

# The Intergenerational Transmission of Violence

Testimonials from Prison

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In collaboration with the Wilson Center

Institutions for Development  
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Innovation in Citizen  
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## ABSTRACT\*

This article, based on an analysis of the *Survey of Convicted Prisoners* from eight Latin American countries, helps to expand knowledge about the association between victimization in childhood and the criminal behavior of individuals who have been incarcerated. The results of the multivariate regression models show that having grown up in a home in which the father/partner beat the mother (“indirect” violence) mainly affects women when it comes to future criminal behavior (both their likelihood of being repeat offenders and of having possessed firearms). At the same time, having been a “direct” victim of abuse is a factor that clearly affects women and men alike in terms of the possibility of their becoming repeat offenders, although this much more affects men when it comes to firearm possession. This article suggests that prevention-oriented interventions must take into account these gender differences to be more effective. Women seem to be affected by both types of victimization during childhood, which indicates that intervention strategies for the female population should address both forms of violence (direct and indirect). In contrast, interventions to prevent future male criminal behavior should specifically focus on direct domestic violence.

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

**Keywords:** care for victims, intrafamily violence, prison system, violence against women

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# INTRODUCTION

This article explores the association between domestic violence and criminal behavior in Latin America. The literature has highlighted various risk factors associated with criminal behavior, primarily the early socialization context, certain sociodemographic characteristics of the individual, and the individual's socioeconomic situation immediately prior to incarceration, among others.

Studies on how socialization context can influence criminal behavior have shown that, in most cases, inadequate parenting is the main factor behind the appearance of this behavior (Herrero Remuzgo and León Fuentes, 2006). Violence in the family of origin has been the most researched element of the socialization environment when it comes to criminal behavior. There are two dimensions of family violence. One is child abuse, where the child is the "direct" victim. Additionally, a child may grow up in a home in which there was violence between parents; although the child may not witness the abuse directly, he or she is immersed in a violent environment ("indirect" violence). Both dimensions of violence, direct and indirect, can be predictors of future violent and/or criminal behavior.

In Latin America, studies on this topic are very limited. For this reason, the first objective of this article is to explore to what extent having grown up in a household as a direct and/or indirect victim of violence influenc-

es certain criminal patterns of incarcerated men and women in Latin America. Specifically, this article seeks to find whether exposure to violence during childhood affects the likelihood that an incarcerated individual becomes a repeat offender and/or has ever had a firearm in his or her hands. It suggests that these behaviors are indicators of a longer criminal trajectory (recidivism) and violence (firearm possession). Additionally, this article seeks to examine how domestic violence affects women and men differently when it comes to recidivism and/or firearm possession. As Herrera and McCloskey (2001) suggest, little is known about how domestic violence experienced during childhood affects men and women differently in terms of their possible future criminal behavior. Thus, the second objective of this article is to examine possible gender differences: that is, how each modality of domestic violence in these criminal patterns (recidivism and possession of a firearm) vary between men and women.

This work helps to broaden the field of knowledge involving the life trajectories of people who have committed a crime, providing an important input for the design of intervention and early prevention programs. As proposed by Smith and Stern (1997), knowledge about the relationship between family life and crime is essential for generating early preventive interventions in the family environment.

# FAMILY VIOLENCE AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

A long academic tradition has examined the role played by families in the development of criminal behavior. It is known that children who grow up in homes characterized by conflict and/or abuse are more likely to commit crimes, while a more supportive and protective family may help provide the child with better self-restraint, even in a hostile and damaging external environment (Smith and Stern, 1997). The theories of social control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990) and of social learning have been the most consulted explanatory frameworks in this line of analysis (Smith and Stern, 1997). Social control theory emphasizes the restrictive effect that attachment to the family represents when an individual is inclined to become involved in criminal behavior (Sampson, 1992). Social learning theory argues that coercive family patterns of interaction are learned during childhood, become entrenched, and then are reproduced during adulthood. Both theories emphasize the importance of the role of the family, especially in the first years of children's lives. One of the causal mechanisms affecting the tendency to develop criminal behavior is the low level of empathy of the aggressor. Empathy, according to this line of reasoning, is learned and/or incorporated through interactions with parents at an early age.

Intrafamily (domestic) violence includes not only abuse directly received by the child (direct violence), but also exposure to violence between parents (indirect violence) (Frías Armenta and Gaxiola Romero, 2008). Both dimensions of violence have been considered as predictors of violent and/or criminal be-

havior (Broidy et al., 2003). Child abuse has received wide attention as a predictor of crime and antisocial behavior during adulthood (Widom and Maxfield, 2001; Smith, Ireland, and Thornberry, 2005; Ireland and Smith, 2009). On the other hand, analyses of other dimensions of family violence, such as growing up in a home in which violence takes place between parents, are less developed (Frías Armenta and Gaxiola Romero, 2008; Ireland and Smith, 2009).

Child abuse is positively associated with violence, crime, and recidivism in numerous studies (Widom, 1989; Malinosky-Rummell and Hansen, 1993; Smith and Thornberry, 1995; Benda, 2005; Ryan and Testa, 2005; Petrosino, Derzon, and Lavenberg, 2009). The findings indicate that having been abused during childhood (direct violence) significantly increases the risk of developing criminal behavior in adolescence and adulthood (Broidy et al., 2003).

The victimization of one parent at the hands of the other (indirect violence) is also a key variable (Frías Armenta and Gaxiola Romero, 2008).<sup>1</sup> Various authors highlight the harmful effects of indirect violence for a child with regard to future criminal behavior (Ireland and Smith, 2009; O'Keefe, 1998; Fergusson and Horwood, 1998) and in terms of aggressiveness and antisocial behavior (Kolbo, Blakely, and Englemen, 1996; Langhinrichsen-Rohling and Neidig, 1995; Sternberg et al., 1993).

Most of the research examines how either type of abuse influences criminal behavior; that is, few studies consider the two variables in the analysis simultaneously.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, evidence of "indirect violence" comes from a survey question formulated as follows: "Do you know if your father or your mother's partner sometimes hit your mother when you were a child?" Thus, when we refer to the existence of indirect violence in the family of origin, it is assumed that the children live in a home in which there is such a form of abuse—and they have knowledge of it—but we cannot affirm that the child witnessed this abuse.

Among those who do consider the two kinds of violence, the results vary. For example, Weaver, Borkowski, and Whitman (2008) say the two types of intrafamily violence (being a direct or indirect victim during childhood) predict crime and violent behavior. However, other studies indicate that only one of the types of victimization has an influence. For example, Herrera and McCloskey (2001) emphasize that having grown up in a home in which violence took place between parents<sup>2</sup> predicts the development of criminal behavior to a greater extent than having been a direct victim. In contrast, in a study about aggression in intimate couples, Simons, Lin, and Gordon (1998) suggest that having experienced child abuse increases the chance of being an aggressor in a couple but that having experienced indirect violence has little to no effect on the probability of being an aggressor.<sup>3</sup>

### *Family Violence and Criminal Behavior: Gender Differences*

Farrington (2005) highlights the need to explore to what extent the risk factors associated with criminal behavior is the same for men and women. There are few studies on the association between child abuse and crime that examine gender differences (Moffit et al., 2001). Herrera and McCloskey (2001) say little is known about how exposure to violence in childhood affects men and women differently in terms of their developing criminal behavior.

Within this line of research, most studies indicate that abuse during childhood (direct violence) increases the risk of developing criminal behavior mainly for women—not for men, or at least not to the same extent (Rivera and Widom, 1990; Herrera and McCloskey, 2001; Widom and Maxfield, 2001; Wolfe et al., 2001, Lansford et al., 2007). Benda (2005) shows that child abuse is a strong predictor of female, but not male, recidivism: for women, having experienced abuse as a child increases their chances of being repeat offenders. Basically, these studies suggest that victimization during childhood has a more damaging effect on women than on men: female victims of violence during childhood are more likely to develop criminal behavior. However, in contrast, some studies reveal that the long-term consequences of childhood victimization show a pattern consistent with gender stereotypes and the traditional image of women (Widom, 1989). That is, women are more likely to exhibit the effects of child abuse in more subtle ways. In line with traditional socialization practices (Widom, 1984), it is argued that women who have been abused may be more likely to suffer from depression and psychiatric problems rather than directing their violence externally, as is presumed to occur in men (Bryer et al., 1987). Others argue that men show greater weakness than women when it comes

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<sup>2</sup> This study specifically refers to whether the mother was a victim of physical abuse by her partner.

<sup>3</sup> The study by Simons, Lin, and Gordon (1998) was conducted only among adolescent males from the United States (Iowa). The objective of the research was to explore the extent to which violence in the family of origin influences adolescent relationships—basically, to recognize if violence during childhood is reproduced in such relationships. The study concludes there was no association between indirect violence (in childhood) and being an aggressor in adolescent relationships, although there was a positive and significant relationship with direct violence. It was suggested that this finding might be explained by the fact that children rarely observe positive effects of violent exchanges between parents. Consequently, growing up in a home in which there is aggression between adults (indirect violence) would rarely teach a child that abuse is an effective strategy. The study found that children usually modify their behavior when they experience abuse. Although being attacked surely produces feelings of rejection and anguish in the child, in the end it produces the change being sought. Consequently, children who have been direct victims of abuse must have learned that physical violence is sometimes an effective and necessary strategy to achieve a behavior change within the family (thus reproducing the abuse in their intimate relationships of adolescence).

to the effects of adverse family contexts (Buka and Earls, 1993). This argument holds that exposure to a violent family environment during childhood has greater consequences in men than in women. Foo and Margolin (1995), specifically focusing on partner violence, emphasize that having experienced indirect violence during childhood (growing up in a home in which violence between parents took place) predicts

male aggressive behavior in the couple, but not female behavior. The male imitates the use of violence that he observed between his parents during childhood to resolve conflicts in his own interpersonal relationships. It is suggested that aggressive behavior of the woman in the couple is influenced, to a greater extent, by temporally closer variables, as opposed to distant variables such as victimization during childhood.

## DATA, VARIABLES, AND ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

This section refers to methodological issues: the data used, the variables explored, and the techniques used for the statistical analyses. This article is based on data from the Survey of Convicted Prisoners conducted by the Center for Latin American Studies on Insecurity and Violence (Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos sobre Inseguridad y Violencia, CELIV), with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and carried out 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 8,285 cases in total (see Table 1, which also includes the distribution of the sample by sex).

As part of the research involving the first and second objectives of the article, a multivariate analysis is carried out. The main technique used is logistic re-

gression. The first objective of the article is to explore whether exposure to direct and/or indirect violence during childhood has an effect on certain criminal patterns, specifically, on the likelihood that an individual who is incarcerated is a repeat offender and/or has ever held a gun in his or her hands. Two dependent variables are used while two aspects of criminal behavior are studied: recidivism and firearm possession.

The *first dependent variable* is a binary indicator of whether the individual has been *previously convicted*. Inmates who acquire the value 1 in this binary variable are considered to have been previously convicted, while first-time offenders get the value 0. The descriptive analysis of this variable (Table 2) shows that 32 percent of the incarcerated individuals are repeat offenders. The data show gender differences: 20 percent of women have been previously convicted of a crime, while the figure for men is 34 percent.

**TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE OF THE SURVEY OF CONVICTED PRISONERS BY COUNTRY AND 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 authors.

<sup>4</sup> Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Peru represent national-level data, which is not the case in the rest of the countries.

The *second dependent variable* is *possession of firearms*,<sup>5</sup> which is also a binary indicator and was developed from a survey question about whether the individual at any point in his or her life has held a firearm. Those who said yes are given a value of 1 in this variable, while those who said no are given a value of 0. Table 2 shows that 55 percent of incarcerated individuals have had a firearm in their hands; therefore, it is suggested that they have had a more violent trajectory. Gender differences also emerge here: only 26 percent of women had ever held a weapon during their lives in comparison with 61 percent of men.

The *main independent variables* try to capture socialization in an environment of family violence. One is a dichotomous variable on direct violence: inmates whose parents beat them as part of a scolding are given the value 1, while those who have not been victims of direct violence during childhood are given the value 0. A second variable shows whether the individual has experienced indirect violence; this is derived from a survey question about whether the individuals know if, when they were children, their mother was beaten by her husband or partner. The reference category (value 0) includes those who have not been victims of this type of violence.

The first objective of this article is to study the effect of exposure to violence (direct and indirect) during childhood on certain criminal patterns. However, in addition to the independent variables corresponding to the various forms of family violence, it is necessary to include in the analysis other factors that the literature has associated with criminal behavior in order to explore the extent to which victimization in childhood has a direct effect on these criminal patterns. Likewise, different *control variables* derived from the literature are included. These are factors specific to the early socialization environment, certain sociodemographic characteristics of the individual, and variables linked to the socioeconomic context immediately prior to incarceration. In addition, control variables corresponding to each of the eight countries are included. Given that the sample used includes all the countries combined, this variable is incorporated to rule out possible contextual compositional effects; that is, effects resulting from the unequal distribution of the main variables in the different countries. Table A1 and Table A2 in the appendix present the description and distribution of the different control variables incorporated.

The analyses are performed separately for each dependent variable (recidivism and possession of a firearm), which means that two different logistic regres-

**TABLE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

| VARIABLES   | WOMEN | MEN | TOTAL |
|---|-------|-----|-------|
| Sentence due to a previous offense (DV1)*                     | 20%   | 34% | 32%   |
| Has held a weapon in his or her hand (DV2)                    | 26%   | 61% | 55%   |
| Victim of indirect violence (violence between parents) (IV)** | 35%   | 32% | 32%   |
| Victim of direct violence (child abuse) (IV)                  | 42%   | 48% | 47%   |

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Note: \* DV = dependent variable. \*\* IV = independent variable.

<sup>5</sup> From a criminal policy perspective, in cases involving firearm possession, the situation is exacerbated given the potential to worsen a victim's defenselessness, produce greater subjugation, and cause lethal damage. It follows that those who have or have had firearms are more violent than those who do not have (or have not had) guns in their possession.

sions are presented, one for each dependent variable. Given the presence of missing values<sup>6</sup> in the main variables, the sample used in the analyses is reduced to 6,458 individuals in the analysis of recidivism and 6,437 in the analysis of the possession of a weapon. For each of the dependent variables, two interpretation models are carried out. First, there is a logistic regression with the corresponding dependent variable: recidivism (Table 3) or possession of a firearm (Table 4) and the two main independent variables that capture the effect of direct and indirect violence during childhood (Model 1). Additionally, Model 1 includes all the control variables considered. In this way, discounting

the effect of other possible influencing factors, the first model makes it possible to capture whether exposure to violence during childhood affects the likelihood that an incarcerated individual becomes a repeat offender and/or has ever held a firearm in his or her hands (*first objective*). Then the interactions between each of the main independent variables (direct and indirect violence) and the gender variable (Model 2) are added to the initial model. The interaction variables are incorporated by exploring whether the influence of each type of domestic violence on the criminal patterns investigated (recidivism and/or possession of a firearm) is different for men and women (*second objective*).

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<sup>6</sup> The missing values correspond to missing information in the database. The reasons for the absence of data may be diverse, such as failure in the measuring instruments and/or lack of response by the subjects to a series of questions.

## RESULTS

The results of the multivariate logistic regression analyses are presented below in different sections for each of the two dependent variables analyzed in this article: recidivism and possession of a firearm.

### *Recidivism*

Model 1 of Table 3 identifies whether victimization in childhood (as a direct or indirect victim) influences the likelihood that an individual in confinement in Latin America is a repeat offender; that is, has developed a greater criminal trajectory.

Direct violence is a statistically significant risk factor. The chance of being a repeat offender among those who were victims of this type of violence in childhood are greater than among those who were not victimized (odds ratio 1:2). On the other hand, having been a victim of indirect violence does not turn out to be an important risk factor: there is no statistically significant difference between the probabilities of inmates who experienced this type of indirect abuse compared with those who did not suffer from it. That is, Model 1 indicates that the likelihood of being a repeat offender is associated with being a victim of physical aggression during childhood, not with having grown up in a home in which the father or partner physically abused the mother.

Model 2 in Table 3 includes the interactions between each of the victimization variables during child-

hood (direct and indirect) and the gender variable. Gender differences are found to be statistically significant in the effects of indirect violence. The coefficient of interaction indicates that indirect violence has a greater effect on the criminal trajectory (in this case, recidivism) of women prisoners than of men. This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that victimization in childhood has a more damaging effect on women than on men (Rivera and Widom, 1990; Herrera and McCloskey, 2001; Widom and Maxfield, 2001; Wolfe et al., 2001; Benda, 2005; Lansford et al., 2007).<sup>7</sup> In this case, it is found that women who were victims of indirect violence during childhood are more likely than men to develop criminal behavior—specifically, to be repeat offenders.

In short, having been a victim of aggression during childhood (direct violence) influences the criminal trajectory of male and female inmates who were assaulted by their parents while growing up. In other words, incarcerated men and women who were assaulted by their parents are more likely to be repeat offenders than those who have not been assaulted. In addition, for this type of violence (direct), no gender differences are found. On the other hand, indirect violence has a differential gender effect: it mainly affects women, increasing their chances of being repeat offenders.

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<sup>7</sup> Although previous studies have focused mainly on the study of direct violence, their findings relate to indirect violence; in relation to direct violence, there are no gender differences (it affects men and women alike).

**TABLE 3. FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROBABILITY THAT INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS IN LATIN AMERICA ARE REPEAT OFFENDERS (LOGISTIC REGRESSION)**

|                              | VARIABLES                                   | MODEL 1                               |        | MODEL 2   |        |      |
|------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--------|-----------|--------|------|
|                              |   | EXP(B)                                | S.E.   | EXP(B)    | S.E.   |      |
| <b>DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</b>     | Has been a victim of direct violence        | 1.2**                                 | 0.09   | 1.3       | 0.23   |      |
|                              | Has been a victim of indirect violence      | 1.1                                   | 0.09   | 1.6**     | 0.23   |      |
|                              | Gender = Male                               | 1.2                                   | 0.12   | 1.5**     | 0.17   |      |
|                              | Has children                                | 1.4***                                | 0.10   | 1.4***    | 0.10   |      |
|                              | Educational level                           | 0.9***                                | 0.03   | 0.9***    | 0.03   |      |
|                              | Consumed alcohol/drugs 6 hrs. before        | 1.2**                                 | 0.08   | 1.2**     | 0.08   |      |
|                              | Left home before age 15                     | 1.2**                                 | 0.09   | 1.2**     | 0.09   |      |
|                              | Alcohol/drug consumption in the environment | 1                                     | 0.09   | 1         | 0.09   |      |
|                              | Criminal background in the environment      | 1.3***                                | 0.08   | 1.3***    | 0.08   |      |
|                              | Friends who committed crimes                | 1.6***                                | 0.09   | 1.6***    | 0.09   |      |
|                              | Criminal gangs in the neighborhood          | 1.3***                                | 0.09   | 1.3***    | 0.09   |      |
|                              | <b>CONTROL VARIABLES</b>                    | Work: Did not work the previous month | 1.4*** | 0.10      | 1.4*** | 0.10 |
| Never worked                 |   | 1.1                                   | 0.17   | 1.1       | 0.17   |      |
| Age at first detention       |   | 0.7***                                | 0.01   | 0.7***    | 0.01   |      |
| Current Age                  |   | 1.3***                                | 0.01   | 1.3**     | 0.01   |      |
| Argentina                    |   | 0.5***                                | 0.16   | 0.5***    | 0.16   |      |
| Brazil                       |   | 0.7**                                 | 0.18   | 0.7**     | 0.18   |      |
| El Salvador                  |   | 0.1***                                | 0.19   | 0.1***    | 0.19   |      |
| Mexico                       |   | 0.2***                                | 0.17   | 0.2***    | 0.17   |      |
| Peru                         |   | 0.2***                                | 0.17   | 0.2***    | 0.17   |      |
| Costa Rica                   |   | 0.3***                                | 0.17   | 0.3***    | 0.17   |      |
| Honduras                     |   | 0.1***                                | 0.22   | 0.1***    | 0.22   |      |
| <b>INTERACTION VARIABLES</b> |   | Direct Violence * Gender              | -----  | -----     | 0.9    | 0.25 |
|                              |   | Indirect Violence * Gender            | -----  | -----     | 0.6*   | 0.25 |
|                              |   | Constant                              | 0.6*   | 0.284     | 0.5**  | 0.30 |
| Nagelkerke R squared         |   | 0.624                                 |        | 0.624     |        |      |
| -2 log of likelihood         |   | 4,234.139                             |        | 4,229.046 |        |      |

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Notes: n=6,458; \*\*\* significant at 0.01; \*\* significant at 0.05; \* significant at 0.1 / S.E. refers to Standard Error

Reference category: not having been a victim; woman; does not have children; did not consume anything six hours before; did not leave home before age 15; there was no consumption of drugs or alcohol in the environment; there was no criminal record; there were no friends who committed crimes; there were no gangs in the neighborhood; worked the previous month; Chile.

### *Holding a Firearm*

Model 1 in Table 4 identifies whether victimization in childhood (as a direct or indirect victim) influences the likelihood that an incarcerated individual in Latin America has ever held a firearm in his or her hands; that is, whether he or she has developed a more violent criminal trajectory. Again, direct violence is a statistically significant risk factor: the probability of having ever held a firearm is greater among those who were victims of this type of violence during childhood compared with those who were not victimized (odds ratio 1:2). On the other hand, having been a victim of indirect violence does not result in a relevant risk factor. That is to say, the probability of having handled a firearm is associated with being a victim of physical aggression during childhood, not with the fact of having grown up in a home in which the father or partner physically abused the mother.

Model 2 of Table 4 includes the interactions between each of the victimization variables during childhood (direct and indirect) and the gender variable. Gender differences are seen in the effect of both types of violence to the extent that the two interaction variables are statistically significant.

Again, it is found that the effect of indirect violence is greater for female inmates while, in this case, the influence of direct violence is greater for male inmates.

In short, having been a victim of childhood aggression (direct violence) increases the probability of having had a firearm mainly for men, while having grown up in a home in which there was violence between parents (indirect violence) increases this probability, especially, for women. Both types of violence have a differential gender effect.

**TABLE 4: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROBABILITY THAT INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS IN LATIN AMERICA HAVE HELD A FIREARM IN THEIR HANDS (LOGISTIC REGRESSION)**

| VARIABLES                    | MODEL 1                                     |           | MODEL 2 |           |      |
|------------------------------|---|-----------|---------|-----------|------|
|                              | EXP(B)                                      | S.E.      | EXP(B)  | S.E.      |      |
| <b>DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</b>     | Has been a victim of direct violence        | 1.2***    | 0.07    | 0.9       | 0.17 |
|                              | Has been a victim of indirect violence      | 1         | 0.07    | 1.4*      | 0.17 |
|                              | Gender: Male                                | 5.0***    | 0.09    | 5.1***    | 0.12 |
|                              | Has children                                | 1.3***    | 0.08    | 1.3***    | 0.08 |
|                              | Educational level                           | 1.2***    | 0.02    | 1.2***    | 0.02 |
|                              | Consumed drugs/alcohol 6 hrs. before        | 1.1       | 0.07    | 1.1       | 0.07 |
|                              | Left home before 15 years of age            | 1.5***    | 0.07    | 1.5***    | 0.07 |
|                              | Alcohol/drug consumption in the environment | 1.1       | 0.07    | 1.1       | 0.07 |
|                              | Criminal background in the environment      | 1.3***    | 0.06    | 1.3***    | 0.06 |
|                              | Friends who committed crimes                | 2.3***    | 0.07    | 2.3***    | 0.07 |
|                              | Criminal gangs in the neighborhood          | 1.6***    | 0.07    | 1.6***    | 0.07 |
| <b>CONTROL VARIABLES</b>     | Did not work the previous month             | 1.9***    | 0.09    | 1.9***    | 0.09 |
|                              | Never worked                                | 2.5***    | 0.16    | 2.5***    | 0.16 |
|                              | Age at first detention                      | 0.9***    | 0.01    | 0.9***    | 0.01 |
|                              | Current age                                 | 1.0***    | 0.01    | 1.0***    | 0.01 |
|                              | Argentina                                   | 1.7***    | 0.14    | 1.7***    | 0.14 |
|                              | Brazil                                      | 1.2       | 0.15    | 1.2       | 0.15 |
|                              | El Salvador                                 | 0.9       | 0.14    | 0.9       | 0.14 |
|                              | Mexico                                      | 0.4***    | 0.14    | 0.4***    | 0.14 |
|                              | Peru  | 0.4***    | 0.14    | 0.4***    | 0.14 |
|                              | Costa Rica                                  | 1.3**     | 0.14    | 1.3**     | 0.14 |
|                              | Honduras                                    | 1.1       | 0.14    | 1.1       | 0.14 |
| <b>INTERACTION VARIABLES</b> | Direct Violence * Gender                    | -----     | -----   | 1.4*      | 0.18 |
|                              | Indirect Violence * Gender                  | -----     | -----   | 0.7**     | 0.19 |
|                              | Constant                                    | 0.1***    | 0.214   | 0.1***    | 0.23 |
|                              | Nagelkerke R squared                        | 0.347     |         | 0.348     |      |
|                              | -2 log of likelihood                        | 6,900.131 |         | 6,893.609 |      |

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Notes: n=6,437; \*\* significant at 0.01; \* significant at 0.05; \* significant at 0.1 / S.E. refers to Standard Error

Reference category: has not been a victim; woman; does not have children; did not consume six hours before; did not leave home before age 15; there was no consumption in the environment; had no criminal record; had no friends who committed crimes; there were no gangs in the neighborhood; worked the previous months; Chile.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article contributes to the knowledge about the relationship between victimization during childhood and criminal behavior in Latin America. Based on the analysis of a database of incarcerated individuals in eight countries, it finds that the environment in which boys and girls are raised (and specifically children's victimization) influences two dimensions of their subsequent criminal behavior. These are the probability of being repeat offenders and of ever having had a gun in their hands. These results underscore the importance of preventing violence in the home. In particular, programs focused on the family should be aimed at children who are at risk of being exposed to violence in order to offset the possibilities that they will develop protracted and/or more violent criminal behavior.

In turn, it is found that exposure to family violence during childhood affects men and women differently in terms of their subsequent criminal behavior. Given these gender differences, preventive intervention strategies should be adapted depending on whether those involved are male or female. Indirect violence (having grown up in a home in which there was violence between parents) mainly affects women, both in terms of recidivism and the possession of firearms. Likewise, preventive interventions for female criminal behavior should focus specifically on this indirect form of family violence: women who have been immersed during childhood in an environment of violence between parents have greater possibilities, compared to men, of developing protracted and more violent criminal behavior. In contrast, direct violence during childhood increases the likelihood of recidivism for both men and women; there are no gender differences in its effect. Thus, strategies to prevent female criminal activity must also act on this type of violence during childhood. Interventions for women must be broader and more comprehensive

when it comes to both types of violence. On the other hand, males are more affected than females by direct violence—by the aggressions they suffered during childhood—and less affected than females by having witnessed situations of violence between parents. Thus, interventions based on the prevention of male criminal behavior should focus specifically on this type of direct family violence, given that it affects males the most.

It should be underlined that the sample consists of persons placed in confinement for having committed crimes; that is, it is a sample of offenders. As there is no identical sample of nonoffenders, the magnitude of the effect of a violent environment on future criminal conduct cannot be measured. This paper distinguishes between those who presumably have a greater and more violent criminal trajectory as opposed to those who have a lower propensity and/or level of violence. Differences have been found to support the hypotheses of the adverse effects caused by early victimization. It is very likely that if research were able to measure a distinction between offenders and nonoffenders based on how they were raised, the effect of the early family environment would be considered significantly greater.

This article has taken an initial approach to the influence of family violence on the criminal behavior of men and women in confinement contexts in Latin America. Future research should explore possible gender differences involving the effects of other factors that the literature associates with criminal behavior. It is necessary to study not only victimization during childhood but also other factors in the child-rearing environment, such as belonging to a broken home, among others. This issue is relevant since, if gender differences exist, preventive strategies must be different for men and women. This article is a starting point from which future research lines are defined.

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## APPENDIX: INFORMATION ON CONTROL VARIABLES INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSES

**TABLE A1. LIST OF CONTROL VARIABLES INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSES**

| VARIABLE                                | DESCRIPTION  |
|---|--|
| <b>SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS</b> | Gender<br>1 = Man; 0 = Woman   |
|   | Children<br>1 = Has children; 0 = Has no children  |
|   | Educational level<br>Variable treated as Interval (1 = did not go to school; 6 = college graduate)   |
|   | Consumption of drugs and/or alcohol<br>1 = Consumed alcohol or any drug during the six hours prior to the crime for which he or she is accused; 0 = Had not consumed   |
|   | Current age<br>Variable Interval   |
|   | Age at first detention<br>Variable Interval. For repeat offenders, it corresponds to the age arrested the first time while, for those who are not repeat offenders, this variable is the age at which arrested for the current crime |
| <b>SOCIALIZATION ENVIRONMENT</b>        | Left home before 15 years of age<br>1 = Left home before age 15; 0 = Never left  |
|   | Alcohol/drug consumption in the environment<br>1 = Comes from a family environment in which there was drug and/or alcohol consumption; 0 = There was no consumption  |
|   | Criminal background<br>1 = Some member of his or her family was imprisoned; 0 = No family members have been imprisoned   |
|   | Friends who committed crimes<br>1 = Had close friends who committed crimes; 0 = Did not have such friends  |
|   | Criminal gangs in the neighborhood<br>1 = Lived in a neighborhood with criminal gangs; 0 = There were no criminal gangs  |
| <b>SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT</b>            | Work<br>Three categories: never worked, worked some time but not during the month before the arrest; worked before the arrest (reference category)   |
| <b>COUNTRIES</b>                        | Eight categories: Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Chile (reference category)   |

Source: Authors' elaboration.

**TABLE A2. DISTRIBUTION OF CONTROL VARIABLES OF THE ANALYSES**

|   | VARIABLES  | WOMAN | MAN  | TOTAL |
|---|--|-------|------|-------|
| <b>SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS</b> | Gender   | 16%   | 84%  | 100%  |
|   | Has children   | 87%   | 78%  | 79%   |
|   | Educational level (average)                                  | 2.85  | 2.68 | 2.71  |
|   | Consumed drugs or alcohol 6 hrs. before committing the crime | 21%   | 35%  | 33%   |
|   | Average age at first detention                               | 30    | 28   | 28    |
|   | Current average age  | 36    | 36   | 36    |
| <b>SOCIALIZATION ENVIRONMENT</b>        | Left home before 15 years of age                             | 38%   | 39%  | 39%   |
|   | Alcohol/drug consumption in the environment                  | 42%   | 44%  | 44%   |
|   | Criminal background  | 38%   | 37%  | 37%   |
|   | Friends who committed crimes                                 | 31%   | 50%  | 47%   |
|   | Criminal gangs in the neighborhood                           | 44%   | 54%  | 53%   |
| <b>SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT</b>            | Work   |       |      |       |
|   | Never worked   | 8%    | 6%   | 6%    |
|   | Worked, but not the month prior to his/her detention         | 27%   | 7%   | 19%   |
|   | Worked the month before his/her detention                    | 64%   | 77%  | 75%   |
| <b>COUNTRIES</b>                        | Argentina  | 15%   | 12%  | 13%   |
|   | Brazil   | 8%    | 9%   | 9%    |
|   | Chile  | 9%    | 10%  | 10%   |
|   | Costa Rica   | 9%    | 13%  | 13%   |
|   | El Salvador  | 16%   | 14%  | 14%   |
|   | Honduras   | 12%   | 12%  | 12%   |
|   | Mexico   | 19%   | 15%  | 15%   |
|   | Peru   | 12%   | 15%  | 15%   |

Source: Authors' elaboration.



