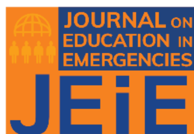


JOURNAL ON EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

“If you don’t have an education, you are no one”: Understanding the School Experiences of Youth Involved in Drug-Related Crime in Ciudad Juárez and Medellín

Author(s): Cirenia Chavez Villegas and Elena Butti

Source: *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (October 2020), pp. 148-174

Published by: Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies

Stable URL: http://hdl.handle.net/2451/61509

DOI: https://doi.org/10.33682/rmx8-v18b

REFERENCES:

This is an open-source publication. Distribution is free of charge. All credit must be given to authors as follows:

Chavez Villegas, Cirenia, and Elena Butti. 2020. ““If you don’t have an education, you are no one”: Understanding the School Experiences of Youth Involved in Drug-Related Crime in Ciudad Juárez and Medellín.” *Journal on Education in Emergencies* 6 (1): 148-74. https://doi.org/10.33682/rmx8-v18b.

The *Journal on Education in Emergencies (JEiE)* publishes groundbreaking and outstanding scholarly and practitioner work on education in emergencies (EiE), defined broadly as quality learning opportunities for all ages in situations of crisis, including early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocation, higher and adult education.

Copyright © 2020, Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies.

The *Journal on Education in Emergencies,* published by the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

"IF YOU DON'T HAVE AN EDUCATION, YOU ARE NO ONE": UNDERSTANDING THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH INVOLVED IN DRUG-RELATED CRIME IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ AND MEDELLÍN

Cirenia Chavez Villegas and Elena Butti

ABSTRACT

The relation between being out of school and participating in criminal economies is widely documented in the literature on youth delinquency. However, the complex connection between these two phenomena has not yet been fully unpacked. This paper draws from two studies that we, the authors, conducted separately to explore the role educational experiences play in shaping the delinquent trajectories of male youth who participate in the drug business in urban centers located in Mexico and Colombia. The first consists of in-depth interviews and surveys conducted in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, while the second is based on long-term ethnographic engagement in Medellín, Colombia. We provide unique insights into the educational experiences of this hard-to-reach population and find that economic hardship does not wholly explain why these young people leave school and engage in delinquent activities. These youth do not "drop out" of school in search of money; rather, they are "pushed out" by a vicious cycle of stigmatization, segregation, punishment, and exclusion. By exploring these dynamics in two cities that have waged long drug wars, this article furthers understanding of the nexus between crime-related violence and educational experiences, thus making an important contribution to the field of education in emergencies.

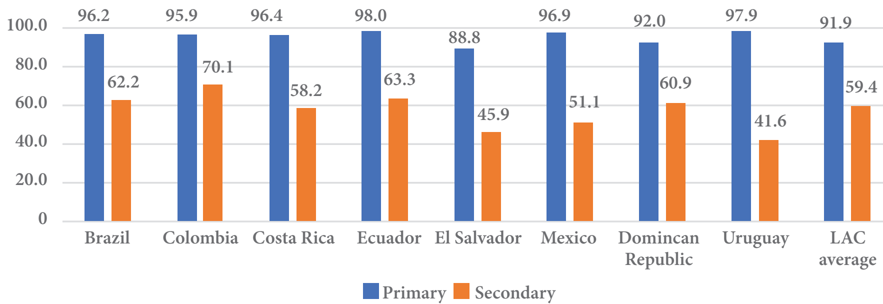
Received December 3, 2018; revised January 31, 2019, and October 20, 2019; accepted July 27, 2020; electronically published October 2020.

Journal on Education in Emergencies, Vol. 6, No. 1
Copyright © 2020 by the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE).
ISSN 2518-6833

INTRODUCTION

The Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region is home to 8 percent of the global population but accounts for 37 percent of the world's homicides (Chioda 2017).[1] Being young and male have been found to be risk factors for participation in criminal activity in both the LAC region (Chioda 2017; Muggah and Aguirre 2018) and around the globe (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1995; Shoemaker 1990). Studies in the LAC region also show that low educational attainment is a persistent characteristic of those who engage in crime (Azaola and Pérez-Correa 2012), and that there is a clear correlation between being out of school and first instances of engagement in criminal activity. In some countries in the LAC region, the share of out-of-school adolescents at the secondary level is particularly high (see Figure 1).[2]

Figure 1: Percentage of Population between Ages 15 and 19 that Completed Primary and Secondary Education in Select LAC Countries, 2014



Source: Data from ELAC statistics (2018), with authors' elaboration

Despite this correlation, an in-depth understanding of how educational attainment and criminal engagement are related is lacking. There is not enough empirical evidence available to understand whether the school experiences of youth involved in criminal actions in the LAC region have contributed to their engagement in the drug business and, if they have, how they do so. Existing research on the drug trade has concentrated primarily on the top members of criminal organizations (see, e.g., Grillo 2011; Molloy and Bowden 2011) while disregarding the perspectives of those in the lower echelons, even though evidence indicates that adolescence is a period when engagement in criminal behavior increases

1 In 2014, the average regional homicide rate in LAC was the highest worldwide. Regional rates for LAC stood at 22.5 homicides per 100,000 in 2014, twice the rate for sub-Saharan Africa (9.5) and more than five times the rate for the Middle East and North Africa (3.9) (World Bank 2014). It is important to clarify that there is significant variation in the level of violence within the region.

2 In 2015, the rate of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age was 7.2 percent for LAC, compared to an average rate of 3.0 percent in OECD countries (World Bank 2018).

substantially (Chioda 2017; Trucco and Ullmann 2016). This is especially true in Mexico and Colombia, where the pathway to crime often starts in the early teens (Chavez 2018; Butti 2019).

Typically, the youngest participants in the drug business act as *carritos* (drug transporters) in exchange for candies or pocket money. As they get older, they start selling and guarding drugs, finding new buyers among their peers, getting protection money from shops, buses, and residents, and serving as neighborhood lookouts. Criminal activity is often something the youngest participants do when not in school, but these youth typically leave school when they are older, and selling drugs becomes their main activity and source of income (Chavez 2018; Butti 2019).

Despite this correlation between leaving school and engaging in criminal activities, to our knowledge, no work has yet focused on the educational experiences of the low-level participants of criminal groups engaged in the drug business in Mexico and Colombia. Our aim with this paper is to address this major gap in our understanding of education within a context of drug violence and insecurity. Moreover, drug-related violence is still not considered an emergency by a large part of the humanitarian sector or in academia, thus it is overlooked in fields such as education in emergencies. As we demonstrate in this paper, the young people who are implicated in this violence are exposed to as much if not more stress than young people living in conflict settings. The need to frame these youths' experiences within the education in emergencies debate is thus relevant and urgent.

Drawing from data we collected in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and Medellín, Colombia, this paper explores the relation between school experiences and participation in the drug trade among adolescents and young men, broadly between the ages of 12 and 29.[3] We specifically ask, How do the school experiences of youth in both contexts shape their entry into the drug business? To answer this question, we draw from two studies, one each in Mexico and Colombia, two countries that have experienced particularly violent episodes over several decades that can be attributed at least in part to criminal dynamics related to the drug business. By "drug business," we refer to both local dealing and transnational trafficking in illicit substances.

3 Those involved in the drug trade are, to a very large extent, male. This age range was assigned by the National Youth Institute in Mexico City.

We structured this paper as follows. We first present a brief review of the evidence linking school experiences and delinquency, in Latin America and at the global level. We then make the argument for our focus on Ciudad Juárez and Medellín and outline the methodologies used in the two studies we bring together in this piece. We then turn to the core of the paper, an in-depth exploration of the school experiences of youth involved in criminal groups in the two locations.

In this paper, we make three main theoretical contributions to the debate on education in emergencies in the context of the war on drugs. One contribution is to problematize use of the term "drop out" to describe the process whereby youth disengage from school and end up leaving it (the term is used in a wealth of literature, such as Agnew 1991; Booth, Farrell, and Varano 2008; Thornberry et al. 2003; Henry et al. 2012). We provide empirical evidence to support using the term "push out" instead to refer to the exclusionary structures at play in the school environment that end up "pushing" certain students out.

We also show that social relationships matter in attempting to understand education access, which confirms Hirschi's (1969) assertion that a lack of social bonds can play a role for those who stray from conventional norms. Without affective bonds with their parents and teachers, youth have either no emotional incentive to conform to conventional norms in the best case, or no exemplars of positive behaviors in the worst case. Echoing somewhat the findings of Burdick-Will (2013) and Garot (2010), we specifically emphasize the crucial role teachers play in the process of school disengagement. However, we also stress that teachers cannot be held individually responsible, as there is an exclusionary and repressive structure of education policies and regulations that guides and even restrains the extremely challenging work of teachers. Third, and most importantly, we bring to light the unheard voices of hard-to-reach youth who have participated in crime but are not sufficiently represented in current scholarly work. Based on their narratives, we argue that it is not these youth who have rejected school but the school system that has rejected them.

A BRIEF REVIEW OF EVIDENCE ON THE LINK BETWEEN SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND DELINQUENCY

The link between school experiences and delinquency can be traced back to Hirschi's (1969) theory of social control, which is based largely on the connection between individuals and conventional social institutions, including the family and the school. Hirschi argued that individuals with positive social bonds—including

those with a strong attachment to authority figures, positive friendships, and a commitment to socially accepted norms and institutions, and the belief that these things are important—are more likely to conform to conventional norms. Conversely, Hirschi posited that boys who are less attached to their parents and teachers or have weak or broken social bonds are more likely to engage in delinquent activities.

Since Hirschi's work, a plethora of mostly quantitative studies have explored the relationship between school dropout and delinquency. One strand of the literature signals that the factors leading to dropout may be more salient in explaining delinquent behavior than dropping out of school itself (Agnew 1991; Booth et al. 2008; Thornberry et al. 2003). For example, Henry et al. (2012) argued that leaving school is only the end point in a process of school disengagement, which usually begins in the early stages of education. Although this literature establishes a solid association between dropping out of school and participation in delinquent activities, the use of the term "drop out" is problematic. Rather than unpacking, as we do in this paper, the multilayered process of school disengagement that is shaped by structural exclusionary practices embedded in how schools operate, the literature implies that responsibility for the decision to leave school lies squarely with the student.

Some evidence shows that teachers can be an important factor in pushing students out of school. In one qualitative study that examined the educational experiences of youth involved in criminality, Garot (2010) identified the critical role teachers play in students' lack of interest in school. Garot found that teachers often had strong prejudices that made them consider some students unteachable and, further, that they had no incentive to teach these students beyond the minimum required. This led to these youths' overall disillusionment and apathy toward school in particular, which eventually caused them to abandon the institution. Ultimately, these students felt that leaving the school was their most viable (or perhaps only) reasonable choice. In this paper, we echo this line of argument and suggest that school environments and interactions can in fact push students out.

Another significant body of qualitative work with youth engaged in delinquency (e.g., participating in gangs, the drug business) has focused on economic marginalization and stigmatization as important drivers of illicit activity. Densely (2013, 40), who studied youth gangs in London, argued that "gang members clearly have high aspirations to succeed and share with their non-gang counterparts the material expectations encouraged within advanced capitalism," thus suggesting that criminal behavior is the result of a mismatch between material aspirations and economic

opportunities. Anderson's *Code of the Street* (2000), which focuses on street culture in Philadelphia, and MacLeod's *Ain't No Makin' It* (2008), about poor men from low-income housing projects in Massachusetts, offer similar arguments.

In Latin America, there is a long tradition of studies on youth engagement in criminality (see, e.g., Rodgers and Jones 2009; Zubillaga 2009; Ward 2013; Wolseth 2014), which points to the connection between socioeconomic exclusion and delinquency. In his research with young men involved in crime-related violence in Caracas, Venezuela, Zubillaga (2009) noted how engagement in delinquent trajectories is, for these young men, a way of proving their social existence and gaining respect. While a handful of studies from the LAC region suggest an association between school experiences and participation in some forms of delinquency (Azaola and Pérez-Correa 2012; González-Pérez et al. 2012) or dissocial behavior (de la Rubia and Ortiz Morales 2012), no work has reached this explicit conclusion or specifically included youth who participate in the drug business. In sum, while insightful, the literature on youth criminal engagement and their economic motivations has only marginally addressed the role of youth educational experiences (particularly feeling excluded from school) in shaping delinquent trajectories. However, this connection is empirically evident and is often cited peripherally in the literature (see, e.g., Wolseth 2014; Ward 2013), which suggests the presence of important links between youth engagement in violence, being pushed out of school, and feeling stigmatized and excluded. Such relationship warrants further exploration of the kind we undertake in this paper.

Several nationally representative studies in Mexico and Colombia shed light on the reasons for school abandonment among the general population, but these are not specific to youth who engage in criminal activity. A recent report in Mexico, for example, found that the main reason for abandoning school at the secondary level was economic hardship (48.2%), followed by disliking school (19.9%) (SEP 2012). A study on school desertion at the secondary school level in Colombia found that the key drivers of temporary school abandonment for the largest share of respondents was that "school was far from home" (37.1%), followed by "there were financial constraints at home" (33.2%) (Obregón et al. 2010). Because these results are generalized for the secondary level school population in Mexico and Colombia, they have little to say about whether these factors help explain delinquency, as youth who engage in delinquent acts may be underrepresented in these figures. These large-sample studies on school desertion in the countries of interest do not specifically highlight the diverse experiences of different youth subgroups, which could provide a better understanding of what links school experiences with delinquency.

One main contribution we make in this paper is the rich qualitative data provided in the largely unheard narratives of a hard-to-reach population group that has been overlooked in the literature on school desertion in Latin America—that is, our study participants, who have been actively involved in the drug trade in Medellín and Ciudad Juárez. Our findings add nuance and complexity to some of the direct associations presented in the literature and problematize some of the assumptions underlying concepts and terminology commonly attributed to these youth. While theoretical frameworks emphasize the notions of dropout, nonattachment, noncommitment, and disinvestment in school, we argue that these explanations provide simplistic renditions of the relationship between school experiences and delinquency in the contexts we studied and fail to appropriately acknowledge the role institutions play in pushing students out of school. In this article, we tease out the mechanisms that drive this connection among youth who have participated in the drug business.

CONTEXTS, POPULATIONS, AND CASE SELECTION

We conducted the data collection and analysis for the two studies we drew from for this paper separately and in different contexts, and using somewhat different epistemologies. We decided *a posteriori* to write this article collaboratively, discovering not only that the research questions in the two studies were very similar but that the findings they uncovered using different approaches were strikingly analogous. This section elaborates on the comparability between the geographic areas selected, describes our methods and sampling techniques, and reflects on our limitations and ethical considerations.

As a starting point, Mexico and Colombia are two relevant and comparable cases for this inquiry, due to cultural and demographic similarities, and to high rates of criminality related to the drug trade. Significantly, the two cities in question—Medellín and Ciudad Juárez—have been and still are focal points in the production and commercialization of drugs and are key stops in the drug route from Latin America to the United States. Both cities have experienced a spike in violent crime that is attributed to criminal groups involved in the drug trade. Similarities and connections between Ciudad Juárez and Medellín, and the broader contexts in which they are located, provide solid ground for a joint analysis.[4]

4 This work not only crosses the qualitative-quantitative divide, it also opens the possibility for authors using different research methodologies and subscribing to different epistemologies to work together. As far as we are concerned, it is uncommon for scholars who have used such different methodological approaches, particularly those implementing ethnographic and mixed-methods research, to conduct a joint analysis of their data to draw common conclusions.

Ciudad Juárez

The situation in Ciudad Juárez reflects national developments in Mexico, where agreements were negotiated for decades between government officials from the Institutional Revolutionary Party—which ruled the country almost undisputedly for 71 years—and various organized criminal groups involved in the drug trade.[5] These agreements assigned fiefdoms—specific areas of the national territory known as *plazas*—to the control of particular organized crime groups that were free to transport and distribute drugs (Hernández 2010). The agreements broke down with the arrival of the right-wing National Action Party in the country's national political arena. In 2006, Felipe Calderón, the second president from the National Action Party, declared a war on drugs and vowed to put an end to the corruption and agreements that had characterized previous administrations. His declaration caused an eruption of violence between rival organized criminal groups, particularly in strategic areas that had a lucrative narcotics trade, such as Ciudad Juárez. This city, which is located on the northwest border between Mexico and the United States, has a long history of smuggling. Because it is so close to the border, it is a central and symbolic point of entry for drugs into the US, which is the reason it became coveted territory and precipitated a notorious war between rival organized criminal groups (Juárez and Sinaloa) at the beginning of the Calderón presidency.[6]

Medellín

Violence increased in Medellín in the 1960s and 1970s, when a decline in textile manufacturing facilitated a surge of illicit economies, mainly those related to trafficking marijuana and cocaine. The city's criminal dynamics were revolutionized between the 1980s and the mid-1990s with the creation of the Medellín cartel, headed by Pablo Escobar. Bands of street children and marginalized young people were "employed" by narcotraffickers as informants, watchdogs, and assassins. During this time, drug-related violence intersected with the civil war between the state, leftist guerrillas, and the paramilitaries. These various factions engaged in successive alliances and confrontations with drug cartels—a complex history that goes beyond the purposes of this paper. Homicide rates in Medellín reached a peak of 395.4 per 100,000 people in 1991, and Escobar was killed in 1993 after

5 In 1988, the first time Mexico introduced electronic ballot counting, the leftist candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas won the popular vote. However, under the excuse of a "system failure" in the vote counting, which was clearly showing a lead for Cárdenas, votes were recounted and the Institutional Revolutionary Party candidate was declared winner of the 1988 elections.

6 The use of the term "organized criminal group" rather than "cartel" corresponds with the problematization of the latter term, as explained by the Mexican historian Luis Astorga (2005).

a period of violent state repression. This marked the start of a new phase in the urban drug war, as the minicartels that emerged from the fragmentation of the Medellín cartel started to fight each other. Since then, homicide rates in the city have steadily declined (though they still are above the regional average), thanks to a variety of municipal and national policies.[7] However, the drug business remains solidly in place and is carried out primarily by large criminal groups called *BACRIM* (short for *bandas criminales* or criminal gangs) (McDermott 2014). During this time, a crucial rung in the drug chain—exports to the United States—has been falling into the hands of the Mexican cartels, which retain control to this day (*El Espectador* 2018).

Methods and Sampling

Both of the studies this paper is based on explored adolescents' trajectories into organized crime and violence. Both focused on similar populations of adolescents and young men, who were approximately ages 12 to 29. However, it is important to note that the youth who participated in the research were at different stages of engagement in criminal activities. Those in Ciudad Juárez were serving time in prison for offenses related to the drug trade, while those in Medellín had just started to engage in very small-scale drug trafficking.

While seeking to answer similar research questions, the two studies employed different methodologies. The study in Ciudad Juárez used mixed-methods research, including in-depth interviews and surveys with a sample of youth (n=20) who engaged in delinquency and a comparison sample of youth who did not (n=360) (Chavez 2018).[8] The long-term ethnographic research conducted for the Medellín study involved daily observation, informal conversation, and interaction with about 20 key informants over a three-year span, and casual conversations, engagement with, and observation of hundreds of other informants during this time (Butti 2019).[9]

7 This is according to the World Bank database, which relies on the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's International Homicide Statistics database.

8 This research was funded by a doctoral grant from Cambridge Trust/Scientific Council of Mexico. The research received approval from the University of Cambridge Centre of Development Studies.

9 This research was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ES/J500112/1), received ethical approval from the University of Oxford (SSD/CUREC1A/14-SSH_C2_15_014), and was carried out in the spirit of the 1975 Helsinki Declaration. Ethnography is a well-established method in social science research, which entails the sustained observation of and engagement with a chosen population in a chosen context over an extended period of time. It does not entail the conduct and recording of structured interviews or focus groups but, rather, structured note-taking of the observations and informal conversations conducted.

Data Collection in Ciudad Juárez

Data collection for the sample in Ciudad Juárez, the city with the world's highest homicide rate during the war on drugs (Ortega 2010), was undertaken by Chavez in 2014 and 2015. The research involved surveys and interviews with young men who were serving a prison sentence for a variety of offenses related to the drug trade.[10] During the first stage of the study, 180 youth were randomly selected from a prison population of more than 3,000 to participate in a survey that covered a series of subjects related to participants' aspirations, as well as to their family, school, and the community environment they grew up in. At the end of the survey, all 180 participants were asked whether they would be willing to participate in the second stage of the study, a follow-up interview. From those who consented, after a quick preliminary scan of their survey responses (which either fell in line with or contradicted the study hypotheses), a subsample of only 20 participants was selected for in-depth, semistructured interviews that were conducted face-to-face in prison.[11] Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and an hour and was audio-recorded with participants' consent.

Data Collection in Medellín

Butti collected data over the course of more than 18 months of fieldwork in Colombia between 2015 and 2018 using an ethnographic methodology. Most of the fieldwork was conducted in the Antioquia region in the city of Medellín, and in the small nearby town of San Carlos, which historically has been a center of drug-dealing activities and paramilitary violence (CNMH 2011).[12] Conversations were held predominantly with a group of youth ages 14-29, who were known to consume drugs and sell them for a business that was controlled by criminal structures operating in and around Medellín, and with their families and community members. These boys were selected through a process of snowball sampling, which is common in studies of marginalized populations involved in illicit businesses and of hard-to-reach groups more generally (see Shaghaghi,

10 Law against organized crime in Mexico dictates that, when three or more individuals have organized to execute—in a permanent or systematic way—a series of crimes, they will be sanctioned as members of organized delinquency. The crimes considered in this research were, therefore, (1) crimes against public health, which included transport and possession of drugs, distribution, consumption, and/or cultivation, among others; (2) crimes related to arms trafficking; (3) other forms of organized delinquency, including human trafficking; and (4) theft. The study also considered individuals sentenced for crimes such as (5) kidnapping, (6) extortion, and (7) homicide related to organized crime.

11 For example, one hypothesis of the study was that participants who came from violent households were more likely to have participated in organized criminal activity. We selected a mix of participants for our interviews, some who experienced violence in the household and some who did not.

12 When we refer to Medellín in this paper, it includes the surrounding area.

Bhopal, and Sheikh 2011). Butti lived in the boys' community and, while making her research intentions explicit, she built rapport with a small number of youth who helped her slowly approach others. After she gained their trust, she held daily informal conversations with these youths while observing their routines and practices. She also followed them as they moved between San Carlos and the peripheries of Medellín. These conversations often revolved around the boys' engagement in illegal and violent activities, but they also addressed the range of topics that make up a typical adolescent's life, such as their aspirations for the future. Butti recorded the conversations in written field notes after each engagement; thus, the quotes presented in this paper should not be read as exact transcriptions but as her best attempt to report what her informants said. The quotes presented in this paper come from the limited number of participants with whom Butti was able to achieve a closer level of interaction; she also judged them to be emblematic cases of the population she intended to describe. Relying on the narratives of a few emblematic cases is standard practice in ethnographic research conducted with participants who belong to hidden populations (see, e.g., Goffman 2014; Bourgois 2003).

Analysis

We conducted a separate content analysis for each study, using the quotes and notes from Medellín and Ciudad Juárez. This involved reading through transcripts and notes multiple times, creating separate thematic codes for each study, and identifying segments of the interviews and notes that fit under the developed codes. For the Medellín study, we used the qualitative analysis software NVivo, and for Ciudad Juárez we used AtlasTi. To bring the data on Medellín and Ciudad Juárez together, we identified the main underlying themes of participants' experiences through a collaborative process. We first developed an outline for the paper. Chavez provided initial codes from the Mexico study and checked with Butti to determine if they matched the codes of the Colombia study. Butti then reviewed the initial codes and added more where necessary. We then assigned content from our respective analyses to the corresponding codes. What is interesting and valuable about this joint (rather than comparative) analysis is that we arrived at the same conclusions in different countries using different research methods.

Limitations

This work aims to understand the school experiences of a male population engaged in crime in Medellín and Ciudad Juárez and how these experiences have shaped their delinquent trajectories in the drug business. While we have highlighted the strengths of putting together our different methodological approaches and uncovered similar findings in our research, we are aware that these findings are not generalizable beyond the specific contexts of Medellín and Ciudad Juárez. Furthermore, the questions we have addressed here—how school experiences contribute to youth being pushed out of school and how this relates to their delinquency—do not account for other factors that play a role in the decision to engage in delinquent behavior, such as the presence of fathers or father figures and other family members who are engaged in the drug business. There also are broad macro factors, such as the corruption and institutional weakness in both countries that have allowed the drug business to flourish. However, while important in their own right, these factors are not the focus of this article.

Ethical Considerations

These studies posed three main ethical questions. First, while our research had the potential to be emotionally distressful for both researchers and participants, this was outweighed by the possible benefits of our findings, such as more inclusive education policies and including hard-to-reach youth in future academic research. Second, it was possible that the research work would effectively legitimate the youths' delinquent actions, as asking them about it could make them feel it is an attractive topic. However, we believe that talking to us prompted these youth to engage in some degree of critical reflection on their behavior, rather than pushing them further into it. Third, issues also arose about the publication of sensitive material. However, this study presents the subjective experiences of the young people we engaged with, which do not necessarily present a direct threat to the functioning of the criminal business itself. As such, our research was unlikely to trigger retaliatory reactions against us or our informants. Moreover, we have taken great care to disguise the identities of our young informants by changing their names and some biographical details, always doing so with their informed consent. All participants in the Ciudad Juárez interviews were asked for permission to use an audio recorder and were reminded at different points of the interview that the recorder could be turned off if they felt it was necessary. In the Medellín ethnography, consent was considered an ongoing process and was reiterated numerous times throughout the months of fieldwork.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH INVOLVED IN CRIMINAL GROUPS IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ AND MEDELLÍN

Our findings suggest that youths' school experiences and involvement in the drug business are inextricably linked through a vicious cycle of stigmatization, separation, punishment, and exclusion. For the young men in our study, leaving school and making a career in the street is a way of gaining the social recognition they lack elsewhere. Our findings also show that these youth do put high value on education, but once they have been excluded from school, their attempts to get back in usually fail, which leads them to embed themselves further in the realm of the street. As success at school seems impossible to them, engaging in delinquent behaviors becomes the only alternative way to achieve a better life.

Findings

Dropped Out or Pushed Out?

During interviews, our informants often mentioned *"la falta de dinero"* (the lack of money) as a main reason for leaving school. However, many of the young people who participated in these studies had families that were able to provide for them. In fact, their living conditions were modest but not extremely poor. If it is not dire economic need that pulls these young people into the streets, what is it?

To understand what happens in the streets and why young people end up there, we need to look at what happens while they are still at school. It is not so much that these youth drop out of school for lack of money, as their own statements may suggest and many in their communities believe. A deeper, more nuanced analysis of their narratives shows that they are in fact pushed out of school by stigma, marginalization, and exclusion, as we illustrate in this section.

Our data from both Medellín and Ciudad Juárez show that youth involved in illegal activities are often stereotyped by their communities as students with low academic performance. Many mothers in both contexts, faced with teachers' repeated negative remarks about their children, become convinced that their child *"no es bueno para estudiar"* (is not good at school), as one mother in Medellín said. However, this stereotype did not necessarily match their academic performance. In fact, many of these young people performed well at school.

In Ciudad Juárez, more than half the young people surveyed (54.6%) disagreed and highly disagreed with the statement, "Your grades in school were usually low."[13] When asked during the in-depth interviews about their experiences in school, participants confirmed this finding; at least three of the twenty youths explicitly mentioned performing well in school. When asked about his experiences, Rodrigo, who was 21 years old, mentioned that, before he dropped out of school, he was a highly engaged student involved in academic contests and competitive sports. Jorge, who was 27, abandoned school at the secondary level, but he mentioned liking school so much that he often did his sister's homework.

Several youths in the Medellín study reported similar experiences. They often commented on how smart they were, thus suggesting that they had the ability to be good students. Their problems at school, they suggested, did not come from poor academic performance but from what was often referred to as "unruly behavior." Oscar, who was 22 years old, reported that "they didn't expel me from school because I wasn't good but because I was making trouble all the time." Indeed, as these youth themselves admitted, they routinely violated school regulations, for which they were continually reprimanded, punished, and, ultimately, expelled. As 24-year-old Pedro, from Ciudad Juárez, explained:

> Well . . . in the beginning I was, in fact, very smart. Yes, I had good grades and had no problems there. The problem was that I was very much a *vago* [slacker], a disaster . . . I would often not pay attention to teachers, what they said, and I ignored them. I would present my homework, I would meet what was required of me, but I would not follow disciplinary rules, other norms . . . of keeping quiet, for example.

As a result, these youth are often considered "impossible to deal with," as a teacher in Medellín said. In an attempt to "straighten out" this particular group of students, their teachers used strategies that further isolated and marginalized them. For example, the teachers typically separated the unruly kids from the others. Pedro, from Ciudad Juárez, explained that, before being expelled from school, he was moved from the morning school to the evening school, where there was a concentration of "ungovernable" students and students who did not perform well. He stressed that it was the school authorities who placed him in this group, rather than him choosing to associate with other "unruly" youths:

---

13 While social desirability is a constant factor that may bias survey responses, self-reporting one's behavior is a widely accepted approach to understanding diverse social phenomena in social science fields, such as criminology.

> They switched me from morning [school] to the evening . . . I think the evening shifts at any school are worse . . . this is where *la vagancia* [slackness] and all the unruly kids are concentrated. I mean, in the mornings, they give preference to students who pass exams, who have, well, a higher level. They are given preference. And the evening [school] . . . you could say that this is for people who do not have a good academic level.

As Pedro's case illustrates, although he was performing well in school, his unruly behavior led teachers to move him to an evening shift, where the association with people who did not have a good academic level negatively affected his experience. The teachers made this move despite abundant evidence that pairing students who struggle in the classroom behaviorally or academically with high performers produces better results (see McMaster, Fuchs, and Fuchs 2006). Evidently, labelling Pedro a slack and unruly student became a self-fulfilling prophecy (see Kaplan 1992). Teachers, school psychologists, and others who label some children as "problem" or "ungovernable" students and separate them from others in fact help to push these students out of school and down the criminal path, particularly in societies where criminal opportunity structures already exist. In Pedro's case, for example, the fact that he was performing well in school but was nonetheless placed with low-performing students who often got in trouble reinforced his negative behavior and ultimately contributed to his expulsion from school.

Another strategy often used to bring problematic students back on track was repressive, authoritative punishment. The youth in our studies often reported that teachers were very authoritative and that few played a supportive role for them. Close to one-third of the participants in Ciudad Juárez agreed or highly agreed that, in general, teachers at their school were impatient and distant with the students (30.2%, n=180). More than one-quarter also agreed that their teachers failed to motivate students to continue learning (27.7%, n=180), which suggests that teachers may contribute to negative school experiences.

Jesus from Ciudad Juárez, for example, mentioned that it really bothered him when teachers yelled at him for misbehaving, so he would often yell back. When asked why he had left school, he explained that the violence he suffered at home—he was physically punished by his parents—made him unwilling to accept authority figures in the school setting. In his words, "I did not like to be ordered around . . . maybe I am the way I am because of what I went through as a kid." The qualitative data from Medellín suggest similar conclusions. As 15-year-old Yerson explained when recounting his expulsion, "I really hated how the school principal

was talking to me, telling me what I should and what I shouldn't do, rather than listening to me and trying to understand me."

In both cities, the isolating, repressive, and exclusionary strategies teachers employ to deal with unruly young people are supported by repressive school regulations and education policies. In fact, in Mexico, corporal punishment in the schools is not explicitly prohibited (Plan International and UNICEF 2015), and while Mexico's General Law on Public Education (2015, 45) does establish that "carrying out actions that jeopardize the health or safety of students" constitutes an infraction, Article 75 establishes that the provisions of the law are not applicable to education workers. This effectively entitles teachers to punish their students using physical violence. In fact, almost one-third (30%) of the respondents in the Ciudad Juárez sample agreed or highly agreed that teachers would react with violence, insults, and/or physical violence when students misbehaved (Chavez 2018). Although a major reform of school rules was mandated in Colombia in 2013, many schools in practice still have a punitive system based on repressive sanctions, such as extra homework, cleaning the school, and expulsion (Butti 2019).[14]

It is understandable that, for frustrated teachers faced with overcrowded classrooms and insubordinate students, punishment may be a logical response. Rather than simply policing unruly children, disciplinary practices in schools often impose the ideal that the teacher rules and the pupils obey, and that adult violence is pedagogical whereas child violence is unsettling. To maintain order in the schools, any behavior that disrupts this model must be promptly eliminated, as exemplified by the story of 22-year-old Oscar from Medellín, who at the time of the research was an active drug dealer:

> One day, I found a mobile phone in the toilet and just took it for myself. I thought no one had seen me, but a teacher had. She came to me and told me, "Here's the little thief of the school! Oscar, where is the mobile?" So, I was taken to the school director's office. The director slapped me on my face: "It seems nowadays no one punishes these kids at home, so it's necessary to do that at school!" he exclaimed. I started beating him back. As a result, they expelled me from school, and that damaged *mi hoja de vida* [my curriculum vitae]. That gave me a reputation as the "problem student" of the school. They wrote that I am aggressive, and that they will never receive me again to study in

14 Law 1620 of 2013 and Decree 1965 of 2013.

> a school. Since then, I am considered a danger for other students. So, I don't feel like going back to studying.

Oscar's detailed account of how he was expelled from school sheds light on the vicious cycle linking stigmatization, punishment, and exclusion. Oscar's previous notoriety as a problem student, as he himself explained, led school authorities to react violently to the theft of the mobile phone. This triggered an aggressive reaction in him, which reinforced his existing reputation. The negative mark his expulsion left on Oscar's curriculum vitae, as he called it, emblematically reducing his life to a sheet of paper, crystallized the "bad kid" stigma attached to him and reduced his chance of being able—or even wanting—to return to school, which led him to embark on a criminal path instead.

Indeed, even when these youth are suspended from school for just a couple of days, they take it as an indication that they are no longer welcome there. In his account, Oscar emphasized that not returning to school was a personal decision, which many of these youth stressed in their narratives. While there certainly is a degree of agency in their decisions, our data demonstrate that, more than choosing to drop out of school (as some of them put it), these youth are in fact pushed out by a series of hostile practices and policies that end up stigmatizing, isolating, and eventually expelling them.

Being Someone in Life

Once they are pushed out of school, these youth look for other ways of "being someone," as they often said, which is where the street life and its economically attractive options come in. This process begins by their framing school as boring and pointless. They express their preference for "hanging out" (*andar en la vagancia* in Ciudad Juárez and *gaminear* in Medellín). Manuel, a 29-year-old Mexican, explained the concept of hanging out: "As a *chavalo* [youth], one leaves the school, does homework, and then goes to hang out in the neighborhood. You go out to the street, out there, on the street corner . . . with all the other friends from the neighborhood, who are also in [the same] school with you. And we would all go there and hang out." Milán, a 28-year-old Mexican, mentioned that common neighborhood activities included "graffitiing . . . hanging out with people from the neighborhood." Ricardo, who started using drugs at age 13, commented that the most common activities in the neighborhood were "going from party to party, getting high, hanging out with *morritas* [girls]."

But is hanging out really all these young people aspire to? A nuanced appreciation of their statements and behaviors reveals a different story. Even when they have been stigmatized and rejected by the school, these youth continue to have educational aspirations. For example, when participants from Ciudad Juárez were asked to list five things they aspired to in life in order of importance, having an education ranked as the first priority among 37.8 percent (Chavez 2018), which highlights the importance they place on education.

In addition, the young people participating in our studies in both countries repeatedly tried to go back to school. Their statements about the nice and easy life in the streets were often intertwined with more reflective remarks about the value of education: "I would like to have a decent life, an education, a job," said Pablo, a 15-year-old Colombian. However, he immediately added, "I would like to [go back to school], but it seems impossible." Indeed, their attempts to go back to school were often in vain, as the structure that pushed them out the first time remained in place and they encountered the same obstacles—difficulties with teachers, with discipline, with peers—which pushed them out once again. As Pedro from Ciudad Juárez explained, "In my mind, I wanted to be a part of society, do you understand? But there were moments of anger, that made society believe that I was a bad person . . . which I was." In these situations, teachers often do not offer a helping hand. "It's useless to invest in them," said one Colombian teacher. "They have already been lost."

While these youth often describe leaving school as a decision that they have control over, their narratives are intertwined with a deep sense of regret. Data from the Ciudad Juárez study suggest that recognizing the value of an education often emerges in the later stages of the transition from youth to adulthood, and perhaps more so during a period of incarceration, when participants have had time to reflect on their life choices. Manuel, a Mexican youth serving time in prison, originally stated that he left school because he did not like it, but he also mentioned that, to prevent young people like him from engaging in criminal activity, the government needed to provide them with an education. Although primary and secondary school in Mexico are free and compulsory, Manuel is correct in stating that public education does not reach all children. School fees, supplies, and uniforms are often prohibitive costs for families who live at or below the national poverty line. Moreover, where public education is affordable, the difference in quality between public and private institutions is great. As a result, not all students have equal access to quality education. The importance of education as a preventative strategy was also highlighted by Milán, a Ciudad Juárez participant. When asked what advice he could offer Mexican youth to

steer them away from participating in crime, he said that "they [should] start studying *machin,*" a word derived from the English "machine" that indicates intensity. In other words, Milán was emphatically advocating for young people to invest in their education. In the participants' narratives, education was often equated with the notion of *ser alguien en la vida* (being somebody in life), as Yerson from Medellín explained:

> Studying is the only thing that counts, right? If you don't have education and money, you are no one for the government. Today, you need a basic education even just to sweep the streets. If you don't have that, you can't do anything, so you are no one. Without a job, you don't have anything. You don't exist.

If having an education, and therefore a job, means existing, what becomes of those who, for a variety of reasons, are repeatedly pushed out of school? Convinced as they are that school is a place where they will never be able to succeed, these young people have only one option left: to craft an alternative school for themselves, *la escuela de la calle,* the school of the street. As José Luis, a young Mexican, explained, "Either you are a student or you belong to the street corner." This suggests that, if one cannot have the identity of student, the only alternative is the identity of the street. Yerson from Medellín described his time as a youth on the street:

> I learned so much there. I learned not to believe in anyone. I learned that the person who is closest to you is also the one who is most likely to stab you in the back. I learned to have more hatred, more anger. I learned to recognize people from one look—knowing if they are fake, if they can betray me, or not. I also had friendships that were worth it. I also learned some skills, like working wood.

Their statements reveal that these young people are in fact eager to learn but that the school was not a place they were welcome to do so. The choice to leave school was, then, also a choice to move out of an environment where these youth feel their intelligence is not appreciated to one where they feel it is: the street. As they often say, *la inteligencia criminal* (criminal intelligence) is essential to "make it" in the streets and to pursue a successful criminal career. The youth enjoy bragging about this quality and emphasize how skilled they are at planning criminal missions. Thus they stress that being a criminal is not something for everyone: you need to be street smart. As Yerson said, "I know I am very intelligent, but I only use [my]

intelligence to do bad things. I know how to build a bomb, you know! That's a very complicated thing. But that's very easy for me." In other words, these youth often stressed that they are smart and have a talent—talent the school system never recognized in them.

Rather than representing their genuine aspirations, these young people embrace the identity of the *vago/gamín* (someone who likes the street) and of the criminal as alternatives to that of the good student, which their parents, teachers, and communities have repeatedly told them they will never be. Engaging in delinquent acts, therefore, is a way—perhaps the only viable way they see—to have a better life.

Crucially, the better life and sense of recognition these youth find in the street also entail having money. This money is not necessary for them to live—as noted above, most of these youth did not live in extreme poverty—but to be able to afford more than others around them. This is something these youth have admired since their first years of life. David, a 24-year-old from Ciudad Juárez, explained: "Seeing, I don't know, that they [his friends] had a good car, or well, that they did not go to school and even then they had [material things] . . . I realized that it [school] was not necessary. If I can have the same things, it is not necessary for me to go [to school]." Like David, many of the participants in our studies cared about being able to display expensive material goods, not only as markers of social status but as a glaring reminder that the promise of capitalism is only for some: for the rich people who live in luxury districts, and for those who carve out a high place on the social ladder by engaging in criminal activities and manage to "succeed" without educational qualifications.

In societies that tend to equate masculinity with providing for the family through monetary success but that also are affected by high rates of youth unemployment and job scarcity, especially for the least educated youth, illicit activity is the only way of achieving this success. Having money—and especially more money than others—is key to being someone in social terms, to earning respect. As Yerson from Medellín explained, "*Ser alguien* (being someone) means that you have a house, a job, money. That's when you are someone. But if you have no money, you are no one." For these youth, who have failed to "be someone" at school, money becomes an existential necessity, as it proves, to themselves and to others, that their life matters.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Through a combined analysis of interview, survey, and ethnographic data from Ciudad Juárez and Medellín, we have explored how educational experiences shape certain young people's engagement in the illegal drug business. The available literature offers some explanation of why adolescents and young men in these contexts drop out of the school system, but it less often frames the issue as one of youth being "pushed out." Nor does it focus on a central theme of how their educational experiences contribute to their embarking on a delinquent path. While the literature on youth engagement in crime and violence points to the importance of the school-delinquency connection, this strand of scholarship lacks an in-depth analysis of the link between educational experiences and delinquent behavior.

In this paper, we have drawn from our research to offer some insight into the school experiences of a group of youths and how these experiences connect to their delinquency. Our findings demonstrate that educational experiences shape youth involvement in the drug business similarly across two different contexts, both of which are hotspots of the war on drugs.

We find that their desire for a better life does not imply that the study participants were living in extreme poverty. In fact, economic hardship does not wholly explain why these young people left school and engaged in delinquent activities. What money made through the drug trade represents for these young people is not a means of survival but a way of obtaining social recognition, which they lacked with their families and schools—in short, an illegitimate avenue for a legitimate want. A context of high inequality, as these youth experienced in Ciudad Juárez on the Mexico-US border and in the urban sprawl of Medellín, generates urgent material desires that are difficult to meet by following a traditional education pathway. This draws youth toward what is by far the most lucrative business in their neighborhoods: selling drugs. This finding runs counter to the idea that the main reason for leaving school is economic need. We suggest, rather, that among the urban poor, and particularly at-risk youth, it may be that relative poverty or inequality plays a larger role than pressing economic need in their decision to leave school. Being able to afford expensive goods allows these youth to feel they are someone, in both economic and social terms. This finding confirms previous research with young men who engage in illicit activity across the globe in cities like Caracas, Venezuela, where Zubillaga (2009) noted that young men engage in crime as an avenue to reaffirm their social existence—but also in London, Philadelphia, and elsewhere around the globe.

Second, participants' repeated failure in school does not necessarily indicate a lack of academic talent, an assumption that is contradicted by their high performance in their early school years, nor does it explain their participation in criminal activities. With this finding, we challenge the argument that youth who participate in delinquent or risky behaviors did not perform well or were not invested in school, and that poor school performance explains their engagement in criminality (see, e.g., Thornberry et al. 2003; Booth et al. 2008). Our findings reveal instead that repressive and exclusionary school regulations do not help to integrate children who, despite performing well, are particularly unruly and have a hard time complying with normative behavior. Being continuously punished by the system, these "unruly" youth often decide to leave school completely and instead to turn to the street life, where the opportunity to participate in the drug business is in place. Our findings confirm that students are not making the decision to leave school in a vacuum; rather, they are being pushed out of school by a series of relationships and disciplinary processes.

Third, despite these youths' continued assertions that school was boring, the fact that they repeatedly attempted to go back and often expressed ambition to complete their education and have a professional career demonstrates that they do not, in fact, lack the motivation to study. Our findings show that, despite all the challenges and conflicts these young people experience in the school setting, they continue to put a high value on education and try to get back into the system, only to be pushed out time and again. The feeling of being rejected and out of place in school leads them to develop oppositional behaviors in which hanging out is preferable to staying at school. Thus they turn to the realm of the street, where they feel their intelligence is more appreciated. As they become convinced that success at school is impossible, engaging in delinquent acts becomes the only alternative way to demonstrate that they are smart—even if street smart—and of getting what they view as a better life.

Our findings have several policy-relevant implications. First, gathering systematic data on students' background characteristics to identify those at risk of participation or engagement in criminal activity is essential to providing targeted support. This is especially necessary at the upper-secondary level, where the highest rates of school abandonment occur. Second, expelling children from school should be avoided, even for just a few days, as it discourages youth, particularly those living in marginalized areas, from going back to school altogether. Third, rather than concentrating unruly students in the same classroom, peer support networks should be established between these students and those who do not have conduct issues. Fourth, there should be alternatives to merit-based scholarships that can

cover school costs, as well as further studies, for students who are underperforming but nonetheless quite capable. Finally, it is worth reflecting on the mismatch between the skills typically valued by schools, such as discipline and diligence, and the skills the youth we worked with bring to the table, such as inventiveness and initiative. We ask, Is there room for reorienting the school curriculum to integrate and reward a wider variety of skills?

Taken individually, each of these young people seems insignificant to the broader drug trade, as their lives are often considered irrelevant and easily taken away. As a whole, however, this mass of drug-selling youths is critical—even vital—to the overall functioning of the criminal organizations that threaten security in the regions we studied. This points to the importance of conducting further research on this youth population. Our findings highlight the need to conduct more studies that explore young people's trajectories out of school and into crime, that span disciplinary boundaries, and that use diverse methodologies to deepen understanding of these young people and their lives.

REFERENCES

Agnew, Robert. 1991. "A Longitudinal Test of Social Control Theory and Delinquency." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 28 (2): 126-56. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427891028002002.

Anderson, Elijah. 2000. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Astorga, Luis. 2005. *El Siglo de las Drogas*. Mexico City: Plaza y Janés.

Azaola, Elena, and Catalina Pérez-Correa. 2012. *Resultados de la primera encuesta realizada a población interna en Centros Federales de Readaptación Social*. Mexico City: Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas. https://publiceconomics.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/encuesta_internos_cefereso_2012.pdf.

Booth, Jeb, Amy Farrell, and Sean P. Varano. 2008. "Social Control, Serious Delinquency, and Risky Behavior: A Gendered Analysis." *Crime & Delinquency* 54 (3): 423-56. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128707306121.

Bourgois, Philippe. 2003. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burdick-Will, Julia. 2013. "School Violent Crime and Academic Achievement in Chicago." *Sociology of Education* 86 (4): 343-61. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040713494225.

Butti, Elena. "'We Are the Nobodies': Youth Violence, Marginality and Social Cleansing in Colombia." PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2019.

Chavez, Cirenia. "Youth and Organised Crime in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico: An Exploration of Contributing Factors." PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2018.

Chioda, Laura. 2017. *Stop the Violence in Latin America: A Look at Prevention from Cradle to Adulthood*. Washington, DC: World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/25920.

CNMH (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica). 2011. *San Carlos: Memorias del Éxodo en la Guerra*. Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica.

De la Rubia, José, and Humberto Ortiz Morales. 2012. "Risk and Protective Factors of Dissocial Behaviour in a Probability Sample." *The Spanish Journal of Psychology* 15 (2): 736-47. https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_SJOP.2012.v15.n2.38885.

Densley, James A. 2013. *How Gangs Work: An Ethnography of Youth Violence*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

El Espectador. 2018. "Narcoajustes Mexicanos en Colombia." February 11, 2018. https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/narcoajustes-mexicanos-en-colombia/.

Garot, Robert. 2010. *Who You Claim: Performing Gang Identity in School and on the Streets*. New York: New York University Press.

Goffman, Alice. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. New York: Picador.

González-Pérez, Guillermo, Maria Guadalupe Vega-López, Carlos Enrique Cabrera-Pivaral, Agustín Vega-López, and Armando Muñoz de la Torre. 2012. "Mortalidad por Homicidios en México: Tendencias, Variaciones Socio-geográficas y Factores Asociados." *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva* 17 (12): 3195-208. https://doi.org/10.1590/S1413-81232012001200005.

Grillo, Ioan. 2011. *El Narco: The Bloody Rise of Mexican Drug Cartels*. London: Bloomsbury.

Henry, Kimberly, Kelly Knight, and Terence Thornberry. 2012. “School Disengagement as a Predictor of Dropout, Delinquency, and Problem Substance Use During Adolescence and Early Adulthood.” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 41 (2): 156-66. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-011-9665-3.

Hernández, Anabel. 2010. *Los Señores del Narco*. Mexico City: Grijalbo.

Hirschi, Travis. 1969. *Causes of Delinquency*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hirschi, Travis, and Michael R. Gottfredson. 1995. “Control Theory and the Life-Course Perspective.” *Studies on Crime & Crime Prevention* 4 (2): 131-42.

Kaplan, Carina Viviana. 1992. *Buenos y Malos Alumnos: Descripciones que Predicen*. Buenos Aires: Aique.

MacLeod, Jay. 2008. *Ain’t No Makin’ It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. New York: Avalon.

McMaster, Kirsten L., Douglas Fuchs, and Lynn Fuchs. 2006. “Research on Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies: The Promise and Limitations of Peer-Mediated Instruction.” *Reading & Writing Quarterly* 22 (1): 5-25. https://doi.org/10.1080/10573560500203491.

Molloy, Molly, and Charles Bowden, eds. 2011. *El Sicario: The Autobiography of a Mexican Assassin*. New York: Nation Books.

Muehlmann, Shaylih. 2013. *When I Wear My Alligator Boots: Narco-Culture in the U.S. Mexico Borderlands*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Muggah, Robert, and Katherine Aguirre. 2018. *Citizen Security in Latin America: Facts and Figures*. Strategic Paper No. 33. Rio de Janeiro: Igarapé Institute. https://igarape.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Citizen-Security-in-Latin-America-Facts-and-Figures.pdf.

Obregón, Javier, Rafael Malagón, Oscar A. Quintero, Sebastián Velez, and Irene C. Parra. 2010. *Identificar y Realizar un Analisis de los Factores Asociados a la Permanencia y Desercion Escolar de las Instituciones Educativas Oficiales del Pais*. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia. https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/articles-293674_archivo_pdf_institucional.pdf.

Ortega, José A. 2010. *Cd. Juárez, por Segundo Año Consecutivo, la Ciudad Más Violenta del Mundo*. Mexico City: Seguridad, Justicia y Paz. http://www.seguridadjusticiaypaz.org.mx/sala-de-prensa/58-cd-Ju%C3%A1rez-por-segundo-ano-consecutivo-la-ciudad-mas-violenta-del-mundo.

Plan International and UNICEF (UN Children's Fund). 2015. *Toolkit and Analysis of Legislation and Public Policies to Protect Children and Adolescents from All Forms of Violence in Schools*. Panama City: Plan International and UNICEF. http://www.ungei.org/Toolkit_and_Analysis_of_Legislation_and_Public_Policies_To_Protect_Children_and_Adolescents_from_all_Forms_of_Violence_in_Schools_ENG(1).pdf.

Rodgers, Dennis, and Gareth A. Jones. 2009. "Youth Violence in Latin America: An Overview and Agenda for Research." In *Youth Violence in Latin America: Gangs and Juvenile Justice in Perspective,* edited by Gareth A. Jones and Dennis Rodgers, 1-24. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública). 2012. *Reporte de la Encuesta Nacional de Deserción en la Educación Media Superior.* Mexico City: SEP. http://www.sems.gob.mx/work/models/sems/Resource/10787/1/images/Anexo_6Reporte_de_la_ENDEMS.pdf.

Shaghaghi, Abdolreza, Raj S. Bhopal, and Aziz Sheikh. 2011. "Approaches to Recruiting 'Hard-to-Reach' Populations into Research: A Review of the Literature." *Health Promotion Perspectives* 1 (2): 86-94. https://doi.org/10.5681/hpp.2011.009.

Shoemaker, Donald J. 1990. *Theories of Delinquency: An Examination of Explanations of Delinquent Behavior.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thornberry, Terence P., Marvin D. Krohn, Alan J. Lizotte, Carolyn A. Smith, and Kimberly Tobin. 2003. *Gangs and Delinquency in Developmental Perspective.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Trucco, Daniela, and Heidi Ullmann. 2016. *Youth: Realities and Challenges for Achieving Development with Equality*. ECLAC Books No. 137. Santiago, Chile: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. https://repositorio.cepal.org/handle/11362/40015.

Ward, Thomas. 2013. *Gangsters without Borders: An Ethnography of a Salvadoran Street Gang.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wolseth, Jon. 2014. *Life on the Malecón: Children and Youth on the Streets of Santo Domingo.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

World Bank. 2014. *Intentional Homicides (per 100,000 people).* Washington, DC: World Bank. http://data.worldbank.org.

World Bank. 2018. *Education Statistics: Rate of Out-of-School Adolescents of Lower Secondary School Age*. Washington, DC: World Bank. http://databank.worldbank.org.

Zubillaga, Verónica. 2009. "'Gaining Respect': The Logic of Violence among Young Men in the Barrios of Caracas, Venezuela." In *Youth Violence in Latin America: Gangs and Juvenile Justice in Perspective,* edited by Gareth A. Jones and Dennis Rodgers, 83-103. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.