third, several studies describe the *sociodemographic profile* of incarcerated women. Although the majority of them tend to be uneducated (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994), some reviews show that they may be relatively more educated than their male counterparts (Olaeta, 2016; Goetting and Howsen, 1983). For example, Olaeta (2016) indicates that in Argentina, 74 percent of men and women have barely completed elementary education. Among the women, however, this percentage

drops to 58 percent, indicating that it is the women who have a higher level of education. In contrast, Moloney, van der Bergh, and Moller (2009) find that it is the woman who has a lower level of education. Studies relating to age present similar conflicting results. On the one hand, there are reports that indicate that incarcerated men and women tend to be of a similar age (Olaeta, 2016; Naredo Molero, 2007). In Spain, for example, the average age for both is 33 years (Naredo Molero, 2007). Other studies, nevertheless, argue that imprisoned women tend to be older than men (Goetting and Howsen, 1983; Antony 2007). Goetting and Howsen (1983) state that in the United States, the average age of a woman is 29.66 years, while that of a man is 29.03. Similarly, Antony (2007) found that the percentage of women in Panama older than 50 is 6.6 percent—a much higher percentage than that of men, at 3.9 percent. Several authors highlight the elevated number of foreign women in prison (Olaeta, 2016; Yague Olmos, 2007; De Miguel Calvo, 2014; Ruidíaz García, 2011; Owen and Bloom, 1995; Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994).

Men and women in prison tend to have children (Antony, 2007), although women have them at a higher rate (Goetting and Howsen, 1983). Between 70 percent and 80 percent of women are mothers, each with an average of three children (Azaola, 2005; Ruidíaz García, 2011; Yague Olmos, 2007). Many of them are single, bearing full responsibility for their children and families (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994; Owen and Bloom, 1995; Antony, 2007; Ruidíaz García, 2011; Azaola, 2005; De Miguel Calvo, 2014). Some studies, continuing in this vein, even argue that the crimes committed by women often directly relate to the level of poverty of the family and the need to care for their children (Moloney, van der Bergh, and Moller, 2009). Single mothers often experience social exclusion, a determining factor in crime probability (De Miguel Calvo, 2014). Several evaluations indicate that women in relationships are often dependent on their partners (Azaola, 2005). This dependency often implicates them in criminal behavior as a result of their

attempt to cover up the partner's crime or they may participate in criminal behavior as a voluntary or involuntary accomplice (Azaola, 2005). It is conceived that women will engage frequently in criminal activity as a result of a relationship with a delinquent partner or husband (Gilfus, 1992; Mullins and Wright, 2003).

At the same time, it is evident that the majority of women in jail have experienced violence from an intimate partner, either directly or indirectly (Yague Olmos, 2007; Igareda, 2006). In California, 60 percent of women report having experienced physical abuse as an adult, mainly at the hands of a partner (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994). Various authors also have highlighted the high rate of consumption of alcohol and illicit drugs and their effect on women (De Miguel Calvo, 2014; Villagr  Lanza et al., 2011; Ruid az Garc a, 2011). For example, Moloney, van den Bergh, and Moller (2009) note that more than half of women in Australian and U.S. prisons were under the influence of alcohol and/or an illegal drug at the time they committed a crime. Precarious alcohol and illicit drug consumption is more problematic among women than men (Goetting and Howsen, 1983; Owen and Bloom, 1995).

Finally, several evaluations include the *socioeconomic status* of women at the time they are placed in prison. For the most part, the data confirm the vulnerability of women (Antony, 2007). In terms of employment, fewer women than men report being employed at the time of their arrest: a higher proportion of women were unemployed immediately prior to incarceration (Goetting and Howsen, 1983; Owen and Bloom, 1995; Olaeta, 2016; Antony, 2007). In Panama, 72.1 percent of all prisoners reported having been employed at the time of their arrest, although this figure dropped among women to 52.9 percent (Antony, 2007). Likewise, more than half of women surveyed declared that they were receiving no income at the time of arrest, while a smaller amount of men said likewise (Antony, 2007). Research has shown that the majority of women in jail are poor and economically marginalized—unemployed

with significantly few professional qualifications and/or little work experience (Ruid az Garc a, 2011; Yague Olmos, 2007; Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994; Azaola, 2005; Owen and Bloom, 1995).

In summary, the literature reflects that the characteristics of incarcerated women do not conform to the general patterns observed among the majority of the prison population, dominated by men (Olaeta, 2016). Evidence shows that while imprisoned women may share some similarities with their male counterparts, they also differ from them (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994; Olaeta, 2016). Women in prison come from environments where they have been marginalized (Owen and Bloom, 1995; Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994); they have experienced multiple forms of social exclusion prior to incarceration (De Miguel Calvo, 2014). A significant proportion of women share similar characteristics, such as poor education, lack of work experience, and a history of personal and substance abuse. Findings support the notion that many female offenders are not necessarily violent and do not have a long criminal record.

## Female Criminal Behavior: Associated Risk Factors

The rise in the number of publications on the characteristics of women who have been imprisoned parallels the debate over what factors might explain their criminal behavior (Rettinger and Andrews, 2010). Few empirical studies, however, are available on the predictors of this behavior (Bonta, Pang, and Wallace-Capretta, 1995). As a result, various researchers have attempted to explain female delinquency on the basis of factors within the male population (Bonta, Pang, and Wallace-Capretta, 1995).

This section discusses the various risk factors, highlighted in the literature, that are associated with criminal behavior. Research on risk factors focuses on the relationship—either associative or, ideally, causal—between particular determinants and the various stages of a life of crime (initiation, duration, recidivism, etc.)

(Redondo et al., 2005). Since criminal behavior is not innate but, rather, is acquired (Feldman, 1989), several studies identify preventive risk factors in the development of criminal behavior (Arce et al., 2010).

The development of criminal behavior may be understood as a product of the interaction between numerous social, familial, and individual variables. Fundamentally, the literature categorizes the risk factors that are associated with criminal behavior of an individual into three groups: *early socialization process*, certain *sociodemographic characteristics*, and/or *socioeconomic status* immediately prior to his/her incarceration. These aspects coexist and interact during the criminal behavior development (Hein, Blanco, and Mertz, 2004), amounting to the criminal behavior being the result of a series of risk factors that act interdependently (Bringas et al., 2010).

Studies on the influence of *social interaction* in terms of criminal behavior have proved that inadequate socialization determines, in most cases, the development of criminal behavior (Herrero Remuzgo and León Fuentes, 2006). Risk factors in a child's social interactions may include family discord, including the temporary or long-term separation from parents; parents' lack of affection and support toward their children; engagement in criminal behavior by parents or close family members; lack of communication between family members, hampering the development of a positive parent-child relationship; exposure to paternal discipline that is based on physical violence rather than

on verbal punishment; exposure to violence between parents; exposure to drug or alcohol consumption in the home; unconventional composition of family; contact with peers who commit crimes; and/or residence in a disadvantaged/marginal neighborhood, among others. Analyses demonstrate that children who grow up in these environments are more likely to develop violent and criminal behavior.<sup>2</sup> Some authors highlight the gender difference within each factor: for example, having friends who have committed crimes is considered to be less relevant for women than for men, since women tend to be less influenced by a criminal subculture (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Pugh, 1986; Covington, 1995). Furthermore, while men are more likely to seek support from their peer group, women are more attached to their families (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Pugh, 1986; Anderson, 1989).

Among the risk factors relating to the context of socialization, exposure to family violence is arguably the most researched element of criminal behavior. There are various types of family violence. According to Ireland and Smith (2009), child abuse has received the greatest amount of attention as a predictor of crime and antisocial behavior during adulthood (Widom and Maxfield, 2001; Smith, Ireland, and Thornberry, 2005). Child abuse is certainly associated with violence, criminal behavior, and recidivism, as demonstrated in numerous studies (Tontodonato and Crew, 1992; Dubowitz, Feigelman, and Zuravin, 1993; Benda, 2005; Ryan and Testa, 2005; Petrosino, Derzon, and Lavenberg, 2009). Analyses of other

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<sup>2</sup> Several authors have analyzed the association between the socialization process and the development of criminal behavior. The influence of various factors relating to the environment have been explored: various dimensions of family violence—as a witness and/or as a direct victim—(Ireland and Smith, 2009; Widom and Maxfield, 2001; Smith, Ireland, and Thornberry, 2005; Tontodonato and Crew, 1992; Dubowitz, Feigelman, and Zuravin, 1993; Benda, 2005; Ryan and Testa, 2005; Petrosino, Derzon, and Lavenberg, 2009; O'Keefe, 1998; Foo and Margolin, 1995); belonging to a broken home—a home without two biological parents—(Wells and Rankin, 1991; Smith and Stern, 1997); family size (Valverde, 1988; Bringas et al., 2010); having a criminal record (Otero-López, Romero Trinanés, and Luengo, 1994; Bringas et al., 2010); having parents who frequently consume drugs and/or alcohol (Loeber and Stouthammer-Loeber, 1986); lack of parental affection, support, and commitment (Smith and Stern, 1997; Simons, Lin, and Gordon, 1998; Petrosino, Derzon, and Lavenberg, 2009); socioeconomic status of the parental family (Levitt and Lochner, 2001; Torrente and Rodríguez, 2004; Pérez, Gutiérrez, and Rodríguez, 2008; Bringas et al., 2010); and the peer group (Ensminger, Kellam, and Rubin, 1983; Hein, Blanco, and Mertz, 2004; Farrington, 1996).



forms of family violence—such as witnessing violence between parents—is less well established, although some authors highlight the harmful effects of being a witness to family violence on a child's criminal behavior (Ireland and Smith, 2009; O'Keefe, 1998). Some research indicates that both types of family violence (being a victim of violence and/or a witness to it during childhood) are linked to crime, while others argue that only one type of exposure is pivotal (Foo and Margolin, 1995). In any case, it should be kept in mind that these two types of family violence often overlap (Appel and Holden, 1998).<sup>3</sup>

Various studies highlight certain *sociodemographic characteristics* associated with criminal behavior. These include gender, age, marital status, educational level, immigrant status, issues with consumption of drugs and/or alcohol, and number of dependents (mainly children) that the individual has, among others.

On the one hand, studies indicate that women are less prone to criminal activity than men (Gonzales and Gutiérrez, 2014). On the other hand, age is found to be inversely related to criminal behavior. That is, as an individual's age increases, the display of criminal behavior decreases. Children are more likely than adults to develop criminal behavior (Gonzales and Gutiérrez, 2014). A similar, inverse relationship is observed on the effect of having children or a partner. Evidence shows that being part of a couple and/or having dependents (children, mainly) has a deterrent effect on criminal behavior, since the family acts as a type of social control (Gonzales and Gutiérrez, 2014). However, this effect differs between genders (Cobbina, Huebner, and Berg, 2010). A wide range of empirical studies suggests that marriage reduces the probability of males developing criminal behavior (Horney, Osgood, and Marshall, 1995; Visher et al., 2009). The effect of these vari-

ables (marital status and children) on criminal behavior is the opposite for women (Cobbina, Huebner, and Berg, 2010; Rettinger and Andrews, 2010). For example, many women in relationships engage in criminal activity as a result of their connection to a delinquent boyfriend or husband (Gilfus, 1992; Mullins and Wright, 2003). Similarly, studies show that the development of criminal behavior in women is frequently linked to the need to care for their children and provide economically for their families (Moloney, van den Bergh, and Moller, 2009). This means that, for women, the responsibility of childcare does not act as a deterrent to criminal behavior; rather, it becomes a motivation. Some studies particularly reflect that the family is more significant for women than for men (Farrington and Painter, 2004).

Nationality, level of education, and issues that relate to the consumption of drugs and/or alcohol also are associated with criminal behavior. Classical theory argues that immigrants are more likely to engage in criminal behavior than native-born residents (*nativos*), although recent empirical research has shown the opposite (Chen and Zhong, 2013). Education appears to play a determining role in criminal behavior: the more years of study an individual has, the less likely he or she is to engage in criminal behavior (Gonzales and Gutiérrez, 2014; Huebner, DeJong, and Cobbina, 2010). The issues relating to the use of hard drugs and/or alcohol is positively associated with the development of criminal behavior: studies suggest that consumption increases an individual's tendency to develop criminal behavior (Cid Moliné, 2007; Huebner, DeJong, and Cobbina, 2010).

Finally, studies highlight the importance of the *socioeconomic status* of a person immediately prior to entering prison. Cid Moliné (2007) indicates that indi-

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<sup>3</sup> The influence of domestic violence on criminal behavior is an extremely important issue. This is the main focus of the study, "The Intergenerational Transmission of Violence: Testimonials from Prison" (Safranoff and Tiravassi, 2018), which explores the extent to which the influence of each form of family violence (child abuse and partner violence toward the mother) varies. Potential gender differences in this association are examined.

viduals with economic issues are more likely to engage in criminal behavior than those without such difficulties. Along the same lines, Sanabria and Uribe Rodríguez (2010) center on the relationship between criminal behavior and an individual's belonging to an environment where he/she is vulnerable (or poor) and marked by high unemployment rates. The difference in gender emerges from these studies. The argument is made that a lack of work opportunities and poverty affect female criminal behavior to a greater extent than they do male criminal behavior (Holtfreter, Reisig, and Morash, 2004; Andrews et al., 2008; Gonzales and Gutiérrez, 2014).

In summary, the literature divides the risk factors associated with criminal behavior into three groups: early socialization process, sociodemographic characteristics, and socioeconomic status. For the most part, studies have centered attention on how these risk factors affect men (Bonta, Pang, and Wallace Capretta, 1995). The objective of this study thus is to explore the extent to which these relate to female criminal behavior in Latin America. Specifically, three dimensions of criminal behavior are explored: *recidivism*, *previous experience in juvenile institutions*, and *age at first arrest*.

## DATA, VARIABLES, AND METHODOLOGY

The following section describes this study’s methodology: the data used, the variables explored, and the techniques applied for the statistical analyses. The report uses data from the *Survey of Convicted Prisoners*, carried out by CELIV with support from the United Nations Development Programme and the IDB, and undertaken in prisons in eight Latin American countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Peru.<sup>4</sup> The sample consists of a total of 8,285 individuals: 1,033 inmates in Argentina, 805 in Chile, 751 in Brazil, 1,160 in El Salvador, 1,263 in Mexico, 1,205 in Peru, 1,049 in Costa Rica, and 1,019 in Honduras (Table 2 includes the distribution of the sample by sex).

Two types of analyses are conducted using the survey data. These include one that is in depth and one that is multivariate. The in-depth analysis is performed to understand the profile of women in prison (*the first objective* is shown in Table 3). Here, the full sample

of men and women is used, and the results are presented in relative terms based on sex. In order to determine the extent to which gender differences are significant, various tests have been performed: chi-square for the nominal variables and t-test for the interval variables.

To examine *the second objective*, a multivariate analysis is performed. The techniques used are logistic and linear regressions, depending on the nature of the dependent variable. The aim is to explore the risk factors relating to the various criminal trajectories of women. Three indicators are used—variables dependent on the analysis: whether or not a woman has been convicted previously (recidivism); whether or not she has been placed in a juvenile center; and the age at which she was first detained. For this level of analysis, only data from jailed women—a total sample of 1,287 women—is used. Due to missing values in the main variables, the sample size applied to the

**TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE OF THE SURVEY OF CONVICTED PRISONERS (BY COUNTRY, BY GENDER)**

	WOMEN	MEN	TOTAL
ARGENTINA	188	845	1,033
CHILE	112	693	805
BRAZIL	103	648	751
EL SALVADOR	210	950	1,160
MEXICO	242	1,021	1,263
PERU	156	1,049	1,205
COSTA RICA	120	929	1,049
HONDURAS	156	863	1,019
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,287</b>	<b>6,998</b>	<b>8,285</b>

Source: Prepared by the author.

<sup>4</sup> In Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Peru, the data is nationally representative. This is not the case in the other countries.



analysis is reduced to 1,019 women in the recidivism analyses; 1,082 as those in juvenile centers; and 1,058 as those determined by age at first detention.

An analysis is performed separately for each *dependent variable*, meaning that three different regressions are presented.

First, for the variable on previous convictions (*first dependent variable*, Table 4), a logistic regression is performed using independent variables derived from various factors that have proved relevant in the literature: early socialization process, sociodemographic characteristics, and socioeconomic status. For these analyses, age at first detention and current age also are included as independent variables. According to Herrero Remuzgo and León Fuentes (2006), age is one of the most important factors regarding incarcerated people, as the earlier an individual begins his or her life in crime, the greater the number of crimes he or she is likely to commit and, therefore, the greater the number of potential convictions. In other words, the chance an individual will be a repeat offender increases the younger the age at first detention and/or the older the age is later on.

Second, detention in a juvenile center (*second dependent variable*, Table 5) is examined by using a logistic regression. In this case, the only independent variable included as a risk factor is the socialization context. It is likely that sociodemographic characteristics and an individual's socioeconomic background are also influential, as demonstrated by previous studies. However, the survey used by this report only captures indicators relating to the recent history of imprisoned women, which is not likely to influence their risk of being convicted to a juvenile institution.

Third, to explore the risk factors associated with age at first detention (*third dependent variable*, Table 6), a linear regression is performed given the in-

terval nature of the variable. Again, the independent variables correspond only to factors relating to socialization due to the time-related limitations of the available information.

It should be noted that the three regressions include control variables corresponding to each of the eight countries, with Chile being the reference category.<sup>5</sup> Since the samples used in the analyses are based on a group of countries, this variable is included in an effort to discard potential effects on the contextual composition; that is, effects that represent an unequal distribution of the main variables in different countries.

The *first dependent variable* is a binary indicator of whether the woman has been *previously convicted*. Inmates who acquire the value 1 in this binary variable are considered to be repeat offenders (i.e., they have been previously convicted), while first-time offenders are assigned the value 0. The in-depth examination of this variable (Table 3) shows that 20 percent of women are repeat offenders, although there are differences from country to country (Appendix Table A.1). Chile has the highest rate of female recidivism (68 percent of women have been previously sentenced) followed by Brazil, Costa Rica, Peru, and Argentina (30 percent, 27 percent, 22 percent, and 20 percent, respectively). Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador have the lowest rate of recidivism (10 percent, 7 percent, and 4 percent, respectively).

The *second dependent variable on juvenile detention* is also a binary indicator. The variable was developed from a survey question about whether an individual had been detained in a center for minors. Inmates who responded "yes" were assigned the value 1 as opposed to those who responded "no" (value 0). Nine percent of women were detained in a center for minors (Table 3), with variances depending on the country (Appendix Table A.1). Again, Chile has the

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<sup>5</sup> Chile is considered a reference category since it presents extreme values in two of the dependent variables: an earlier conviction and detention in a juvenile center (Appendix Table A.1).

highest percentage of juvenile detentions (36 percent of women), followed by Argentina, Costa Rica, Brazil, and El Salvador (14 percent, 10 percent, 7 percent, and 7 percent, respectively) and, finally, by Mexico, Honduras, and Peru (3 percent, 3 percent, and 1 percent, respectively).

The *third dependent variable* is an interval variable that relates to *age at first detention*. For repeat offenders, this variable corresponds to the age when the women were detained for the first time (excluding their current sentence). For nonrepeat offenders, this variable corresponds to their age when their current sentence first began. It also is used as an independent in the recidivism analyses. The average age at first detention is 30 years for women (Table 3). Brazil is the country with the youngest average age at first detention (27 years), followed by Costa Rica and El Salvador (29 years), Chile and Mexico (30), Honduras (31), Argentina (32), and Peru (33) (Appendix Table A.1).

*Independent variables* are derived from the different risk factors that previous literature has identified as influential in criminal behavior: characteristics of socialization, sociodemography, and socioeconomic background. These are treated as complementary insofar as they are considered significant.

In order to capture the effects of different *socio-demographic traits*, the analyses include a series of variables: children, education, relationship status, drug and/or alcohol consumption, and current age. The *children* variable is dichotomous: women who do not have children are the reference category (value 0). *Education* is typically used as an ordinal variable although, in this case, is treated as an interval variable. The *relationship status* variable includes three categories: women who are not in a relationship; women who have a partner who is incarcerated; and women who have a partner who is not incarcerated (reference category). The *drug and/or alcohol use* variable is developed from a survey question on whether the respondent had consumed any alcohol

or drugs within six hours prior to the offense for which she was charged (value 1). The reference category (value 0) includes those who did not during this time period. It is important to stress that the drug and/or alcohol use variable is not a direct indicator of problematic consumption because it only captures drug and/or alcohol use up to six hours before the offense was committed. However, it may be considered a proxy. *Current age* is included as an interval variable.

*Socioeconomic status* at the time of detention is determined based on survey questions regarding inmate activities. A variable with three categories is applied: women who never have been employed, women who were employed but did not work during the month prior to their arrest, and women who were employed at the time of detention (reference category).

Finally, seven dichotomous variables regarding *socialization* are included. First, a variable for *family violence* refers to women who were beaten by their parents as a form of discipline and/or who witnessed violence in their home and are considered to come from a violent family environment; they were assigned a value of 1. Women who did not experience this type of violence were assigned a value of 0. The second variable captures whether or not an individual had *left home before age 15* (value 1) versus one who did not, as the reference category (value 0), and therefore, may have experienced greater supervision and family attachment (Covington, 1995). The third variable captures *frequent use of drugs and/or alcohol by parents* and/or adults in the household during childhood. Inmates who come from a family environment without drug or alcohol use serve as the reference category. The fourth variable captures the *family criminal history* of inmates. This variable stems from a survey question on whether or not any member of an inmate's family has been imprisoned. Inmates whose family members do not have criminal records serve as the reference category. The fifth variable—the peer groups of inmates—is divided into

two categories: women whose closest friends have committed crimes (value 1) and those who have not (reference category). The sixth variable, socialization in an “unstructured” household, is determined by the response of women to a survey question on whether

their parents lived together when they were growing up (reference category). Finally, a variable is included that captures information regarding whether or not an inmate grew up in a neighborhood with criminal gangs. Those who did are assigned a value of 1.

## RESULTS

The following section presents the results of this study, separated into two segments based on the objectives of this report. The first part describes the characteristics of incarcerated women (first objective) according to the detailed analysis. The second part identifies the risk factors relating to their criminal trajectories (second objective), based on the multivariate regression models.

### Part 1: Who Are the Women Imprisoned in Latin America?

Using the results presented in Table 3, it is possible to develop a preliminary profile of incarcerated men and women in Latin America with regard to the four thematic areas explored in previous literature: *socio-demographic characteristics*, *socialization process*, *socioeconomic background*, and *criminal behavior*. This study indicates that women mainly differ from men in terms of criminal behavior and degree of social exclusion prior to imprisonment.

First, with regard to *sociodemographic characteristics*, the current average *age* of male prisoners is similar for females—approximately 36 years. However, there are country variances: in Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru, no significant difference is evident, supporting previous lines of research (Olaeta, 2016; Naredo Molero, 2007). In contrast, incarcerated women in Argentina and Chile are usually older than men (Goetting and Howsen, 1983), and in Honduras, the opposite is apparent (Appendix Table A.2). The results regarding the *level of education* suggest that men and women alike have little *academic*

*training*, although education levels are higher in Brazil and Mexico (Appendix Table A.3). In general, women are more educated than men (Olaeta, 2016; Goetting and Howsen, 1983). The average educational level among women is 2.85, while the male average is 2.68. This means that men and women alike, on average, have not completed secondary education.<sup>6</sup> However, this significant difference is more relevant in certain countries. For example, in Argentina, the average education level of women is 2.82, while that of men is 2.51. The difference tends also to be the reverse in some countries. In Costa Rica and Peru, imprisoned women have slightly lower levels of education compared to men (Moloney, van den Bergh, and Moller, 2009).

Based on previous studies, while men and women in prison in Latin America have children, a greater proportion of women identify as a parent (Antony, 2007; Goetting and Howsen, 1983). Across the region, 87 percent of incarcerated women have children, while 78 percent of men do. This variance is significant only in Mexico, where a greater proportion of men have children (97 percent of men compared to 84 percent of women (Appendix Table A.4)). There are relevant variances in terms of the age at which inmates had their first child. While 55 percent of women did before turning 18, only 26 percent of males did. The study confirms that women are more likely than men to be mothers in adolescence, which is an initial indicator of vulnerability. This gender gap relates to all the countries in the group (Appendix Table A.5). The vulnerability of women is reinforced by the fact that 24 percent of women with children have no partner.

<sup>6</sup> The educational level variable is made up of a scale in which 1 = did not go to school or did not complete elementary school; 2 = completed elementary school; 3 = did not complete secondary school; 4 = completed secondary school; 5 = did not complete university, 6 = completed university.

**TABLE 3: PROFILE OF INCARCERATED MEN AND WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA**

		VARIABLES	WOMEN	MEN	TOTAL	
<b>SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS</b>		Has children***	87%	78%	79%	
		Has children				
		Has more than 3**	27%	23%	24%	
		Has no partner***	24%	17%	18%	
		First child under 18 years of age***	55%	26%	31.4%	
		Living with him or her in prison	9.50%			
		Educational Level (average)***	2.85	2.68	2.71	
		Has a partner	74%	75%	74.6%	
		Has a partner who is also incarcerated**	39%	5%	10%	
		Current average age	36	36	36	
<b>SOCIALIZATION CONTEXT</b>		Consumed 6 hrs. before committing the crime***	21%	35%	33%	
		Her parents did not live together***	39%	33%	34%	
		Domestic violence: victim or witness**	56%	59%	59%	
		Left home before 15 years of age	38%	39%	39%	
		Alcohol/drug consumption in the household	42%	44%	44%	
		Criminal background	38%	37%	37%	
		Friends who commit crimes***	31%	50%	47%	
		Criminal gangs in the neighborhood***	44%	54%	53%	
	<b>SOCIOECONOMIC SITUATION</b>		Work***			
			Never worked	8%	6%	6%
		Worked, but not the month prior to detention	27%	17%	19%	
		Worked the month before detention	64%	77%	75%	
<b>CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR</b>	<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CRIME FOR WHICH HE OR SHE IS INCARCERATED</b>	Caused physical injuries***	28%	35%	34%	
		Had a firearm***	11%	28%	26%	
		More participants in the crime***	65%	51%	53%	
		Type of crime***				
			Theft	22%	41%	38%
			Homicide	14%	21%	20%
			Drug trafficking/possession	38%	12%	16%
			Sexual crimes	2%	15%	13%
			Other crimes	23%	11%	13%
		<b>CRIMINAL HISTORY</b>		Sentence due to a previous offense (dependent variable [DV])***	20%	34%
	Has held a firearm**		26%	61%	55%	
	Was in a juvenile detention center (DV2)***		9%	15%	14%	
	Average age at first detention (DV3)***		30	28	28	

Source: Prepared by author.

Note: The asterisks mark significant male/female differences in variables: \*\*\* significant at 0.01; \*\* significant at 0.05; \* significant at 0.1.

Several authors stress the high proportion of female inmates who are single mothers and that this factor may motivate women to commit crimes in order to financially provide for the household (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994; Owen and Bloom, 1995; Antony, 2007; Ruidíaz García, 2011; Azaola, 2005; De Miguel Calvo, 2014). De Miguel Calvo (2014) argues along these lines, claiming that motherhood alone is a determinant of social exclusion, leading many women to crime. Women also have more children than men. Among those with children, 27 percent of women have more than three children versus 23 percent of men (this difference is significant). Almost 10 percent of female inmates in Latin America have a child living with them inside prison, a percentage that differs from country to country. In Brazil, 1.2 percent of incarcerated women are joined by their children, increasing to 24.3 percent in Costa Rica (Appendix Table A.6). To summarize, women in Latin America who are in prison tend to be adolescent mothers, who are single and/or have a greater number of children at a higher proportion than men.

Another gender variance in the sociodemographic characteristics of those in prison relates to partners. Men and women alike, for the most part, reported having a partner (around 74–75 percent). Among them, 39 percent of women's partners were incarcerated compared to only 5 percent of men's partners. In relative terms, a larger proportion of women than men have a partner in prison. This confirms previous findings about the dependence of women on the male figure and their lack of personal autonomy (Azaola, 2005; Gilfus, 1992; Mullins and Wright, 2003; Yague Olmos, 2007). However, in contrast to previous literature (Goetting and Howsen, 1983; Owen and Bloom, 1995), the results of this study on the use of drugs and/or alcohol suggest that men are more likely than women to have used them. In the representative countries, a higher proportion of men than

women had consumed alcohol or used drugs in the six hours preceding the crime for which they were charged (Appendix Table A.7).

This study notes that men and women who are imprisoned have experienced an *underprivileged socialization process*, characterized by family members who have committed crimes (approximately 37–38 percent of individuals have or have had a family member in detention); by the use of drugs and/or alcohol at home (44 percent of individuals come from family environments wherein there is frequent use of drugs and/or alcohol consumption); and/or by departure from home before age 15 (approximately 38–39 percent).<sup>7</sup> Significant gender differences are observed in terms of the presence of criminal gangs in the neighborhood during childhood (54 percent of men compared to 44 percent of women); having been raised in a “fragmented home” (33 percent of men compared to 39 percent of women did not live with both parents); and exposure to an environment of family violence during childhood (56 percent of women and 59 percent of men have been victims of direct violence and/or witnessed violence between their parents). These findings suggest that more incarcerated men than women have been victims of a violent family environment and have grown up in neighborhoods with greater prevalence of criminal gangs. At the same time, a higher proportion of women have lived in unstructured households. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that, while these differences are significant, they are not endemic.

In line with the literature, this study considers incarcerated women and men to be survivors of hostility during childhood (Yague Olmos, 2007), evidenced by a history of criminal activity and/or use of drugs in the immediate family, leaving home at an early age, the presence of criminal gangs in the neighborhood, unstructured households, and/or exposure to domestic violence. There are few variances be-

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<sup>7</sup> No significant gender variances were found relating to these three variables within the context of socialization.

tween men and women in terms of this measure—both have suffered from deprived socialization.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the study discovers differences in the circles of friends imprisoned individuals were exposed to, whereby 50 percent of men had close friends who had committed crimes compared to 31 percent of women. This finding confirms the relevance of peer group influence on male criminal behavior (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Pugh, 1986). While women are more connected to their families (their partners, in this case), men appear to be more influenced by their peers/friends (Anderson, 1989).

Regarding the analysis on *socioeconomic background* prior to admission into prison, gender variances highlight the vulnerability of women (Antony, 2007). In the month prior to detention, 27 percent of women were unemployed—although they had been at some point during their life—compared to 17 percent of men. This result is consistent with the literature, wherein a higher percentage of women are reported to have been unemployed immediately prior to incarceration (Goetting and Howsen, 1983; Owen and Bloom, 1995; Olaeta, 2016; Antony, 2007). In addition, the percentage of women who had never been employed (8 percent) is higher compared to men (6 percent).

Finally, men and women may be typified according to their *criminal behavior*. Criminality refers not only to an individual's most recent criminal behavior (the aspects of the crime for which the result is imprisonment), but also to the individual's criminal trajectory or the characteristics of his/her criminal background.

As has been widely documented (Azaola, 2005; Olaeta, 2016; Antony, 2007; Ruidíaz García, 2011; Almeda Samaranch, Di Nella, and Navarro Villanueva, 2012; Naredo Molero, 2007; Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994; Owen and Bloom, 1995), the most

common cause for women to have ended up in the criminal justice system is due to drug possession and/or drug trafficking (38 percent of cases). Men are more likely to be involved in other types of crime, such as robberies and homicides (Ruidíaz García, 2011) (41 percent and 21 percent of sentences, respectively). However, each country differs (Appendix Table A.8). Women in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru have been most often convicted for drug-related crimes. However, in Costa Rica and Mexico, the key criminal activity of men and women alike is robbery, while in El Salvador, and Honduras, it includes “other crimes” (which, in these countries, implies “extortion”).

Results from the literature suggest that women commit less violent crimes compared to men (Moloney, van den Bergh, and Moller, 2009; Almeda Samaranch, Di Nella, and Navarro Villanueva, 2012; Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994; Goetting and Howsen, 1983). Fewer women carried firearms at the time of their crime (only 11 percent of women compared to 28 percent of men), and a lower proportion of women were sentenced for crimes that caused physical injury to a third person (28 percent versus 35 percent). There is no divergence between countries relating to the carrying of firearms. Throughout the region, men report more often that they carried weapons during the crime for which they were charged (Appendix Table A.9). However, there are exceptions in crimes that involve physical injury; in Mexico and Costa Rica, women are involved to a greater extent than men in crimes that cause physical injury (Appendix Table A.9). The data, again, confirms the significance of dependency in terms of female criminal behavior (Azaola, 2005). Across the entire group of countries, women tend to be involved in crimes with multiple participants (women do not commit crimes

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<sup>8</sup> No significant gender variances were found based on having left home before the age of 15, alcohol consumption/drug use, and family criminal records. Those that were observed related to an individual's belonging to a fragmented household, having grown up in an environment of family violence, and having lived in a neighborhood with criminal gangs.



alone; however, it is not possible to determine in this study who was with them at the time of the crime) to a greater extent than men (65 percent versus 51 percent) (Appendix Table A.9).

Finally, there are gender variances in relation to criminal trajectories. Compared to men, women have a shorter history of crime. They are less likely to be repeat offenders (20 percent of women have previously been convicted of another offense compared to 34 percent among men); and they are less likely to have spent time in a juvenile detention facility (9 percent of women compared to 15 percent of men). They have less contact with firearms (26 percent of women have held a gun versus 61 percent of men) and they begin their life of crime later in life (the average age at which an individual was first detained is higher for women than for men: 30 years of age versus 28 years of age). In other words, men are detained at an earlier age.

In summary, it is evident that incarcerated men and women in Latin America share certain characteristics. Both are vulnerable in the socialization context, due to exposure to the nuclear family with members with criminal records; paternal discipline based on physical violence; violence between parents; severe drug use and/or alcohol consumption at home; and residing in a neighborhood with criminal gangs. Gender differences, however, depend on the degree of influence of each of these categories. Women appear to be influenced mainly by their partner, while the peer group has more influence on men. Men and women also diverge in terms of their criminal behavior. Women are involved in less violent crime, have shorter criminal records, and are more likely to a commit crime in the company of others. Finally, the results corroborate that women experience multiple forms of social exclusion prior to incarceration (De Miguel Calvo, 2014). In general, imprisoned women in Latin America are—in greater proportion than men—teenage mothers, single mothers, and/or

mothers to a larger number of children. In addition, they are unemployed immediately before incarceration in greater numbers than men, thus underlining their vulnerability.

## Part 2: Female Criminal Behavior and the Risk Factors Associated with Different Criminal Trajectories

Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6 demonstrate whether or not a woman in prison has been previously sentenced (Table 4); has been placed in a juvenile center (Table 5); and/or began her criminal career at an early age (Table 6). In each case, based on the dependent variable, various risk factors derived from the literature (socialization process, sociodemographic characteristics, and/or socioeconomic background) were taken into account.

### *Recidivism*

Table 4 identifies the characteristics of imprisoned women associated with recidivism in Latin America. There are particular *sociodemographic* and *socialization characteristics* in this study that evidence the significant likelihood that a woman is a repeat offender; that is, she previously has been convicted for an earlier offence (independent from the current one). Also discovered is that other risk factors, such as those that relate to her *socioeconomic status*, are not exceptional. In other words, the findings indicate that recidivism has a closer link to individual factors and history than to economic need.

Regarding the *sociodemographic factor*, this study indicates that the probability of women with children being repeat offenders is higher than that of those without (odds ratio 2:56). Having consumed alcohol or used drugs in the six hours prior to the crime also has a significant and positive link to recidivism: the probability of recidivism among women who consumed drugs or alcohol is 1.8 times that of those who did not. It is important to highlight that the results did not indicate



**TABLE 4: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH LIKELIHOOD THAT AN INCARCERATED WOMAN IN LATIN AMERICA WILL BE A REPEAT OFFENDER: PRINCIPAL EFFECTS, LOGISTIC REGRESSION**

VARIABLES		EXP(B)	E.E.
<b>SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS</b>	Has children	2.557**	0.403
	Education level	0.915	0.087
	Partner is incarcerated	1.015	0.267
	Does not have a partner	0.906	0.28
	Consumed drugs and/or alcohol in the 6 hours before committing the crime	1.759**	0.263
<b>SOCIALIZATION CONTEXT</b>	Parents did not live together	1.031	0.236
	Left home before age 15	1.258	0.251
	Family violence	1.519*	0.257
	Exposed to consumption of drugs and/or alcohol at home	1.29	0.245
	Criminal history	1.189	0.236
	Friends committed crimes	1.798**	0.274
<b>SOCIOECONOMIC SITUATION</b>	Criminal gangs in the neighborhood	1.006	0.257
	Has worked, but did not work in the month previous to the crime	1.128	0.254
	Never worked	0.725	0.446
<b>AGE</b>	Age at first arrest	0.732***	0.031
	Current age	1.316***	0.028
<b>COUNTRY</b>	Argentina	0.143***	0.381
	Brazil	0.21***	0.442
	El Salvador	0.017***	0.562
	Mexico	0.057***	0.408
	Peru	0.191***	0.416
	Costa Rica	0.14***	0.502
	Honduras	0.043***	0.567
Constant	0.197**	0.823	
Nagelkerke R squared		0.544	
-2 log of the probability		550.826	

Source: Prepared by the author..

Notes: n=1,019; \*\*\*significant at 0.01; \*\*significant at 0.05; \*significant at 0.1.

Reference category: does not have children; partner is not incarcerated; did not consume drugs and/or alcohol; parents lived together; did not leave home before age 15; did not live in a violent home; was not exposed to drug and/or alcohol consumption; no criminal history; did not have friends who committed crimes; no gangs in the neighborhood; worked in the previous month; Chile.

a significant link between a woman's partner having been incarcerated and recidivism.<sup>9</sup>

Two factors linked to *socialization* are significant in terms of effect: inmates who experienced domestic violence and/or those who had friends who committed

crimes are more likely to be repeat offenders. These results affirm the findings in the literature. The odds of recidivism among women who have been exposed to family violence (either as a witness or direct victim) are 1.5 times those of women who have not. The probability of

**TABLE 5: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROBABILITY THAT AN INCARCERATED WOMAN IN LATIN AMERICA HAS BEEN INSTITUTIONALIZED IN A JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER: PRINCIPAL EFFECTS, LOGISTIC REGRESSION**

VARIABLES		EXP(B)	E.E.
SOCIALIZATION CONTEXT	Parents did not live together	1.397	0.254
	Left home before age 15	5.447***	0.291
	Family violence	0.952	0.284
	Exposure to drug and/or alcohol consumption at home	1.6*	0.272
	Criminal history	1.215	0.256
	Friends committed crimes	2**	0.29
	Criminal gangs in the neighborhood	1.283	0.294
COUNTRIES	Argentina	0.444**	0.338
	Brazil	0.136***	0.498
	El Salvador	0.175***	0.388
	Mexico	0.088***	0.47
	Peru	0.027***	1.041
	Costa Rica	0.054***	0.77
	Honduras	0.055***	0.645
	Constant	0.068***	0.39
	Nagelkerke R squared	0.355	
	-2 log of the probability	452.382	

Source: Prepared by the author.

Notes: n=1,082; \*\*\*significant at 0.01; \*\*significant at 0.05; \*significant at 0.1.

Reference category: parents lived together; did not leave home before age 15; did not live in a violent home; was not exposed to drug and alcohol consumption at home; no criminal history; Friends did not commit crimes; no criminal gangs in the neighborhood; Chile.

<sup>9</sup> Based on the literature relating to the influence of partners on the development of a woman's criminal behavior (Gilfus, 1992; Mullins and Wright, 2003; Azaola, 2005; Yague Olmos, 2007), it is assumed that there would have been a close link. However, it is important to note that the information available only refers to a woman's current partner. Unfortunately, there is no information that includes previous partners who may have exerted influence on her previous convictions.

recidivism among women whose friends have committed crimes is 1.8 times that of those whose friends have not. Exposure to violence and being a part of a peer group whose members have committed crimes has significant (and positive) influence on the probability of recidivism of incarcerated women.

The age at first offense and the age at the latest have been incorporated into the recidivism model. Results confirm that both factors have a significant influence on recidivism. Women who began their life of crime at an earlier age (i.e., younger age at first detention) and/or are older (the later age) are more likely to be repeat offenders (odds ratio 0:7 and 1:3, respectively).

Finally, although the finding goes beyond the aim of this report, significant differences between countries are evident. Women in Chile have the highest probability of being a repeat offender, compared to the others. This is a significant factor.

### ***Institutionalization in a Juvenile Detention Center***

Table 5 identifies the characteristics associated with incarcerated women in Latin America who have been placed in a juvenile detention center. The analysis considers only factors specific to the socialization context.<sup>10</sup>

Results show that prisoners who left home before age 15, who grew up in a household where parents frequently used drugs and/or consumed alcohol, and/or who had friends who committed crimes are more likely to be detained in a juvenile center. These effects are particularly striking with regard to those who left home at an early age. The chance of having been institutionalized in a center is 5.45 times that of women who did not leave home prior to age 15.

Based on the statistics, it is once more evident that Chile differs from the other countries under study. Inmates in Chile are more likely to have been institutionalized at a juvenile detention center.

### ***The Beginning of a Criminal Career: Age at First Detention***

Table 6 identifies the factors associated with age at first detention (whether or not the first sentence is the current one or another previous one) for incarcerated women in Latin America. Again, this analysis only considers the *context of socialization*.<sup>11</sup>

Findings relating to this variable confirm the relevance of two factors: having left home before age 15 and/or having friends who have committed crimes. Both variables are risk factors associated with a younger age at first detention. For example, women who had friends culpable for crime were first arrested more than three and a half years sooner than those whose friends had not committed crime. In parallel, statistics demonstrate the presence of two further significantly negative factors. Those women in prison whose parents did not cohabit ("unstructured households" or households without two biological parents) were first detained almost two years earlier than those who grew up in a home where both parents lived together. Women who grew up in neighborhoods with criminal gangs were arrested for the first time almost three and a half years sooner than those who did not.

The variances between countries are less pronounced in terms of age at first detention. Argentina, Peru, Costa Rica, and Honduras do not differ significantly from Chile. In contrast, in Brazil, El Salvador, and Mexico, women were detained for the first time at a younger age.

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<sup>10</sup> As previously explained, the survey questions regarding sociodemographic characteristics and socioeconomic status relate only to a woman's most recent position, excluding factors that may have influenced her having been sent to a juvenile institution.

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<sup>11</sup> As previously explained, the survey questions regarding sociodemographic characteristics and socioeconomic status refer to a woman's most recent situation. Such characteristics, therefore, cannot have influenced the age at first detention if it took place many years previously.

**TABLE 6: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH AGE AT FIRST DETENTION: LINEAR REGRESSION**

	VARIABLES	B	E.E
<b>SOCIALIZATION CONTEXT</b>	Parents did not live together	-1.718***	0.619
	Left home before age 15	-2.828***	0.649
	Family violence	0.358	0.644
	Exposure to drugs and/or alcohol use at home	-0.29	0.638
	Criminal history	-0.375	0.637
	Friends committed crimes	-3.675***	0.724
	Criminal gangs in the neighborhood	-3.489***	0.644
<b>COUNTRIES</b>	Argentina	1.833	1.222
	Brazil	-3.059**	1.387
	El Salvador	-2.671**	1.211
	Mexico	-2.308*	1.198
	Peru	0.378	1.328
	Costa Rica	-0.672	1.578
	Honduras	-0.079	1.323
	Constant	35.6***	1.148
	R	0.393	
	R squared	0.154	

Source: Prepared by the author.

Notes: n=1,058; \*\*\*significant at 0.01; \*\*significant at 0.05; \*significant at 0.1.

Reference category: parents lived together; did not leave home before age 15; did not live in a violent home; was not exposed to drug and/or alcohol consumption at home; no criminal history; Friends did not commit crimes; no criminal gangs in the neighborhood; Chile

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on an analysis of data relating to those who have been imprisoned in eight Latin American countries, this report supplements the literature in terms of women. It identifies the characteristics and risk factors associated with their criminal trajectory. The key objective is to recognize that women consistently have been relegated to an inferior position within the criminal justice system (Goetting and Howsen, 1983; Yague Olmos, 2007).

First, the in-depth analyses suggest that, as documented previously, Latin America's incarcerated women have various characteristics that are similar to those of men as well as some that differ (Bloom, Chesney-Lind, and Owen, 1994; Olaeta, 2016). While men and women alike may have experienced a deficiency in their socialization process, there are gender variances that relate to criminal behavior and the level of social exclusion prior to imprisonment. Women are involved in less violent crime, have a shorter criminal record, and are more likely to commit a crime in the company of others. In addition, findings confirm the significant dependence on the men in their lives (Yague Olmos, 2007; Azaola, 2005). Findings also confirm the relevance of a women's peer group in terms of criminal behavior (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Pugh, 1986). Results also corroborate the presence of multiple forms of social exclusion that women may experience prior to incarceration (De Miguel Calvo, 2014). To a large extent, women in Latin American jails tend to be teenage mothers, single women, and/or have a higher number of children. Furthermore, women tend to be unemployed immediately prior to incarceration to a greater degree than men, further adding to their vulnerability.

Second, the multivariate analysis identified the risk factors associated with the criminal trajectory of incarcerated women in Latin America. This is extremely pertinent for policymaking in key areas that require early prevention interventions.

The results highlight the relevance of a peer group on a woman. Those in the company of friends who commit crime are more likely to be repeat offenders, to have been at some time placed in juvenile detention, and to have been arrested at an early age. The in-depth analysis indicates that a partner is also relevant to a woman's trajectory in crime, while the multivariate analysis highlights the influence her friends have on her.

The multivariate analysis also identifies the importance of other risk factors that relate to a woman's socialization process beyond her peer group. For example, leaving home before the age of 15 has a significant influence on the likelihood of her being placed in juvenile detention and being arrested at an early age. Similarly, growing up in an unstructured home environment also may have impacted her having been arrested at an early age. The evidence suggests that parental affection and supervision can be an essential deterrent against the early onset of criminal behavior. The corroboration suggests the importance of attachment and parental supervision to deter the early onset of a career in crime. To grow up in a family wherein there is domestic violence (either as a victim or witness), in a home where family members frequently use drugs and/or consume alcohol, and/or in a neighborhood with active criminal gangs also risks certain criminal behaviors. Within a violent family environment, a woman is more likely to become a repeat offender. Exposure to hard drugs and/or alcohol has an effect on a woman's likelihood of spending time in a juvenile detention center. Finally, a woman's contact with criminal gangs will increase her chances of arrest at an early age. Overall, the results highlight that a woman's socialization process during childhood can lead to criminal behavior. As stated by Petrosino, Derzon, and Lavenberg (2009), from an intervention perspective,

to determine which family environmental factors influence an individual's criminal behavior is critical in the effort to establish what preventive actions should be taken. Therefore, interventions that relate to the family environment should focus specifically on the risk factors outlined in this study.

Finally, analyses relating to recidivism bring forth factors that go beyond the socialization context of an individual. Evidence indicates that child rearing and drug and alcohol consumption have a bearing on the likelihood of women in jail in Latin America becoming repeat offenders, as do their having children and using drugs and/or consuming alcohol. Effective preventative measures must take these aspects into account.

This study indicates areas where intervention is necessary to promote the re-entry of imprisoned women into society in Latin America. The results highlight a particularly vulnerable group in prison, almost 90 percent of whom are mothers. Many of them are single (24 percent), have more than three children (27 percent), and/or have been teenage mothers (55 percent). Their work history has been insecure. Some were unemployed prior to entering prison (27 percent), while others have never been employed (8 percent). Above all, women are shown usually to have been incarcerated for nonviolent offenses. Their crimes are typically drug-related, committed without the use of firearms, and mostly carried out in the company of others. These results confirm that crimes committed by women frequently relate to family poverty and the need to care for their children (Moloney, van den Bergh, and Moller, 2009). Evidence stresses the need to address the vulnerability of women on their release from prison. Policymaking should focus on their being

able to enter the labor market and on providing them with childcare support. This will ensure that their economic needs are met while, at the same time, will empower them and give them independence. Similarly, it is essential for policies to promote inclusion. The vast majority of women in prison live in environments where they are vulnerable and socially and economically excluded. The design and development of public policy must address the issue of vulnerability experienced by women prior to arrest in order to prevent future crime.

This report represents a preliminary approach to women who have been incarcerated in Latin America, shedding light on a variety of topics for further review. Future research should include the risk factors relating to other dimensions of criminal behavior, such as the type of crime and/or the level of violence. Gender factors also should be considered. For example, Herrera and McCloskey (2001) argue that little is known of the comparison between males and females in terms of family violence during childhood and its link to criminal behavior. This is relevant, and in the event that there are variances, interventions should be adequately designed. Finally, future research should consider the comparison between countries. This study groups the countries together, excluding the divergences that may exist between each. A deeper level of analysis would be required. These results especially indicate that there is significant variance between countries in terms of criminal behavior; therefore, it is essential to examine to what extent such behavior differs between each country. Preventive interventions must be country-specific and more focused. This report represents a starting point from which multiple lines of further research can be undertaken.

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## APPENDIX : TABLES WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**TABLE A.1: TRAJECTORY OF CRIME OF INCARCERATED WOMEN ACCORDING TO THE THREE DEPENDENT VARIABLES OF ANALYSIS**

	SENTENCED PREVIOUSLY FOR AN EARLIER OFFENSE, (DV1)	WAS IN A JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER (DV2)	AVERAGE AGE AT FIRST DETENTION (DV3)
ARGENTINA	20%	14%	32
CHILE	68%	36%	30
BRAZIL	30%	7%	27
EL SALVADOR	4%	7%	29
MEXICO	10%	3%	30
PERU	22%	1%	33
COSTA RICA	27%	10%	29
HONDURAS	7%	3%	31
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>30</b>

Source: Prepared by the author.

**TABLE A.2: AVERAGE CURRENT AGE OF INCARCERATED MEN AND WOMEN (BY COUNTRY)**

COUNTRY	GENDER	AVERAGE AGE
ARGENTINA	Women	37
	Men	35
CHILE	Women	38
	Men	35
BRAZIL	Women	33
	Men	34
EL SALVADOR	Women	33
	Men	34
MEXICO	Women	35
	Men	36
PERU	Women	40
	Men	39
COSTA RICA	Women	35
	Men	35
HONDURAS	Women	34
	Men	37
<b>TOTAL</b>	Women	36
	Men	36

Source: Prepared by the author.

**TABLE A.3: AVERAGE EDUCATION LEVEL OF INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS (BY COUNTRY AND GENDER)**

COUNTRY	GENDER	AVERAGE
ARGENTINA	Women	2.82
	Men	2.51
	Total	2.57
CHILE	Women	2.23
	Men	2.19
	Total	2.19
BRAZIL	Women	3.54
	Men	3.29
	Total	3.32
EL SALVADOR	Women	2.86
	Men	2.62
	Total	2.66
MEXICO	Women	3.52
	Men	3.30
	Total	3.34
PERU	Women	2.85
	Men	3.04
	Total	3.01
COSTA RICA	Women	2.12
	Men	2.32
	Total	2.30
HONDURAS	Women	2.36
	Men	2.10
	Total	2.14
TOTAL	Women	2.85
	Men	2.68
	Total	2.71

Source: Prepared by the author.

**TABLE A.4: PERCENTAGE OF INCARCERATED MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE CHILDREN (BY COUNTRY)**

COUNTRY	GENDER	PERCENTAGE
ARGENTINA	Women	85%
	Men	75%
CHILE	Women	90%
	Men	74%
BRAZIL	Women	83%
	Men	69%
EL SALVADOR	Women	86%
	Men	74%
MEXICO	Women	84%
	Men	97%
PERU	Women	88%
	Men	82%
COSTA RICA	Women	87%
	Men	68%
HONDURAS	Women	92%
	Men	82%

Source: Prepared by the author.

**TABLE A.5: PERCENTAGE OF INCARCERATED MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAD THEIR FIRST CHILD PRIOR TO AGE 18 (BY COUNTRY)**

COUNTRY	GENDER	PERCENTAGE
ARGENTINA	Women	53%
	Men	28%
CHILE	Women	65%
	Men	37%
BRAZIL	Women	65%
	Men	33%
EL SALVADOR	Women	67%
	Men	33%
MEXICO	Women	56%
	Men	30%
PERU	Women	52%
	Men	18%
COSTA RICA	Women	63%
	Men	27%
HONDURAS	Women	68%
	Men	35%

Source: Prepared by the author.

**TABLE A.6: PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN ACCOMPANIED BY CHILDREN WHEN IN DETENTION (BY COUNTRY)**

COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE
ARGENTINA	8.2%
CHILE	8.0%
BRAZIL	1.2%
EL SALVADOR	3.9%
MEXICO	10.3%
PERU	8.0%
COSTA RICA	24.3%
HONDURAS	13.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9.5%</b>

Source: Prepared by the author.

**TABLE A.7: PERCENTAGE OF INCARCERATED MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAD USED DRUGS AND/OR CONSUMED ALCOHOL IN THE SIX HOURS PRIOR TO COMMITTING THE CRIME (BY COUNTRY)**

COUNTRY	GENDER	PERCENTAGE
ARGENTINA	Women	22.3%
	Men	31.5%
CHILE	Women	40.2%
	Men	50.3%
BRAZIL	Women	34.0%
	Men	41.0%
EL SALVADOR	Women	7.6%
	Men	17.0%
MEXICO	Women	18.2%
	Men	40.4%
PERU	Women	10.6%
	Men	33.5%
COSTA RICA	Women	45.4%
	Men	48.6%
HONDURAS	Women	11.9%
	Men	23.8%

Source: Prepared by the author..

**TABLE A.8: TYPES OF CRIME COMMITTED BY INCARCERATED MEN AND WOMEN (BY COUNTRY)**

GENDER	TYPE OF CRIME	ARGENTINA	CHILE	BRAZIL	EL SALVADOR	MEXICO	PERU	COSTA RICA	HONDURAS	TOTAL
WOMEN	Robbery	26.6%	33.0%	18.6%	9.5%	33.8%	11.3%	43.7%	6.4%	22.4%
	Homicide	14.9%	8.3%	7.8%	19.9%	24.1%	8.7%	10.9%	9.0%	14.4%
	Drug trafficking/ possession	52.1%	55.0%	66.7%	26.4%	6.8%	72.0%	27.7%	28.8%	38.1%
	Sex crime	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	4.6%	2.0%	4.2%	1.3%	2.1%
	Other crime	4.3%	3.7%	6.9%	43.8%	30.8%	6.0%	13.4%	54.5%	23.0%
MEN	Robbery	55.4%	65.2%	41.1%	15.2%	55.8%	37.6%	39.5%	20.5%	40.6%
	Homicide	19.9%	8.0%	10.6%	41.5%	20.2%	10.1%	15.5%	37.9%	21.0%
	Drug trafficking/ possession	7.9%	15.3%	28.1%	6.1%	1.5%	19.1%	16.6%	5.7%	11.8%
	Sex crime	9.8%	8.4%	17.7%	13.6%	9.8%	26.1%	17.6%	17.1%	15.3%
	Other crime	6.9%	3.1%	2.5%	23.6%	12.8%	7.1%	10.8%	18.8%	11.3%

Source: Prepared by the author.

**TABLE A.9: CHARACTERISTICS OF CRIME COMMITTED BY INCARCERATED MEN AND WOMEN (BY COUNTRY)**

CHARACTERISTICS	GENDER	ARGENTINA	CHILE	BRAZIL	EL SALVADOR	MEXICO	PERU	COSTA RICA	HONDURAS	TOTAL
HELD A FIREARM	Women	20.7%	15.6%	15.5%	8.3%	10.0%	2.0%	9.2%	6.8%	10.8%
	Men	58.0%	27.3%	32.4%	22.8%	22.4%	20.1%	26.3%	21.4%	28.2%
CAUSED PHYSICAL HARM	Women	32.2%	12.7%	12.9%	25.9%	41.8%	15.5%	39.8%	32.0%	28.3%
	Men	36.8%	26.6%	20.5%	41.2%	34.6%	33.7%	33.9%	43.3%	34.5%
OTHER PEOPLE PARTICIPATED IN THE CRIME	Women	59.1%	72.3%	60.0%	55.2%	76.2%	64.3%	73.9%	59.1%	65.0%
	Men	56.4%	55.6%	45.3%	49.0%	53.2%	52.6%	52.7%	41.3%	50.9%

Source: Prepared by the author.