



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



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## ABSTRACT

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

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## 1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2. The developmental victimology perspective

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

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

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

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

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

Risk factors were chosen for analysis in this study to represent both the environmental context, e.g. major activities, characteristics of neighborhoods, parental supervision as well as target congruence features of victims, e.g., age, gender, self-esteem.

### 3. Methods and measures

#### 3.1. Data

This research uses data from the 2014 ECOPRED. This survey, using a stratified probability sample representative of 47 major cities and metropolitan areas, was conducted by the National Institute for Statistics and Geography and the Department of State (*Secretaría de Gobernación*).<sup>7</sup> The ECOPRED followed a two-step strategy in order to obtain information about victimization, social participation, as well as community and social cohesion. First, 84,928 heads of households answered a questionnaire regarding social dynamics in their neighborhood such as the interaction among neighbors, level of trust in neighbors, individual's participation in associations, conflicts and problems in the neighborhood, the role of public authorities, and trust in police corporations. Second, a young person-defined by the survey as those between 12 and 29 years old- in that same household was randomly selected and interviewed (N = 40,366). The youth's questionnaire inquired about experiences of victimization, household dynamics, individual and peer's involvement in deviant activities. The non-response rate was 13.1%, mainly due to vacant households, temporary residencies, and non-residential dwellings. The database included sample weights to correct for non-response and socio-demographic representation.

The questionnaires were administered between October and December 2014 in the respondents' households using a mixture of face-to-face interviews and Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) for questions that might make the respondent feel uncomfortable. In the juvenile questionnaire, only sections regarding respondents' experiences of sexual abuse, as well as their engagement in deviant and criminal behaviors and those of their peers were self-administered using CAPI. Respondents were told that their responses would be confidential as provided by the National System of Statistical and Geographical Information Law. In this study, to focus on non-adult juveniles, we used a subsample of youth aged 12–17 years (N = 11,816). The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are in [Appendix 1](#).

### 4. Measures

#### 4.1. Dependent variables

The types of victimization included: 1) *Bullying* –someone made fun of him/her, gave him offensive nicknames, spread rumors or lies, or excluded him/her because of physical appearance, clothing, or preferences; 2) *Cyberbullying* –someone distributed a text message, image or video without his/her consent with the purpose of blackmail, or to harass or humiliate; 3) *Physical violence* –someone with bad intentions hurt his/her body (pulled hair out, pushed, pinch, or hit) causing physical pain, bruises, cuts, burns or fractures; 4) *Theft* –someone has stolen something from him/her; 5) *Robbery* –someone has taken things away from him/her using violence or has forced him/her through threats, physical or verbal violence to hand over his/her belongings; 6) *Threats* –someone has threatened to physically hurt him/her, a relative or a friend; 7) *Extortion* –someone has demanded money, goods or favors to stop bothering him/her and let him/her do his/her activities; 8) *Sexual abuse* –someone has touched, fondled him/her or has attempted to do so, making him/her feel bad and/or he/she had an unwanted sexual encounter, or was forced to see or do something sexual. The variable “victimization during the last 12 months” was coded dichotomously.

#### 4.2. Independent variables

Drawing on the developmental victimology perspective (Finkelhor, 1995, 2007), several variables were used to assess factors associated with victimization risk and vulnerability: individual and environmental or contextual variables (demographic, family variables, previous experiences of victimization, satisfaction with physical appearance, major activities, involvement in delinquency, peers' involvement in delinquency, and contextual characteristics neighborhoods). These selected variables have generally been shown to be associated with different types of victimization and poly-victimization in previous literature (Esbensen, Huizinga, & Menard, 1999; Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996; Frías & Erviti, 2014; Lauritsen et al., 1991; Lila et al., 2008; Malik et al., 1997).

#### 4.3. Individual variables

We coded the age variable into two categories. a) 12–14 years old (children in middle school, equivalent to secondary school in Mexico –*escuela secundaria*) and b) 15–17 years old (children in high school level or an equivalent level of education). According to the 2010 Census, only 67% of youth aged 15–17 attended school and 8.8% of the girls in this age

<sup>7</sup> Data and methodological information is available at <http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/encuestas/hogares/especiales/ecopred/2014/>.

range already had children (Inegi, 2010). We coded gender dichotomously (1 = female, 0 = male). Satisfaction with physical appearance, a proxy for self-esteem, assessed respondents' satisfaction with their own physical appearance (0 = satisfied, 1 = unsatisfied).

#### 4.4. Household & family variables

The measurement of socioeconomic status is an index of financial strain based on the respondent's subjective assessment about his/her household ability to afford seven types of expenses. It assesses if in the respondent's household there is enough money for, a) food for everyone and every day; b) buying clothes and shoes; c) doing recreational or amusement activities; d) buying medicines and paying for healthcare when needed; e) paying for school-related expenses (uniform, school supplies, fees, etc.); f) paying for house repairs; and g) indulging themselves. This index ranges from 0 to 7, where 7 represents those households with no scarcities, and 0 indicates the presence of all scarcities (Cronbach Alpha = 0.76).

Positive family environment assesses positive family interactions, widely found to be a protective environmental factor. It is an index that measures if the members of the household, a) spend time together (to have breakfast, lunch, dinner or watch television); b) share household chores; c) ask for forgiveness after a fight or argument; d) demonstrate affection; e) congratulate each other when someone does something right; and f) talk about their disagreements without becoming upset and keeping calm. This index ranges from 0 to 6, meaning that the respondent has a family environment with all six positive interactions features (Cronbach Alpha = 0.65).

Living arrangements is a categorical variable with three categories that measure whether the adolescent lives with his/her: (a) biological mother and father (nuclear family), (b) mother (with or without other adults); and c) father (with or without other adults) or other adults different than biological parents.

Index of family involvement measures daily activities and interactions between the youngster and adults who live in the same household. It assesses not only the number of activities and interactions but also the number of adults with whom the activities are done. It included eight activities and interactions: a) they supervise his/her performance and activities at work or school (grades, help with homework, go to PTA meetings, offer guidance about job-related issues); b) practice sports or work out; c) play board games; d) include him/her in family activities; e) watch TV and discuss what is seen; f) read a book and discuss it; g) go together to the supermarket, market or mall; h) assign and share household chores. The index ranges from 0 to 4, in which 0 implies no interaction with adults and 4 the strongest level of interaction (Cronbach Alpha = 0.77).

Index of parental supervision captures parental or other adult involvement in youth interactions with peers, drugs, and establishing limits. As the index of family involvement, it assesses the strength of parental supervision (activities and number of adults involved in these). It includes eight items, a) talk about friends; b) talk about alcohol; c) talk about drugs; d) listen to his/her problems in school or work, issues with neighbors or friends (provides advice or comfort); e) know his/her friends; f) know where he/she goes; g) set home arrival time; and h) scold or punish when he/she does not comply with orders. The index ranges from 0 to 4, 0 implies no interaction with adults and 4 the strongest level of interaction (Cronbach Alpha = 0.86).

#### 4.5. Previous experiences of family violence

Experienced family violence and/or abuse is a dichotomous variable that measures if the respondent had ever experienced physical violence –had been pushed, pinched, hit, or had something thrown– or psychological abuse –had been insulted, addressed with swear words, rejected, or threatened to be thrown out of the house– when they did something that bothered his/her mother/father or tutor. Witnessed physical family violence measures if the respondent had been exposed to physical violence –had been pushed, pinched, or hit–. Witnessed psychological abuse measures whether the respondent was exposed to insults, screams, shouts, or continuous criticism about physical appearance (weight, height, and skin color), intelligence, preferences, or aptitudes in his/her family of origin.

#### 4.6. Peer and contextual variables

Major activity is a categorical variable with four categories that captures the main activity of the youth. Rooted in the lifestyles and routine activities theory, it posits that individuals' lifestyles and activities place them in situations, contexts and environments in which “they are more or less in contact with potential offenders and at risk of potential victimization” (Finkelhor, 2007: 27). It has four categories: only school, only work, work and school, and no-work and no-school. This last group in Mexico has been dubbed *ninis* (*ni estudia ni trabaja* –no study nor work) and according to the 2010 Census comprises almost 11% of the population from 12 to 17 years old in Mexico.

The peer delinquency index aims to measure to which extent the individual has best friends who engaged in deviant, socially undesirable, and criminal behaviors during the previous year. The index measures fourteen acts and behaviors described in Fig. 1. The index ranges from 0 to 14 depending on the number of activities the individual's friends are engaged in (Cronbach Alpha = 0.80). The index of individual delinquency captures the individual's engagement in eight deviant and criminal behaviors during the previous year described in Fig. 1. The index ranges from 0 to 8 depending on the number of activities the individual has been engaged (Cronbach Alpha = 0.89).

Contextual variables aim to capture social disorganization and violent environments that can put the individual at risk. The index is based on 10 variables described in Fig. 1. The answer choices for the items were: never, rarely, sometimes, often,

Peer delinquency index	Index of proximity to crime and conflicts	Index of individual delinquency
The individual has best friends who...	Frequency in which in his/her neighborhood there are people	Individual's engagement in deviant and criminal behaviors
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bragged of having humiliated or abused someone</li> <li>2. Had been expelled from school or work</li> <li>3. Got drunk often</li> <li>4. Offered him/her marijuana or a similar drug</li> <li>5. Smoked marijuana or consumed other drugs</li> <li>6. Sold drugs because he/she claimed that makes good money and/or to get more drugs.</li> <li>7. Intentionally abused an animal for fun</li> <li>8. Damaged someone's property for fun, for the thrill of doing so or to cause problems (graffiti, break windows, burn something, etc.)</li> <li>9. Beat up or hurt someone to earn his/her respect, to give someone what he/she deserves, to bother someone or because he/she could not bear someone</li> <li>10. Carried a gun to earn respect or to protect him/herself</li> <li>11. Stole something because he/she liked it, to exchange it for money, or to be accepted in a gang</li> <li>12. Became a member of a gang to earn respect or to obtain protection</li> <li>13. Was/were arrested or in prison</li> <li>14. Bragged about making a lot of money and spending it in clothes, car, parties, girls, vacations or luxury activities by <i>working</i> with a group engaged in criminal activities.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Making noise (high volume music, parties, repairs or household activities)</li> <li>2. Putting graffiti on walls or scratching cars</li> <li>3. Breaking house windows, stores, cars or other objects</li> <li>4. Racing cars</li> <li>5. Drinking alcohol on the street</li> <li>6. Pirating products</li> <li>7. Selling drugs</li> <li>8. Consuming drugs</li> <li>9. Blocking the street</li> <li>10. In gang fights</li> <li>11. In fights or disputes among neighbors</li> <li>12. Engaging in prostitution</li> <li>13. Robbing houses, stores or vehicles</li> <li>14. Stealing from or assaulting pedestrians</li> <li>15. Extorting or threatening</li> <li>16. Shooting firearms</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Smoked marijuana or consumed other drugs</li> <li>2. Inhaled drugs (thinner, PVC, cement, glue, gasoline or solvents)</li> <li>3. Consumed acids</li> <li>4. Consumed ecstasy, amphetamines, cocaine, heroin or hashish</li> <li>5. Carried a gun to earn respect or to protect him/herself</li> <li>6. Belonged to or forced to become a gang member to protect a territory, to protect him/herself or to earn respect</li> <li>7. Damaged someone's property for fun, for the excitement of doing so or in order to cause problems (graffiti, break windows, burn something, etc.)</li> <li>8. Had been arrested or been in prison</li> </ol>

Fig. 1. Items included in the peer delinquency index, index of proximity to crime and conflicts and index of individual delinquency.

Table 1

Prevalence of different types of victimization of youth 12–17 yrs. during last year and frequency of occurrence.

	Prevalence	C.I.	# of children (thousands)	Frequency (times)		
				1–2	3–6	>6
Bullying	24.5	(23.9–25.1)	1,040	41.8	37.0	21.2
Theft	23.8	(23.1–24.4)	1,006	49.3	32.4	18.3
Physical assault	10.0	(9.6–10.5)	424	65.0	27.6	7.5
Threats	6.0	(5.7–6.4)	256	72.5	19.3	8.2
Sexual abuse	5.8	(5.4–6.1)	247	61.6	25.9	12.5
Robbery	5.7	(5.4–6.0)	241	66.9	21.5	11.6
Cyberbullying	2.4	(2.2–2.6)	102	72.6	18.5	8.9
Extortion	2.1	(1.9–2.3)	88	57.6	27.3	15.0
Any victimization	44.3	(43.6–45.1)	2,879	48.7	30.0	21.3

Source: Own calculations based on the 2014 ECOPRED.

and very often. The index calculated the arithmetic mean of these items, ranging from 1 (neighborhood with very low levels of conflict) to 4 (high levels of conflict) (Cronbach Alpha = 0.89).

## 5. Analyses

The analyses followed four steps. First, descriptive analyses of prevalence, relationship with the perpetrator and place where it occurred were conducted. Then, the risk of experiencing any given victimization having suffered another one was calculated, as well as that of being victimized by people having different types of relationship with the juvenile. Third, descriptive bivariate analyses of the factors associated with each type of victimization were conducted (correlations between variables are available from the authors upon request). Finally, we performed a set of logistic regressions examining the factors associated to each type of victimization.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. The prevalence of Mexican youth victimization

Table 1 shows the prevalence of victimization experiences among Mexican youth aged 12–17 during the last year. Almost one quarter of youth experienced bullying and 23.8% had something stolen from them. One out of ten had experienced

**Table 2**

Relationship with the perpetrator and place where victimization occurred by type of victimization of Mexican youth 12–17 years.

	Bullying	Theft	Physical assault	Threats	Robbery	Cyber-bullying	Extortion	Sexual abuse	Any Victimization (%)
Relationship with perpetrator									
Family or somebody in household	5	2	10	3	2	3	6	7	7
Dating partner	1	0	3	2	1	4	1	12	3
Schoolmate	64	54	52	37	23	49	48	24	62
Co-worker	3	4	4	2	1	3	1	3	5
Relatives, friends, acquaintances	16	9	13	11	9	14	13	22	17
Known by sight	13	8	15	22	7	13	15	13	17
Stranger	8	25	12	28	60	20	19	28	30
Place where it occurred									
Household	8	11	13	8	4	10	12	12	14
School	68	65	54	40	27	47	52	24	68
Workplace	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	4
Public place	6	4	4	5	7	6	5	10	8
Street	23	17	30	42	60	17	32	30	35
Other	3	4	4	9	6	24	2	24	9

Source: Own calculations based on the 2014 ECOPRED.

Notes: Column percentages. Do not add to 100% because could report more than one victimization.

**Table 3**

Poly-victimization and relationship of the victim with the perpetrator(s) and average number of acts of victimization experienced.

# Victimization(s) types	%	Average number of victimizations
1-2	80	4
3-4	16	11
≥5	4	25
# perpetrator(s) types		
1	69	4
2	24	8
3	5	15
≥4	3	22

physical assault, 6% threats, 5.8% sexual abuse, 5.7% robbery, 2.4% cyberbullying, and 2.1% extortion. Aggregated together, 44.3% of the youth were victimized at least once during the last 12 months, the equivalent of more than 2.8 million Mexican children.

Table 1 also shows how many times youth experienced each type of victimization. For most youth each type of victimization occurred only once or twice. For some, however, victimizations occurred repeatedly. For example, more than one out of five youth victims of bullying experienced it on more than in six occasions. Among those who disclosed being sexually and/or physically abused, between 35 and 39% of them were victimized three times or more.

Table 2 examines the relationship between the victims and the perpetrators, as well as the places where the victimization took place (column percentages). With the exception of robbery, youngsters tended to be victimized by people they knew. Schoolmates played an important role, perpetrating 64% of the bullying and around half of the physical violence, cyberbullying, extortion, and thefts. To a lesser extent, they were also responsible for 37% of the threats, 24% of the sexual abuse and 23% of the robberies. Close family members and people the youngster lived with were responsible, respectively, for one out of ten cases of physical and 7% of the sexual abuse. Similarly, other relatives, very close friends, and acquaintances perpetrated 16% of bullying, 13% of physical violence, and 22% of the sexual abuse. Victimization by strangers was far from negligible: 60% of robbery, 25% of those who had something stolen, 28% of the sexual abuse, 28% of the threats, and around 20% of the cyberbullying and extortion. These results suggest that victimization of youth tends to occur by people in their networks; mostly by those they have more contact with in the household or at school.

Schools, streets, and households emerged as common places for the victimization of Mexican youth. More than half of the reported experiences of bullying, thefts, physical violence and extortions occurred on school premises. Threats, robbery, physical assault, and sexual abuse of youth tended to take place on the street (respectively, 42%, 60%, 30% and 30%). 13% of physical violence, 11% of the sexual touching, and 12% of the sexual abuse occurred in the youth's household. The last column indicates that overall almost one third of the youth were victimized at school, more than one third on the streets, and 14% in the household.

Table 3 presents information about the number of different victimization types endured by youth. 80% of the victims experienced one or two types of victimization, but 16% had three or four, and 4% had five or more types of victimization. As the number of victimization types increased the average number of victimizations suffered also increased. For example, those who experienced five or more types of victimization reported 25 victimization events on average. In contrast, those who had one or two types of victimization on average experienced only 4 events.

**Table 4**

Victimization level and poly-victimization among victimized Mexican youth 12–17 during the last 12 months.

Victimization		%
Low	1 perpetrator & 1 victimization type	50
Medium	2-3 perpetrators & 2-3 victimization types	40
High (poly-victims)	4 $\geq$ perpetrator & 4 $\geq$ types of victimization	10

There were also considerable numbers of youth who were victimized by multiple perpetrators. In 24% of the cases the youngster had two types of perpetrators, in 3% of the cases three types of perpetrators, and in 1.1% of the cases four or more types of perpetrators. As revealed by [Table 3](#), the mean number of victimization acts experienced by the youth during the last year increased as the number of relationships with perpetrators also increased. For example, those who had one type of perpetrator experienced on average 4 victimization acts. For those with four or more types of perpetrators, they tended to experience in average 22 acts of victimization.

These data suggest that some children are poly-victims, a term coined by [Finkelhor et al. \(2005\)](#) to refer to those children with extremely high levels of victimization. Poly-victims tend to have higher levels of traumatic stress symptoms than other types of victims for whom the level of victimization is lower ([Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2010](#)). Poly-victims in this sample could be defined as those experiencing four or more kinds of victimization in a single year by at least four types of perpetrators. [Table 4](#) shows that among those who underwent some type of victimization, 51% experienced low levels of victimization (one perpetrator and one victimization type), 40% suffered medium levels of victimization (two or three victimization types and perpetrators), and 10% can be labeled as poly-victims. This rate is comparable to the proportion of youth classified as poly-victims in other studies ([Finkelhor et al., 2007a](#)).

## 7. Factors associated with victimization of Mexican youth

We also examined the bivariate associations (OR) among types of victimization. Experiencing of one type of victimization significantly increased the odds of experiencing another type of victimization. For example, having experienced a physical assault was associated with an 8.3 times greater likelihood of also being bullied, an 8.9 times higher likelihood of also being threatened, and a 6.4 times higher likelihood of also being sexually abused (see [Appendix 2](#)). Similarly, the odds of being victimized by one type of perpetrator also increased the odds of being victimized by another perpetrator (see [Appendix 2](#)).

[Table 5](#) presents a series of logistic regressions that examined the variables that might make an independent contribution to victimization (bivariate analyses are available in [Appendix 1](#)). The results show that there were only two variables associated with increased odds of experiencing all types of victimization: proximity to crime and peer delinquency. The individual's own delinquency was associated with some types of victimization: theft or robbery (increase of 20% per delinquent act), sexual touching (50%), cyberbullying (30%) and sexual abuse (80%). However, an individual's delinquency was not associated with bullying or physical violence.

Sociodemographic variables were associated with some types of victimization but not with others. Females were at a significantly higher risk of experiencing all types of victimization but robbery. Females had a 40% lower relative risk of experiencing robbery than males, and no gender difference was found for physical assault. Younger youth (12–14 years) had lower odds of being victims of bullying, physical violence and cyberbullying than older youth (15–17). Those more satisfied with their own physical appearance were at a lower risk of experiencing all types of victimization but robbery. Socioeconomic status was associated with a decrease in the likelihood of bullying, physical assault, and robbery. Youngsters who both work and go to school had a higher risk of being victims of theft (50%), robbery (60%) and cyberbullying (100%) than those who went to school but were not employed. Those who did not work or study had 50% higher risk of experiencing physical violence than those who only went to school. After controlling for other variables in the model, those who lived with both of their parents and those who only lived with their mothers had the same risk of experiencing all types of victimization. In contrast, youth in single parent households living with their father and/or with other adults had a higher risk of experiencing physical violence (50%), and sexual abuse (70%) than those who lived with both parents. Parental supervision was associated with experiences of bullying and theft. Compared to those with lower levels of parental supervision, those with more parental supervision had a higher risk of being victims of bullying and theft.

Finally, previous exposure to violence was associated with some types of victimization but not with others. For example, those who suffered physical violence and/or psychological abuse in their family of origin had higher odds of being both victims of bullying, cyberbullying, and sexual abuse than those who did not. Those who witnessed psychological abuse in their family of origin were also at a higher risk of experiencing all types of abuse but robbery than those who did not. Having observed parental physical violence was associated with higher risk of all types of victimization but bullying and cyberbullying.

The last part of [Table 5](#) presents the results of a logistic regression predicting variables associated to poly-victimization during the last year. The coefficients reveal that compared to victims, poly-victims tended to be more dissatisfied with their

**Table 5**

Logistic analyses of variables predicting victimization among youth during the last 12 months (odds ratios).

	Bullying		Theft		Physical assault		Robbery		Cyber-bullying		Sexual abuse		Polivictimization vs. Victimization <sup>a</sup>	
Intercept	-2.3	***	-3.1	***	-3.3	***	-4.3	***	-6.4	***	-4.8	***	-3.9	***
<b>Individual variables</b>														
Gender (female)	1.2	**	1.2	*	1.1	**	0.6	***	1.5	*	3.2	***	0.7	
12–14 years (15–17)	0.8	***	1.1		0.7	**	1.7	***	0.7	†	1.0		0.8	†
Unsatisf. physical appearance (satisfied)	2.0	***	1.4	**	1.5	**	1.2		2.1	**	1.7	**	1.8	**
SES	0.9	***	1.0		0.9	**	0.9	*	1.0		0.9		0.9	***
Major activities (study)														
Work	1.0		0.9		1.1		0.8		0.8		1.2		0.9	
Work and study	1.2		1.5	*	1.3		1.6		2.0	†	1.2		1.4	
No work & No study	0.9		0.8		1.4	†	0.9	*	1.4		0.9		1.1	
<b>Family and household variables</b>														
Household structure (mother & father)														
Mother (and other adults)	1.0		1.1		1.0		1.2		1.1		1.3		1.1	
Father and/or other adults	1.2		1.0		1.5	*	1.2		1.3		1.7	*	1.6	
Level of family interaction (low)														
Medium	1.1		1.1		1.2		1.2		1.4		0.9		1.2	
High	1.0		0.9		1.2		1.1		1.2		1.0		1.1	
Level of parental supervision (low)														
Medium	1.4	*	1.5	**	0.9		1.0		1.7		1.0		0.9	
High	1.3	†	1.5	**	0.9		1.3		1.5		0.9		1.0	
<b>Experiences of violence in family of origin</b>														
Witnessed psychological	1.3	**	1.3	**	1.4	**	1.2		1.9	**	1.4	†	1.1	
Witnessed physical	1.2		1.2	†	1.4	**	1.4	†	1.2		1.5	*	1.9	**
Experienced physical and/or psychological	1.7	***	0.9		1.3		1.4		2.4	**	1.5	†	1.8	*
<b>Delinquency &amp; proximity to crime</b>														
Index peer delinquency	1.2	***	1.1	***	1.2	***	1.1	*	1.1	*	1.2	***	1.1	***
Index individual's delinquency	1.0		1.2	*	1.1		1.2	*	1.3	*	1.6	***	1.2	
Index proximity to crime	2.2	***	2.3	***	2.2	***	2.4	***	2.4	***	2.0	***	2.1	***
<b>Parents present in interview</b>														
	0.8	**	0.9		0.9		1.0		0.9		0.7	†	0.9	
-2 Log Likelihood	4545.2		4594.7		2623.3		1793.8		880.7		641.2		1074.8	

Source: Own calculations based on the 2014 ECOPRED.

Notes: Reference categories are in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.0001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; †  $p < 0.10$ .<sup>a</sup>  $N = 7,047$ . 10.5% of the weighted sample were poly-victims.

physical appearance, belonged to families experiencing financial strains, and were exposed to violence in their families of origin. Delinquent peers and proximity to crime also increase the relative risk of the youth being poly-victimized.

## 8. Discussion

In this study we examined Mexican youth 12–17 years old and their experiences of victimization using a representative sample. Our results show that during 2014 alone, more than 2.8 million of Mexican youth aged 12–17 were victims of bullying, cyberbullying, theft, sexual abuse, physical assault, threats, robbery, or extortion. Bullying and theft were the most prevalent victimizations. Youth tended to be victimized by people in their inner circle: schoolmates, relatives, friends and acquaintances, and people known by sight. Only three out of ten victimized youth were victimized by a stranger. One fifth of the sample experienced three or more types of victimization, and 31% had two or more types of relationships with their perpetrators. As the number of victimization types and the number of perpetrators increase, so does the number of victimizations youth experience. About 10% of these youth were what can be called “poly-victims” because they experienced at least four different types of victimization by at least four types of perpetrators (4% of the whole sample), averaging 20 victimization events during the last year. Despite the limited number of victimization types available in the survey, previous research has found that poly-victimization categorization is robust to the number of available indicators and “can be effectively measured in several different ways and still serve useful clinical and research purposes” (Finkelhor et al., 2005: 1309).

The results of this nationally representative sample of youth demonstrate that victimization experiences are not independent one from another. The odds of experiencing one type of victimization increased the odds of experiencing another. The odds fluctuated from 2.3 in the case of bullying and cyberbullying to 10.4 in the case of extortion and cyberbullying. Similarly, victimization by one type of perpetrator also increased the odds of being victimized by another type of perpetrator. These results suggest that victimization has to be understood from a comprehensive standpoint that allows taking into account different victimizations occurring in different settings.

Individual and contextual factors associated with victimization varied by victimization type, which suggests that target congruence and contexts have differential associations with different types of victimization. Therefore, studies examining together different types of victimization might reach misleading results. As found in previous studies, individual sociodemographic and family climate variables associated with youths' victimization vary by type of victimization (Esbensen et al., 1999; Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996). Girls and those unsatisfied with their physical appearance—a proxy for self-esteem—are at a higher risk of experiencing all types of victimization but robbery. Physical appearance as a protective factor has only been reported in the case of bullying victimization (see Delfabbro et al., 2006). It is likely that those less satisfied with physical appearance would have characteristics, such as smaller size or physical weakness, that would increase target vulnerability “because they could compromise the potential victim's capacity to resist or deter victimization, and thus make the victim an easier target for the offender” (Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996: 6). It could also be that victimization experiences typically involve a denigration of youth that leaves them feeling dissatisfied about their appearance. Future studies are required to better understand the link between satisfaction with physical appearance and lower risk of different types of victimization.

The results of this study show that youths' previous or concurrent exposure to violence in their family of origin, both as witness or as victim, tended to be associated with most types of victimization (marginally in the case of robbery). This finding is consistent with previous research both in Mexico and in the U.S. (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007b; Frías & Castro, 2011). Youth who do not live with their mothers had an increased risk of experiencing physical assault and sexual abuse. Family structure, however, was not associated with bullying and cyberbullying or the property crimes examined. The level of family interaction with the youth was also not related to victimization.

The multivariate analyses in our study show that parental supervision is only associated with a higher relative risk of being a victim of bullying and theft. Previous research suggests that kids who are over-supervised tend to get bullied for not being “independent” (Georgiou, 2008). However, other studies have also found weak or no relationship between family and parental supervision variables (Esbensen et al., 1999; Gibson, 2012). A recent meta-analysis has found that parental involvement and support were more likely to protect children and adolescents against peer victimization (Lereya et al., 2013). It might be also the case that because the youth had been a victim a bullying and/or theft, parents supervise their children more closely.

Mexican youth aged 12–17 who work and go to school were more likely to experience theft and cyberbullying than those who only go to school. In contrast, those who do not work or study had a higher risk of physical assault and a lower risk of robbery. Proximity to crime and peer delinquency increased the risk of experiencing all types of victimization. This significant association is similar to that found in previous studies in the U.S. (Gibson, 2012; Malik et al., 1997; Stogner et al., 2014). Youth's engagement in delinquency was linked to all types of victimization except physical assault and bullying. This finding is consistent with previous studies that found a positive association between youth's delinquency and assault victimization (excluding being beaten by a parent)-, attempted assaults, larceny, and vandalism (Lauritsen et al., 1991). The link between victimization and perpetration of violence has been well documented in other countries (Cuevas, Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner & Hamby, 2013); future studies in Mexico need to avoid oversimplifications that treat youth as either victims or perpetrators of violence and delinquent acts.

Poly-victims differ from victims in their concurrent and previous exposure to violence, delinquency and crime. Those in violent and deprived contexts—neighborhood and household- and with delinquent peers have a higher risk of being poly-victims.

The overall prevalence reported in this study is likely conservative because some types of victimizations measured in other studies (for example neglect) were not included here (i.e. Finkelhor et al., 2005; Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2015). The survey was also framed as a victimization and public security survey, which might have led to lower reports given the evidence that non-criminal surveys tend to provide better estimates of the prevalence of some phenomenon such as partner violence (Bachman, 2000; Schwartz, 2000). Additionally, disclosures may have been inhibited because an interviewer administered most of the 2014 ECOPRED and parents or tutors were present when 30% of the respondents answered the survey. The results show that victimization by schoolmates is frequent; suggesting that risk analyses should include some school characteristics such as intensity of supervision, size of school, private/public status, and sociodemographic characteristics of the school population. These, however, were not available in the survey, which is a limitation of the current study.

The results of this study can be used to inform interventions aimed at preventing youth victimization and suggest that research and crime policy in Mexico must not overlook youth victimization but should encompass both youth and adults. These policies must address individual delinquency, family, and contextual violent environments as causes of youth victimization. Special emphasis is needed on early interventions because victimization in one sphere is linked to victimization in other spheres and one type of victimization increases the risk of future and concurrent victimizations. Therefore, interventions must start early with those who have been victimized to prevent continuing and escalating victimization exposures.

Evidence-based prevention programs in Mexico are not as widespread as in the U.S. or European countries (i.e. Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Finkelhor, 2009; MacMillan et al., 2009), and program evaluations are rare (Ramos-Lira, Fuentes, Flores, & Ruiz-Cortés, 2014; exceptions in Romero et al., 2010). However, high rates of victimization of Mexican youth and its impact on their lives suggest the need to implement programs to prevent victimization and assist its victims. This research suggests that these programs should be school-based because the majority of both perpetration and victimization of youth in this age group tends to occur in school settings. Current programs such as *Construye T* from the Department of Education<sup>8</sup> or the National Program for the Social Prevention of Violence and Delinquency<sup>9</sup> could benefit from the results of this research because it can help to develop more tailored interventions based on risk factors and also specific programs for poly-victims.

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<sup>8</sup> Information available at <http://www.construye-t.org.mx/>.

<sup>9</sup> Information available at <http://www.normateca.gob.mx/Archivos/66.D.3818.30-05-2014.pdf>.

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### Appendix 1. Odds of Experiencing another Type of Victimization during last 12 months among Mexican Youth 12–17 (Source: Own calculations based on 2014 ECOPRED)

	Bullying	Theft	Physical assault	Threats	Robbery	Cyber-bullying	Extortion
Bullying							
Theft	3.1						
Physical assault	8.3	2.8					
Threats	5.7	3.5	8.9				
Robbery	3.2	4.3	4.8	6.8			
Cyberbullying	2.3	5.4	8.4	9.9	5.9		
Extortion	5.0	3.8	7.8	9.7	7.7	10.4	
Sexual abuse	4.0	2.8	6.4	5.8	2.7	7.7	5.4

Note: all odds ratios are statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$ .

### Odds of Experiencing Victimization by another Type of Person during the last 12 months among Mexican Youth 12–17 (Source: Own calculations based on 2014 ECOPRED)

	Family or somebody in household	Dating partner	Schoolmate	Co-worker	Relatives, friends	Known by sight
Dating partner	7.1					
Schoolmate	3.2	4.2				
Co-worker	3.8	5.6	1.9			
Relatives, friends, acquaintances	4.9	5.5	1.9	3.1		
Known by sight	3.0	6.1	2.0	2.8	3.2	
Stranger	1.8	3.9	1.7	2.6	2.5	3.7

Note: all odds ratios are statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$ .

### Appendix 2. Descriptive Bivariate Analyses of Variables Associated to Youth's Victimization (Percentages and Means) (Source: Own calculations based on the 2014 ECOPRED)

	Bullying	Theft	Physical	Threats	Robbery	Cyber-bullying	Extortion	Sexualabuse	% Col.
<b>Sociodemographic</b>									
Gender	**				***	*		***	
Male	22.6	22.8	9.7	6.5	7.2	1.9	2.1	3.4	50.5
Female	26.5	24.7	10.3	5.6	4.2	2.9	2.0	8.3	49.5
Age	†	**			***		†		
From 12 to 14	25.8	22.0	10.5	5.5	4.0	2.7	2.4	5.3	49.1
From 15 to 17	23.3	25.4	9.5	6.5	7.4	2.2	1.7	6.3	50.9
Unsatisfaction physical appearance	***	***	***	**		***	**	*	
No	22.3	22.6	9.1	5.6	5.5	2.0	1.8	3.0	88.1
Yes	41.3	32.4	16.2	9.4	7.5	5.6	3.9	6.1	11.9
Major activities		***	***		***	†		**	
School	23.9	23.0	9.2	5.6	5.0	2.2	2.0	5.2	82.9
Work	26.1	26.0	12.0	7.8	8.2	2.1	3.0	9.8	4.6
School & Work	30.6	35.9	14.2	7.9	12.7	4.5	2.3	7.4	5.5
No work no School	25.5	22.2	15.6	8.0	6.9	3.7	2.7	8.6	6.9
<b>Household structure</b>									
Mother & father	23.4	23.4	9.3	5.5	5.2	2.2	1.8	4.9	69.6
Mother (and other adults)	26.9	26.3	10.9	7.0	7.1	2.8	2.7	7.5	22.5
Father and/or other adults	27.1	23.0	14.1	8.1	6.4	2.8	2.6	8.6	7.9
Level of family interaction		*					†	*	
1- lowest	26.2	25.0	10.9	7.2	3.6	2.6	2.7	7.2	27.5
2	24.4	24.8	9.9	5.7	5.8	2.6	2.1	5.4	45.6
3	22.9	20.7	9.4	5.4	4.9	2.0	1.4	5.0	26.9
	Bullying	Theft	Physical	Threats	Robbery	Cyber-bullying	Extortion	Sexualabuse	% Col.
<b>Level of parental supervision</b>									
1- low	24.4	19.6	14.1	6.5	6.2	2.3	3.8	8.6	10.2
2- medium	27.1	25.4	10.9	6.7	5.7	3.2	2.1	6.8	31.0
3-high	23.2	23.6	8.9	5.6	5.6	2.0	1.8	4.8	58.8
<b>Experienced violence family origin</b>									
No	23.0	23.2	9.2	5.5	5.3	1.9	1.8	5.5	94.1
Yes	48.2	33.1	23.4	14.3	12.0	10.3	6.0	17.8	5.9
<b>Witnessed psychological violence family origin</b>									
No	21.4	21.4	8.0	4.6	4.9	1.6	1.6	4.4	76.6
Yes	34.5	31.3	16.7	10.6	8.3	5.2	3.5	10.4	23.4
<b>Witnessed physical violence family origin</b>									
No	22.7	22.4	8.6	5.1	5.0	1.9	1.7	4.8	86.8
Yes	36.6	33.0	19.6	12.5	10.1	5.7	4.6	12.7	13.2
<b>Delinquency &amp; proximity to crime</b>									
<b>Peer delinquency index</b>									
No	1.0 (0.8)	1.0 (0.8)	1.1 (0.9)	1.1 (0.9)	1.1 (0.9)	1.2 (0.9)	1.2 (0.9)	1.1 (0.8)	
Yes	1.8 (1.2)	1.7 (1.1)	2.3 (1.4)	2.3 (1.4)	1.8 (1.3)	2.3 (1.4)	2.6 (1.5)	2.1 (1.3)	
<b>Individual's delinquency index</b>									
No	0.1 (0.3)	0.1 (0.3)	0.2 (0.3)	0.2 (0.3)	0.2 (0.3)	0.2 (0.3)	0.2 (0.3)	0.1 (0.3)	
Yes	0.3 (0.3)	0.3 (0.4)	0.4 (0.5)	0.4 (0.4)	0.4 (0.9)	0.4 (0.5)	0.5 (0.5)	0.5 (0.5)	
<b>Proximity to crime index</b>									
No	1.4 (0.2)	1.4 (0.2)	1.4 (0.2)	1.4 (0.2)	1.4 (0.2)	1.4 (0.2)	1.4 (0.2)	1.4 (0.2)	
Yes	1.5 (0.2)	1.6 (0.2)	1.6 (0.3)	1.7 (0.3)	1.7 (0.3)	1.7 (0.3)	1.7 (0.3)	1.6 (0.3)	

\*\*\* p < 0.0001; \*\* p < 0.001; \* p < .05; † p < 0.10.