



THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF VIOLENCE: TESTIMONIALS FROM PRISON

A child's social, demographic, and economic upbringing are widely believed to be important indicators of possible future criminal behavior. A new study entitled "The Intergenerational Transmission of Violence: Testimonials from Prison" provides new evidence of an association between experiences with domestic violence at an early age and future criminal behavior among incarcerated persons in eight Latin American countries.¹

Major Findings

Experiences with intrafamily violence at an early age are widespread among incarcerated women and men in Latin America.

- 47 percent of those surveyed were *direct* victims of violence in the home: women (42%), men (48%).
- 32 percent were *indirect* victims who either witnessed domestic violence personally or grew up in a violent household: women (35%), men (32%).

Direct and *indirect* experiences with intrafamily violence affect future criminal behavior differently among women and men:

- The impact on future criminal behavior is greatest among women who experience *indirect* violence during childhood. Women who experience *indirect* violence are more likely than men to become repeat offenders, and more likely than men to possess a firearm in their lifetime. Experiences with *indirect* violence have less impact on men.
- Experiences of *direct* violence affect both women and men roughly equally, increasing their likelihood of recidivism.

Early experiences with intrafamily violence have an impact on whether incarcerated men and women become repeat offenders and whether they possess firearms or use a firearm in their lifetime.

Recidivism

- 32 percent of those surveyed were repeat offenders: women (20%), men (34%).
- Both men and woman who experience *direct* family violence during childhood are more likely to be repeat offenders.
- Women who experience *indirect* family violence are more likely to be repeat offenders.

Possession of Firearms

- 55 percent of those surveyed have possessed and/or used a firearm in their lifetime: women (26%), men (61%).
- Men who experience *direct* family violence during childhood are more likely than women to possess a firearm in their lifetime.
- Women who experience *indirect* family violence during childhood are more likely than men to possess a firearm in their lifetime.

Recommendations for Policymakers Based on These Findings

Policymakers designing crime and domestic violence prevention programs should focus on how *direct* and *indirect* intrafamily violence impacts differently the future criminal behavior of women and men.

- Programs for women should focus on reducing incidence of both *direct* and *indirect* violence since both have a significant impact on a woman's future criminal behavior.
- Programs for men should prioritize reducing *direct* violence since it affects men's future criminal behavior at a greater rate than do experiences with *indirect* violence.

¹ This study authored by the Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos sobre Inseguridad y Violencia at the Universidad Tres de Febrero (BID/CELIV-UNTREF) and is based on their survey, "Encuesta de presos condenados," conducted in eight countries: Argentina, Brasil, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Chile. 8,285 women and men were interviewed.

Methodology

The report's findings are based on a survey of 8,285 incarcerated women (1,287) and men (6,998) in eight Latin American countries. The study asks two research questions:

1. To what extent does childhood experience with intrafamily violence (*direct* or *indirect*) influence future criminal behavior?
2. Do gender differences exist in future criminal behavior based on childhood experience with intrafamily violence?

The report is based on a multivariate analysis that employed logistical regressions to explore the risk factors associated with intrafamily violence. The dependent variables studied include whether the subject has a prior criminal conviction (recidivism rate) and whether the subject has ever possessed a firearm. The independent variables are whether the subject experienced intrafamily violence directly (was the victim), or whether the subject experienced the violence indirectly (either witnessing it, or living in a violent household).

