



Victimizations of Mexican youth (12–17 years old): A 2014 national survey



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ABSTRACT

Victimization of Mexican youth (aged 12–17) has received little attention compared to that of adults. Using the 2014 Social Survey on Social Cohesion for the Prevention of Violence and Delinquency, we examine prevalence and types of victimization; describe the characteristics of incidents in terms of relationship with perpetrator(s) and places where took place; and study significant correlates of forms of victimization and poly-victimization. During 2014 alone, more than 2.8 million minors were victims of bullying, cyberbullying, theft, sexual abuse, physical assault, threats, robbery, or extortion. About 10% of these were poly-victims—experienced at least four different types of victimization by at least four types of perpetrators. Youth tended to be victimized by people in their inner circle. The factors associated with victimization tended to vary by victimization type, but proximity to crime and peer delinquency increased the risk of experiencing all types of victimization. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Since the 90s there has been a global effort to assess the magnitude and costs of child-directed violence and victimization (García-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005; Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano Ascencio, 2002). However, in some countries, as is the case with Mexico, academic and government interest in victimization of children has received less attention than victimization of adults. For example, several criminological and non-criminological national surveys have been conducted since 2003,² which have provided data about the victimization of male and female adults. In the case of children, victimization data is limited.

Official records on youth victimization only offer a very limited picture of the problem because of the high rates of under-reporting. According to the 2015 National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Safety (*Encuesta Nacional sobre Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública—ENVIPE*), only 10.7% of crimes were reported, and of these, a preliminary

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² I.e. National Survey on Household Dynamics (2003, 2005, 2011), National Survey on Violence against Women (2003 and 2006), Survey on Indigenous Women's Health and Rights (2007), the National Survey on Victimization and Public Security Perception (ENVIPE) conducted in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; the National Survey on Insecurity (ENSI) conducted in 2002, 2005, 2006 and 2008, and the 2005 International Crime Victimization Survey.

investigation was initiated in only 67.5% of cases (Inegi, 2015). Moreover, official records tend not to be disaggregated by age and gender (see *Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública*, 2014). Existing representative surveys are limited to some regions of the country,³ and specific groups of youth.⁴ Additionally, the questionnaire designs of such surveys only allow studying victimization of youth who experienced health problems as consequence of such victimization,⁵ and the types of victimization studied are very restricted.⁶ Conducted on an annual basis since 2011, the main source for examining victimization and crime in Mexico is the above mentioned ENVIPE. The survey focuses solely on the population of 18 years and older. According to the 2015 ENVIPE, 28.2% of the population 18 years and older (almost 23 million Mexicans) were victims of crime during 2014 (Inegi, 2015). This figure, however, fails to include children and adolescent victims of crime. In many comparative international surveys, “youth are the most victimization-prone segment of the population” (Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996: 3), so the undercount may be large.

Existing research on Mexican youths' victimization has mainly focused on single types of victimization: dating violence (Castro & Frías, 2010; Rivera-Rivera, Allen, Rodríguez-Ortega, Chávez-Ayala, & Lazcano-Ponce, 2006), bullying and cyberbullying (Santoyo Castillo & Frías, 2014; Vega-López, González-Pérez, & Quintero-Vega, 2013), sexual abuse (Chavez Ayala et al., 2009; Frías & Erviti, 2014), homicide (Fernández-Cantón, Hernández-Martínez, & Viguri-Urbe, 2013; González-Pérez, Vega-López, Vega-López, Muñoz de la Torre, & Cabrera-Pivaral, 2009; González Cervera & Cárdenas, 2004; Gutiérrez-Trujillo, Fernández-Cantón, & Viguri-Urbe, 2011), family violence (Frías & Castro, 2011), violence in schools (*Secretaría de Educación Pública* and UNICEF, 2009) and physical and sexual violence (Ramos-Lira, González-Fortaleza, & Wagner, 2007). This focus on single types of victimization does not allow an assessment of co-occurring exposure to multiple types and, therefore, underestimates the full burden and extent of victimization. Moreover, it has produced incomplete knowledge of youth's victimization given the extensive evidence that youth experience multiple types of victimization. Some children are poly-victims –those exposed to extremely high levels of victimization in different contexts and by multiple perpetrators (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007a; Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner & Hamby, 2005).

In comparison to studies assessing multiple experiences of adults' victimization (Medina-Mora et al., 2005; Mendoza Mojica, Márquez-Mendoza, Guadarrama, & Ramos-Lira, 2013), few studies in Mexico have investigated multiple experiences of youth (Benjet et al., 2009; Borges et al., 2008). Studies investigating multiple types of victimization have examined the effect of traumatic events and chronic childhood adversities and the factors associated (Benjet et al., 2009), their relationship with suicide (Borges et al., 2008), and posttraumatic stress disorder (Orozco, Borges, Benjet, Medina-Mora, & López-Carrillo, 2008). They have not, however, studied which individual, relational, and contextual factors are associated with these experiences, the victims' relationship with the aggressor, or place where victimization occurred.

This study aims to address this gap by examining a recent survey –the 2014 Social Survey on Social Cohesion for the Prevention of Violence and Delinquency (*Encuesta de Cohesión Social para la Prevención de la Violencia y Delincuencia*—ECOPRED)—that provides information about youth's (12–17 years old) experiences of victimization of multiple types: bullying, cyberbullying, theft, physical assault, threats, robbery, sexual abuse, robbery, and extortion. This study has three main objectives: a) to examine and report prevalence and types of victimization among Mexican youth; b) to describe the characteristics of incidents in terms of relationship with perpetrator(s) and places where the victimization took place; and c) to study significant correlates of forms of victimization and poly-victimization drawing on a developmental victimology perspective.

2. The developmental victimology perspective

The developmental victimology perspective (Finkelhor, 1995, 2007) extended routine activities theory and identified the crucial sets of risk factors for childhood victimization as being both in the environment (guardianship, exposure and proximity) and also in three “target congruence” features, individual characteristics related to victims' suitability as targets, and their ability to protect themselves. Among these three, target vulnerability features were individual characteristics that might increase the risk of victimization because they compromise the potential victims' capacity to resist or deter victimization and thus make the victim an easier target for the offender; i.e. physical weakness, emotional deprivation and mental health problems. Target gratifiability refers to characteristics that might increase their risk because an offender wants to obtain, have access or to manipulate them, i.e. having valuable possessions, or female gender in sexual abuse. Finally, target antagonism refers to characteristics that might arouse the anger, jealousy, or destructive impulses of the offender. being effeminate, member of a minority group and being anxiously attached (Finkelhor, 2007). Individual variables associated with target gratifiability and target antagonism will vary from crime to crime and from offender to offender.

³ This is the case of the 2005 Survey on Child Maltreatment and Associated Factors—*Encuesta de Maltrato Infantil y Factores Asociados*—(Villatoro-Velázquez, Quiroz del Valle, Gutiérrez López, Díaz Santos, & Amador Buenabad, 2006).

⁴ For example, the National Survey on Exclusion, Intolerance and Violence in Public Institutions of High School Level Education—*Encuesta Nacional sobre Exclusión, Intolerancia y Violencia en Escuelas de Nivel Medio Superior*.

⁵ This is the case of the National Survey on Health and Nutrition—*Encuesta Nacional sobre Salud y Nutrición*.

⁶ In the 2012 National Youth Survey information about victimization was limited to theft, rape, kidnapping, extortion and aggression. No further information about victimization was collected.

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