Abstract

There is a marked contrast between the growing sense of insecurity among the population and the absence of consolidated statistics that would allow the phenomenon to be measured more objectively. Bearing in mind the lack of comparative studies for the Latin American region, this paper seeks to make a contribution from a social and economic perspective to the understanding of crime and the situation of citizen insecurity affecting the region. It begins by examining some manifestations of criminal violence in the 1990s, especially in urban areas. It then examines the most important theories on violence, the profiles of victims and attackers, traditional and emerging forms of delinquency, domestic and intra-family violence, the frequent relation between violence and unemployment and the economic cost of crime and delinquency.
Introduction

Latin America is confronted with various sources of insecurity. From the economic perspective, the sources are many-sided and among the principal ones are those resulting from the globalization process. These have been accompanied by the decline of employment protection, and are also due to unforeseen results of the international crises and varying capital flows, macroeconomic instabilities, as well as the weakness of the institutions to confront those risks (Rodrik, 2001). There is no doubt that among the most direct causes of that insecurity is the rise in crime and violence that explains partially the increasing feeling of insecurity in citizens' daily life. There is a close relationship between lack of social integration and high level of insecurity. When social groups internalize behaviour patterns that do not follow the legal and social rules, society is increasingly exposed to the use of violence as a way to settle conflicts and obtain resources. The difficulties that institutions experience in guaranteeing citizen protection and applying justice accentuate the perception of insecurity.

1. The relations between delinquency and violence. Concepts of citizen and public security

In social science there are two basic theories in violence and criminal conduct, which are used in various combinations: the theory of forms of socialization and the theory of rupture or anomie. The first of these emphasizes socialization milieu, holding that violence has organizational, institutional and cultural dimensions which can lead to the selection of violent strategies by certain social actors. Thus, the theory put forward by Sutherland claims that the primary causes of delinquency lie in the existence of subcultural groups of criminals (friends, family, prison acquaintances) which pass on criminal know-how (ILPES, 1997).

The second theory places more emphasis on structural and social dimensions as explanatory factors: violence stems from the breakdown or maladjustment of the social order, that is to say, from rapid social changes due to industrialization and urbanization which dissolve the traditional social control mechanisms and generate a gap between aspirations and the socially and culturally accepted means of making them come true (Martínez, 1990). Thus, for example, Malton’s theory holds that criminal conduct depends on the capacity of individuals to attain their goals in line with their social environment and the importance attached to economic success (ILPES, 1997). From this standpoint, then, there is an important correlation between poverty and delinquency and social exclusion.

Against a background of rapid changes in the economic field and the appearance of new economic needs, the deterioration in the quality of life of broad sectors of the population and the failure to solve long-standing problems (civil wars,
inequality of income distribution and access to land, delinquency seems a self-defence mechanism for unlucky losers (traditional forms of delinquency such as burglary, theft or armed robbery) or as a new way of making easy money through corruption or through new methods such as laundering hot money, electronic fraud, etc. (Moulian, 1997).

With regard to the definition of violence, there is some degree of consensus that it should be understood as the use or threat of physical or psychological force with harmful intent on a recurrent basis and as a way of settling conflicts (Guerrero, 1997; McAlister, 1998; Tironi and Weinstein, 1990). Violence is related to aggressiveness but is more than just an aggressive action, because it is recurrent and forms part of a process; it may also be noted that there are aggressive actions which are not violent. Aggressiveness has a psychological basis in frustration, but in order for frustration to give rise to aggressive actions it must be combined with other elements: for example, obstacles to the attainment of an anticipated objective, rage over arbitrary treatment, or a habit of responding aggressively to problem situations (Tironi and Weinstein, 1990). In other words, violence and related aspects such as aggression or frustration depend on a complex set of psychological, social and cultural elements.

In defining citizen security, emphasis has been placed on various dimensions and levels, especially its intangible and subjective nature. Broadly, it may be defined as concern for quality of life and human dignity in terms of freedom, access to the market and social opportunities. Poverty and lack of opportunities, unemployment, hunger, deterioration of the environment, political repression, violence, delinquency and drug addiction can all be threats to citizen security (ILPES, 1997, p. 5). From another standpoint, it is held that citizen security mainly means not living in fear of suffering a violent attack, knowing that one’s physical integrity will be respected, and, above all, being able to enjoy the privacy of one’s home without the fear of assault and moving freely around the streets without the fear of being robbed or attacked. Security would thus be a cultural construct involving an equalitarian form of sociability, an environment freely shared by all (UNDP, 1998, p. 128).

At a more limited level, public security has been defined as the set of coherent and interlinked policies and actions which serve to guarantee the public peace by the prevention and repression of delinquency and offences against public order through a system of penal and administrative control (González Ruiz, López and Núñez, 1994).

2. **Factors associated with violence**

The complexity of violence is reflected in the great variety of different types and levels it displays. By its nature, violence may be classified as physical, psychological or sexual; by its victims, as violence against children, women, or old people; by its motive, as political, racial, etc., and by its place of occurrence, as domestic, workplace, street violence, etc. (Guerrero, 1998; Larraín, Vega and Delgado, 1997). Violence can
also be defined according to the effects it causes in its victims and may be cross-referenced as personal or institutional and physical or psychological violence.

In view of the nature of the phenomenon of violence, it is necessary to adopt a multi-causal approach -like the epidemiological approach used in public health- in which the aim is not to establish the cause of violence but to identify the factors that produce it or are most frequently associated with it (Guerrero, 1998; PAHO, 1996) and those that usually operate together, with emphasis on the work of prevention. In this approach, the causality is always interpreted as probability, so that the more factors of risk are present at the same time, the greater the probability that the phenomenon will occur (Fedesarrollo, 1996).

The factors of risk may be classified in three main groups:

i) factors related with the position and family and social status of the persons in question: sex, age, education, socialization in an atmosphere of violence, consumption of alcohol and drugs;

ii) social, economic and cultural factors: unemployment, poverty, overcrowding, social inequality, violence in the mass media, culture of violence, and

iii) contextual and institutional factors: war, drug trafficking, corruption, availability of firearms, parties and other festive occasions.

Quantitative information is available for some Latin American countries on some of the social and economic shortcomings usually associated with urban violence (table 1). The interaction of these quantifiable factors of risk with others of a more qualitative nature on which information is not available can give rise to a climate of violence.

| TABLE 1 Latin America: Presence of urban violence risk factors, 1997 |
|------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Quantifiable risk factors | Countries with a high presence | Countries with a medium presence | Countries with a low presence |
| 1. Urban income inequality (ratio of 10% richest to 40% poorest) | Ratio of over 11: Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Guatemala, Panama | Ratio of 8 to 11: Argentina, Bolivia, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Dominican Republic and Venezuela | Ratio of up to 8: Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico and Uruguay |
| 2. Poverty of urban households | 40% or more of households: Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Venezuela | Between 20% and 39% of households: Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Dominican Republic | Less than 20% of households: Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Uruguay |
### Quantifiable risk factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>Countries with a high presence</th>
<th>Countries with a medium presence</th>
<th>Countries with a low presence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Rate of open urban unemployment</td>
<td>Over 10%: Argentina, Colombia, Panama, Uruguay, Venezuela</td>
<td>Between 6% and 10%: Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Paraguay, Peru</td>
<td>Less than 6%: Bolivia, Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Percentage of urban young people between 13 and 17 who neither study nor work</td>
<td>Over 15%: Honduras, Uruguay</td>
<td>Between 8% and 15%: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Venezuela</td>
<td>Less than 8%: Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Dominican Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Educational deficit (percentage of urban young people aged 14 or 15 who have not completed 6 years’ schooling)</td>
<td>Over 20%: Brazil, Honduras</td>
<td>Between 10% and 20%: Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Venezuela</td>
<td>Less than 10%: Argentina, Chile, Panama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Percentage of urban young people between 13 and 17 who work</td>
<td>Over 15%: Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay</td>
<td>Between 5% and 15%: Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Uruguay</td>
<td>Up to 5%: Chile, Panama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Prepared by the author on the basis of ECLAC (1999).*

The factors set forth in the table should also undoubtedly be related with others of a historical and cultural nature in order to understand the phenomena of urban violence and the differences between one country and another. Nevertheless, the quantification which has been made of some social and economic factors does indicate situations of risk that should be tackled with effective public policies.

Many of these risks factors are considered in an isolated way in the sectorial analysis of education, employment and poverty. Nevertheless, the consideration of these dimensions as a whole provides scenarios of diverse situations of greater and lesser exposure to violence and delinquency. When considering one or more dimensions the effects could intensify crime (negative synergy) as in the case of a high employment, great inequality in income, and educational deficits (see Table 1 again).

### 3. Poverty, delinquency and urban violence

The growth of urban poverty in the last decade is usually seen as being associated with the increase in violence, delinquency and insecurity in the cities. Violence and insecurity do not depend only on poverty, however (box 1). Experience shows that, rather than poverty, it is inequality -together with other social, cultural and psychological factors- that generates more violence. This allows us to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of delinquency, in both its traditional and emergent forms. Various studies carried out in Peru and Colombia have found no relation between poverty and violence: the poorest regions are not the most violent ones, nor
is there a correlation between poverty and the number of murders (Fedesarrollo, 1996; Reyna and Toche, 1999).

**Box 1**

**POVERTY IS NOT THE ONLY CAUSE OF DELINQUENCY**

**If it were:**

- There would be more delinquency in the least developed countries, while the richest and most highly developed countries would necessarily be the safest.
- The worst security crises should occur during the most devastating economic crises, but this has not necessarily been the case.
- The areas of a country with the highest crime rates would be the most economically depressed areas, but this is not always so.
- Among delinquents detected, there should be many workers earning the minimum wage, unemployed, or people who have been looking for work for a long time.
- Crime rates should go down as the economy grows.
- The solution to delinquency would depend on economic policy and on the wealth distribution pattern.
- All poor people would be potential delinquents.

*Source: Prepared on the basis of data from the Mexican Institute for the Study of Organized Crime, A.C. (IMECO, 1998).*

The existence of networks of mutual relations and confidence in a community fosters much smoother and less violent forms of interaction, even in conditions of poverty. This “social capital” (Putnam, 1993) can make the difference between a poor community with low levels of violence and a community with a similar level of poverty but higher levels of violence. However, it has been pointed out that there is also a “perverse” form of social capital in which the networks, contacts and associations serve illegal activities (Rubio, 1998a).

A fairly widespread interpretation on the generation of violence is that poverty generates frustration, and this leads to radical or aggressive forms of conduct which, in turn, give rise to violent situations. Taking this point of view, the idea is that the crises in the economies of the region mean that large numbers of persons remain outside the formal labour market and the resulting frustration drives them to aggressive forms of behaviour, which would explain the waves of violence breaking over the big cities of the region. However, this form of analysis (poverty-frustration-aggression) may be too superficial to account for the varied and changing situations of violence observed.
Indeed, there is evidence both for and against this approach. A study made in Santiago, Chile, estimated that an increase of one percentage point in unemployment leads to 4% more offences against property, thefts and robberies (García, 1997). In the same country, however, it was found that there was a greater propensity to violence among those waiting to enter the labour force (jobless) or those already incorporated in it as wage earners than among those most marginalized from the labour market (Tironi, 1989). Attitudes of adaptation and resignation were observed among informal workers. It would seem, then, that aggression is not the only response to frustration, and that individuals who do react aggressively do so because they have learned to respond in this manner.

Even though poverty may not be the sole cause of delinquency, it is nevertheless associated with it, as are other factors such as inequality and social injustice. Many of those who blame poverty for delinquency base their views on the profile of delinquents arrested and punished, who are mostly males of a low socio-economic level. It must be borne in mind, however, that the percentage of arrests is only small compared with the total number of offences committed. There are a large number of unpunished offences, such as economic offences or cases of corruption, which are often difficult to prove, involve economically powerful groups, and are likely to be committed by persons of higher educational and economic status.

4. The measurement of offences and their economic cost

The measurement of violent offences is a difficult matter because of the variety of definitions and classifications used to record them in different countries, due to the differences in the levels and types of violence in Latin America. The concept of violence is usually limited to physical violence, in order to facilitate the use of traditional forms of data collection, such as records of injuries or deaths. Although it is more difficult to assess the psychological or emotional damage caused, however, this may nevertheless have disabling and permanent consequences (Larraín, Vega and Delgado, 1997).

Most of the countries of the region do not have a nationwide institution responsible for collecting, processing and consolidating this type of statistics, which makes it more difficult to determine the size of the problem and to construct series which show the evolution of violence and citizen security. With regard to the recording of offences, there are three types of sources of information: i) police records, which register the complaints made and reflect the response of civil society to the offences in question (De Rementería, 1998); ii) judicial records, which register court cases, and iii) health records, which register deaths and injuries. No country of the region carries out ongoing public opinion surveys to assess the level and evolution of citizen security.

Moreover, the reliability of the statistics is affected by the under-recording of some offences, such as common violence and, above all, sexual and intra-family violence. This latter type of violence is on the increase in almost all the countries,
assuredly because more official complaints are lodged now that this type of conduct is considered a criminal offence rather than a private matter.

Some countries - Colombia, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Peru and Brazil - have made improvements in the typification and definition of levels of violence, in the measurement of its economic cost, and in other forms of assessment of the phenomenon such as surveys among victims which make it possible to analyse the true rate of occurrence of violence.

Generally speaking, analyses of violence are based on the statistics of violent crimes, especially homicides, because of their serious nature and the fact that they tend to be recorded more carefully and reliably, thus permitting their comparison over time and between countries (Rubio, 1998b). For the purpose of comparisons in the region, the rate of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants was used, which shows that between the 1980s and the mid-1990s there was an increase in violence in the region. International comparisons made in the early 1990s put Latin America and the Caribbean among the most violent regions of the world, with average rates close to 20 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (Guerrero, 1998). More recently, in 1995, a case study in six countries of the region (Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela) calculates the rate at 30 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (Londoño, 1998).

Between the 1980s and the mid-1990s, homicide rates rose in all the subregions, as well as in Brazil and Mexico. The highest rates were registered in the Andean area, and the biggest increases were in Colombia, where violence is now the main cause of death. The lowest rates were in the Southern Cone countries and the English-speaking Caribbean. The tendency for homicide rates to affect men much more than women continued (Arriagada and Godoy, 1999).

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>138.2</td>
<td>117.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>40.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>México</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The rates have not only increased but also display great differences between subregions, countries, and even between cities in the same country. Around 1995, there was a great contrast between El Salvador, which had the highest murder rate in the region (117 per 100,000 inhabitants), and Chile, which registered only 1.8 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (table 2). The situation in El Salvador is striking on account of its seriousness, although the figures must be viewed with some caution because in that country there is no governmental or non-governmental institution which systematically assembles the information on violence. The data obtained are from the Fiscalía General de la República and are the figures with the greatest coverage, but they do not agree with those from other sources.

In Colombia the relative figures for homicides around 1995 are lower than those for 1990 (table 2), but the number of offences has not gone down in absolute terms and the perception of insecurity among the population has been increasing (Trujillo and Badel, 1998). Homicidal violence in Colombia has become established as a routine and generalized form of violence among the population and reflects a country at war, since no present-day society displays such levels of violence in times of peace (Rubio, 1998b).

Although there are differences between and within countries, most of them register an increase in homicides. Between 1980 and 1990 the homicide rate went up in 9 out of 12 countries in region, and in three of them it went up by a factor of between four and six (Panama, Peru and Colombia). In the first half of the 1990s, this rate had gone down in El Salvador, Colombia, Chile and Peru but had gone up in Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela (table 2).

With regard to robbery and theft, the statistical information collected also displays great diversity between countries, especially in the case of different forms of robbery, where the rates per 100,000 inhabitants display extreme variability because of the different definitions of robbery and its various forms and the differing coverage of the statistical records.

Other forms of crime have also increased. It is estimated that annual kidnapping rates increased in the early 1990s by over one point per 100,000 inhabitants in three countries: Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala. In Colombia they came to 9.7 per

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In Chile, the figures of 3.0 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 1990 and 1.8 per 100,000 in 1996 correspond to the complaints in respect of homicides officially lodged with Carabineros; in 1990 the number of cases of homicide brought before the courts amounted to 9.1 per 100,000 inhabitants, and in 1996 to 8.2 per 100,000, while the number of arrests for this crime came to 6.7 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1990 and 4.9 per 100,000 in 1996 (Fundación Paz Ciudadana, 1998a). Whichever of these indicators is considered, however, the rates did go down between 1990 and 1996.

In Colombia in 1996 the rates were 208 in Medellín, 108 in Cali, 60 in Bogotá and 35 in Cartagena de Indias (Colombia, Centro de Referencia Nacional sobre Violencia, 1996).
100,000 inhabitants (*Latin American Newsletter*, 1997), while in Guatemala, in spite of the obvious under-recording of statistics on violence, cases of kidnapping also increased, with 74.6% of the official complaints of this crime being concentrated in the department of Guatemala (Castellanos and Corrales (eds.), 1998).

Attempts were made in the 1990s to measure the economic costs of violence, although the varying definitions of “economic costs” and the fragility of the statistical base make international comparisons difficult (box 2). A comparative study made by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), using a common methodology, found that these costs were considerable: in 1995 they came to 24.9 percentage points of GDP in El Salvador, 24.7 points in Colombia, 11.8 in Venezuela, 10.5 in Brazil, 12.3 in Mexico and 5.1 in Peru (Londoño, 1998).

<table>
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**TYPOLOGY AND DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COSTS CAUSED BY VIOLENCE**

*The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) distinguishes between:*  
- Direct costs: through the health system, the police, the criminal justice system, housing and social services.  
- Indirect costs: higher morbidity, higher mortality due to homicides and suicides, abuse of alcohol and drugs, depressive disorders.  
- Economic multiplier effects: macroeconomic impacts and impacts on the labour market and inter-generational productivity.  
- Social multiplier effects: impact on inter-person relations and on the quality of life.

*Trujillo and Badel also distinguish between direct and indirect costs:*  
However, they define the indirect costs as the negative secondary effects produced by violence, including: losses of productivity; reduction or diversion of investment; faulty resource allocation and increased transaction costs (that is to say, what the IDB would classify under economic multiplier effects).

*In macroeconomic terms, a distinction is drawn between:*  
- Gross costs: these correspond to the costs borne by the victim of an offence (for example, the ransom in kidnapping).  
- Net costs: these are the macroeconomic costs. Thus, a robbery or kidnapping does not give rise to costs in macroeconomic terms: it is considered a transfer, since it neither adds value nor takes it away.


Violence causes heavy costs, affects the economic and social development of a country in many ways, and has negative effects on its physical capital (Guerrero,
1998). In Peru, it is estimated that the public infrastructure has suffered cumulative losses of US$ 25 billion due to terrorism (Reyna and Toche, 1999). Case studies made in Chile and Nicaragua have estimated the cost of domestic violence to the economy at 2% of GDP in Santiago, Chile, and 1.6% of GDP in Managua, not counting the judicial and police costs (Morrison and Orlando, 1997). In Rio de Janeiro, the direct cost for attention to victims and the economic costs for premature death and incapacity in 1995 were estimated at some US$ 916 million. Male victims accounted for 67.9% of the direct cost of attention, 82.6% of the cost for incapacity, and 94.9% of the economic cost for premature death (ISER, Rede de Centros de Pesquisa, 1998).

Furthermore, violence depletes human capital, causes a deterioration in people’s health, and leads to absenteeism and labour incapacity of its victims, among other effects. In the same study on Chile and Nicaragua it is estimated that domestic violence has severe repercussions on women’s income. In Santiago, Chile, women who suffer severe physical violence earn only 39% as much as women who do not suffer this type of abuse, and in Managua they earn only 57% as much (Morrison and Orlando, 1997).

It has been shown that violence destroys social capital. A study in Jamaica concluded that one of the clearest impacts of violence was the social fragmentation of communities, which makes it hard for any community organization to work if it is not based on fear and coercion (Moser and Holland, 1997).

Violence also affects the capacity of governments to combat it. The increase in violent acts makes it necessary to spend resources on the fight against violence which could otherwise be used for development, and it also fosters corruption. Furthermore, the population begin to have resort to private security systems when they perceive that the State is not effective in this respect, so that it gradually loses legitimacy and importance. Finally, there is general agreement on the negative effects of violence on growth and on efforts to reduce poverty in the region (Ayres, 1998).

To sum up, then, although the calculation of the economic and social effects of violence is often only partial, because of the lack of basic information to put it on a proper footing, the economic impact of the various forms of violence is only too clear, and this is a useful point with regard to policies and programmes aimed at reducing it.

5. The profile of victims and aggressors

Another aspect which needs to be taken into account is the gender element in violence (not only in domestic violence). Gender is seen to be a cultural factor which puts certain people at risk and gives others a predisposition to use violence. The main persons involved in homicides are men, especially young men, both as aggressors and as victims. In Latin America external causes account for 20.5% of the total number of years of life lost through death or disability due to all types of reasons in the case of men, and 8.1% in the case of women (PAHO/WHO, 1994). The differences by sex are
considerable in the 15 to 44 age group, since external causes are responsible for 51.7% of the deaths of men but only 24.5% of those of women. Among men, the main external cause of death is homicide (PAHO, 1998).

Along with sex, age is also a very important factor in the profile of victims and aggressors. Of all the homicides reported in Latin America, 28.7% affect young people between 10 and 19 years of age (Guerrero, 1997). In Colombia, homicides mostly affect young men between 15 and 34 -in 1996 65.2% of the total number of homicides corresponded to men in this age group- with 13 men being killed for every woman (Colombia, Centro de Referencia Nacional sobre Violencia, 1996). In Guatemala, juvenile gangs known as maras have appeared, which are organizations made up of young people of both sexes, including both minors and adults, which establish links of solidarity and identity among their members. The maras fight for control of territories which they consider to belong to them; it has been estimated that in 1997 they operated in twelve zones of Guatemala City, where they have been blamed for committing hold-ups on buses and other offences (Castellanos and Corrales, eds., 1998). In Chile, an increase has been observed in the participation of young people under 18 in cases of robbery with violence, where their participation has risen from 21% in 1995 to 32% in 1997 (Fundación Paz Ciudadana, 1998a); similar features are displayed by the majority of those arrested for offences, who tend to be unmarried young men of a low economic and social level.

A study of crime statistics on drug offences between 1985 and 1994 concludes that young people represent a disproportionately high share of arrests but a disproportionately low share of prisoners held in jail for all types of serious offences (homicide, rape, robbery, theft and drugs). Between 1986 and 1993, for this set of offences, 35% of those arrested were under 19 but only 12% of those actually sent to prison were young people. This is held to show “the high vulnerability of young people just for being young, and the predisposition of the police to put the blame on them” (De Rementería, 1998, p. 114).

Along with the greater participation of young people in offences, there have also been changes in the profile of delinquents and their modus operandi. Police authorities in Chile note that in recent years there has been an increase in the percentage of offenders carrying arms (nearly 99%) and in the consumption of drugs among them (70% of all young offenders use drugs). Some studies note that there has been a change in the patterns of conduct of those found guilty of offences, as most of them are now addicted to alcohol and drugs and are therefore more likely to display violent attitudes than in the past (Cooper, 1994).

4 The last report of the Fundación Paz Ciudadana indicates that between 1995 and 1998 the participation of young people between 14 and 18 in cases of robbery with violence increased by 207% (La Tercera, 1999).

5 Interview with police captain Marcelo Cáceres and study by Fundación Paz Ciudadana, Adimark and Gendarmería referred to in the article “Por qué gana la delincuencia” (Las Últimas Noticias, 1998).
6. Domestic and intra-family violence

In the case of intra-family violence, which has gained greater recognition in the law in recent years, the main victims are women. A transcultural study covering 90 societies showed that those with high levels of violence were also those that had authoritarian rules in the household, where the man was the dominant actor and there was social acceptance of physical or psychological violence as a way of settling conflicts (Levinson, cited in IDB, 1998).

It is estimated that over half of Latin American women have been victims of aggression in their homes at some moment in their lives, 33% have been victims of sexual abuse between the age of 16 and 49, and 45% have suffered threats, insults or the destruction of personal possessions (United Nations, 1999).

As already noted, intra-family violence can be physical, psychological or sexual. Some studies also include indirect violence, such as forbidding the spouse to study or work, isolation or confinement in the home, or other forms of restriction of freedom.

Case studies and surveys carried out all over the region bear witness to the magnitude of the problem (table 3). The incidence of violence against women varies from 40% to 80%, depending on the city where the survey was carried out. It is hard to determine whether the upward trends in cases of domestic violence are due to greater frequency of this type of offence, to fuller recording of cases when the offence is made subject to punishment under the law, or to increases in the propensity to lodge official complaints. In view of the seriousness of this phenomenon, it is essential that surveys and studies should be carried out to provide fuller and more detailed country information that will give a better idea of its magnitude and tendencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Incidence of domestic violence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buenos Aires</td>
<td>1998. 1,700 persons were attended in the Intra-Family Violence Unit, 70.5% of whom had been attacked by their spouse (Hospital Alvear)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1998: The Argentine Association for the Prevention of Family Violence attended 5,000 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>1994. It was estimated that out of 20,000 cases of violence reported, 75% corresponded to domestic violence. Domestic violence mainly affects women between 17 and 36, while most of the victims of sexual assaults are adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil (States of</td>
<td>1998. Out of 98,039 cases, 61% corresponded to bodily harm, 2% to sexual offences and 37% to threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio de Janeiro,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>São Paulo, and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rio Grande do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 All the countries of the region have ratified the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eliminate Violence Against Women (Belén do Pará, 1994). Most of the countries have therefore modified their national legislation to include punishment for cases of intra-family violence (Arriagada, 1998).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Incidence of domestic violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sul-Porto Alegre)</td>
<td>1996. Total number of complaints of marital violence: 10,725 women injured. Over 20% were victims of physical abuse, 10% of sexual abuse, and 34% of psychological abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia Santafé de Bogotá</td>
<td>1994. Total number of women attended in the Women’s Unit: 2,299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>1995. Total number of women attended in the Women’s Unit: 5,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile Santiago</td>
<td>1997. 40.7% of women between 15 and 19 living with a man suffered psychological, physical and/or sexual violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>1996. Number of complaints of domestic violence or sexual abuse between January and September: 3,070, i.e., 11 complaints per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador Quito</td>
<td>1997. 60% of women were being or had been beaten by their husbands: 37.3% “often”, 25% “sometimes” and 35.6% “rarely”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>1996. Number of complaints of attacks on women in the country: 39,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1995. 74% of all persons ill-treated were women, of whom 68% were between 13 and 34 years of age. Only 20% of the victims made an official complaint to the authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru Lima</td>
<td>1996. Number of complaints to the Police Unit for Women: 5,512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>1994. Of the police reports and cases published in the press between 1990 and 1994, 95% were for violence against women and minors, of which 67% corresponded to homicides, 25% to beatings and 12% to rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay Montevideo and Canelones</td>
<td>1997. 47.3% of the households studied registered cases of violence: moderate psychological violence, 24.6%; purely psychological violence, 12%; purely sexual violence, 0.7%; moderate physical violence, 4.6%, and severe physical violence, 5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>1995. Data from the Bicameral Commission of Congress: 75,530 cases of sexual violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1997. Data from the Policía Técnica Judicial: 7,426 sexual offences where women were the victims: rape, seduction, kidnapping or incest. Twelve women were raped every day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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7 A recent study carried out by the University of Chile at the request of SERNAM reveals that in Santiago (metropolitan region) 50.3% of women have been abused physically, sexually or psychologically by their couple. Of that total, 34% have suffered physical and/or sexual violence and 16.3% suffers psychological violence. This violence occurs in 38% of women of a higher strata, 44.8% of middle strata and in 59.4% of the lower strata (Universidad de Chile, 2001).
Another form of intra-family violence which has become more visible and frequent is violence against children. It has been maintained that adolescents who have been the victims of violence in their childhood are more likely to become perpetrators of violence themselves in later life. In Brazil, abandoned children are at once the main victims and the main culprits of urban violence (McAlister, 1998). Ayres (1998) estimates that there are 6 million minors suffering ill-treatment in the region, and 80,000 die each year as a result of damage done to them by their parents, relatives or other persons. A study made by UNICEF in 1996 reveals that in São Paulo over 75% of all the sexual attacks against minors reported to SOS Niño were committed by family members (in the following order: legitimate father, brother, stepfather, uncle), and 8% of the victims suffered this type of violence before they were three years old.

Children have also been affected by the internecine conflicts that have taken place in some countries of the region. It is calculated that in Guatemala, between 100,000 and 250,000 children lost one or both of their parents due to the war (PAHO, 1996). In that country, a study carried out by the National Commission Against Child Ill-treatment on the basis of hospital data shed light on three dimensions of the phenomenon: physical ill-treatment, sexual abuse and abandonment. Around 60% of cases of ill-treatment and 55% of cases of abandonment affected boys, while 94% of the sexual abuse was against girls (Castellanos and Corrales, eds., 1998).

7. **Equal access to public and private security**

Violence and insecurity among the inhabitants of the big cities give rise to significant social and economic costs which are shared out unequally in society and are one of the main obstacles to the development of the region. It is estimated that Latin American residents purchase more than half of the insurance policies against kidnapping sold in the world (Newsweek, 1998). In Guatemala, for example, it is calculated that total private expenditure on security is at least 20% greater than the public security budget (Gutiérrez, 1998): there are some 200 private security firms, some of them established by former members of the army or police force, of which only 30 are officially registered (Castellanos and Corrales, eds., 1998). In São Paulo, there are three times as many private security guards as the number of government policemen (Newsweek, 1998).

In Santiago, Chile, there are clear differences between the rich and poor sectors of the city. Whereas the municipalities with the most resources can organize security plans in coordination with the police, and even make contributions in order to increase the number of policemen assigned to a sector, the poorer municipalities cannot do this. It is estimated that the poorest communes of Greater Santiago are below the mean
vigilance level equivalent per 100,000 inhabitants,\(^8\) which introduces a factor of inequity into the way police resources are distributed to combat crime throughout the city (Silva, 1999). Shortage of resources makes it necessary to establish priorities: thus, the central government opts to defend certain urban sectors—usually the city centre and commercial and financial areas—at the expense of other sectors such as working-class areas. This situation means that often public security is left to the community itself.

Although organized community participation in the fight against violence can serve to strengthen the programmes applied by the local authorities, problems arise when such participation is seen as the only alternative because of the lack of police protection, and not a complement to it.

The access to private security—i.e., the capacity to hire alarm services and private guards—is also unequal: these goods and services are shared out unequally among the different social strata, thus widening the differences between them. Insecurity in the high-income sectors has led to changes in the urban configuration of the cities and has restricted neighbourhood sociability through such developments as the establishment of closed neighbourhoods and shopping centres (malls) and the increase in condominiums and private guards.

The sensation of greater vulnerability and lack of protection differs markedly in the different socio-economic sectors. Whereas in the lower-class sectors insecurity takes the form of fear of attacks on one’s physical integrity, in the higher-income areas it takes the form of fear for one’s property.\(^9\) In the more prosperous groups, the range of security services and products available to them often serves to complement the protection provided by the police; in the poorer sectors, the only option may be to organize vigilance groups and other more rudimentary systems of protection against hold-ups and other crimes (home-made alarm systems). In Guatemala, nearly 200,000 persons have formed vigilance organizations. A recent measurement of the degree of insecurity in the different communes of Santiago, Chile, found that the highest levels of fear were in the poorest communes,\(^10\) which fits in with the fact that these are the communes where there is the greatest lack of protection and police vigilance. Another survey made in January 1999 on the degree of security felt to exist in the neighbourhood found that although, overall, a large proportion (70%) of women said they felt safe in their neighbourhood, this proportion went down to 66% among women between 34 and 45 and women from the sectors of lower socio-economic level (Grupo Iniciativa Mujer, 1999). However, a study made between 1996 and 1998 on offences against property in 17 Latin American countries reveals that the percentage of those interviewed who have been victims of such offences goes up in proportion to their socio-economic level and the size of the city where they live and recent growth in the urban population (Gaviria and Pagés, 1999).

\(^8\) The vigilance level equivalent is the supply of vigilance services per commune (Silva, 1999).
\(^9\) See ECLAC (1997), Social Agenda chapter.
\(^10\) *El Mercurio* (1999): article based on a survey made by the Fundación Paz Ciudadana.
Kidnapping for economic gain mainly affects the moneyed sectors of the population, and may even cause them to leave the country. In Guatemala, for example, at least five important families, totalling some 40 persons, all of which have suffered kidnapping or extortion, have left the country because of the State’s inability to give them protection.

Private security measures have also been reflected in the proliferation of arms among the civilian population, with results contrary to those expected. Rather than reducing crime rates (robberies or homicides), this ready availability of arms can increase and aggravate the consequences of acts of social or domestic violence, since attempts at self-defence increase the risk that the victims may be killed.

In the face of these developments, the capacity of the police and judicial institutions to control and judge offences has been swamped, and there has been a growing tendency to take justice into one’s own hands and privatize security. Fear, the lack of effective justice, and the increased violence of offenders have increased the perception of insecurity of Latin American citizens.

8. Traditional and emergent forms of violence and delinquency

The appearance of new forms of violence and delinquency in various countries of the region has been observed in a number of different ambits. Some analysts have described these new forms as a heterodox and contradictory mixture of two types of violence present all over the region: political violence (guerrilla movements, torture, disappearance of persons, repression) and traditional criminal violence. The symbiosis of the two gives rise to a form of social violence which, although not exclusively political, does have political effects, so that it cannot be viewed merely as breaking the law (Castañeda, 1998).

Various authorities and specialists have declared to the mass media that the new forms of violence are attributable to a change in delinquents’ modus operandi. In Chile, the evolution of delinquents’ actions in the 1990s reflects a process of organization and planning of their offences (learning how to obtain arms and/or vehicles, studying the routines of their possible victims, etc.), and they now operate more in groups and carry arms. For other specialists, in contrast, forms of action such as the intimidation and physical and psychological ill-treatment of their victims - together with the use of arms, narcotics or paralyzing gases and masks, which have become more common in recent years- may also be due to the imitation of crime movies (La Epoca, 1995).

In some Central American countries, demobilized soldiers who previously served in the army or the guerrilla have become a mass of unemployed who are familiar with the use of arms and military strategy and have an abundant supply of
arms at their disposal. In many cases these unemployed persons have formed armed bands which, in the view of some specialists, are one the main sources of armed crime in the region. In Guatemala it is estimated that there are some 600 organized criminal bands with a total of 20,000 members, mostly led by former army officers (Gutiérrez, 1998).

In other countries, the reform of the police forces has led to similar situations. In Argentina, Peru and Brazil these reforms have left a considerable number of former policemen unemployed, thus helping to develop a more sophisticated form of crime carried out by quasi-military bands. “This means an increase not only in the number of criminal actions but also in their planning, their level of violence, and the importance of their targets” (El Mercurio, 1998a). Many of these bands are responsible for the many cases of kidnapping which have taken place in the region. Experts note that this type of crime is common in Colombia, where kidnapping has taken on the nature of a well-organized industry; in Mexico, where it is connected with small organizations and drug trafficking; in Brazil, where it is connected with organized crime and difficulties in applying the law, and in Guatemala, where it is carried out by the numerous criminal bands mentioned earlier (Qué Pasa, 1998).

Even more disturbing because of the magnitude of the resources they divert and their international effects, however, are the emergent forms of international crime which have arisen thanks to the existence of open, globalized market economies. Among these emergent forms are the new forms of drug trafficking, illicit activities involving electronic fraud (basically through credit cards), and the traffic in persons, human organs and blood products, and nuclear weapons and materials (IMECO, 1998). It has been asserted that international criminal organizations have taken more advantage of technical progress than the institutions responsible for watching over citizen security.

Conclusions

As it have been maintained throughout this paper, violence and delinquency are multidimensional phenomena and are closely associated with subjective attitudes. Thus, efforts to explain them involve factors connected with the social and family position of the persons in question; social, economic and cultural dimensions; and factors of a contextual and institutional nature.

One of the most obvious situations with regard to criminal violence in Latin America is the striking contrast between the growing sense of insecurity of the population and the absence of consolidated statistics which could give a more objective idea of the true magnitude of the phenomenon. Although the perception held by the population is undoubtedly an important element, the lack of ongoing statistics makes it difficult to prepare diagnoses that can serve as an effective guide for the
measures that need to be taken by the public authorities, the private sector and the population at large.

The analysis has been centered on certain forms of criminal violence in the 1990s, especially in the cities, and is accompanied by a review of the most important theories for the study of violence, the profiles of victims and aggressors, traditional and emergent forms of delinquency, and the frequent relation that exists between violence and unemployment. Information has also been collected on the economic cost of violence and delinquency and the different policies adopted to deal with them.

It has been emphasized the need to approach criminal violence from an epidemiological standpoint which takes account of the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon, and it has been also tried to identify the factors which do most to favour violence in the countries of the region.
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