

Victimization and poly-victimization in a community sample of Mexican adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Background: In Mexico, there is a little information about child and youth poly-victimization. **Objective:** The present study aimed to analyze the prevalence of victimization and poly-victimization in a community sample of Mexican adolescents aged 12–17 years.

Participants and settings: The Mexican version of the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire was applied to 1068 adolescents (504 females and 564 males) at six public schools.

Methods: Descriptive analyses were conducted to establish the prevalence of six types of victimizations and poly-victimization. Odds ratios were used to estimate differences between the genders and age groups.

Results: Nearly 80% of the adolescents reported at least one experience of victimization during the past year, while 85.5% reported at least one experience of victimization in their lifetime. Conventional crimes (65.6%) and indirect victimization (61%) were the most frequent types of victimization reported. Of the sample, 35.9% were classified as poly-victims in the past year. Girls experienced a broader spectrum of victimization than boys. Specifically, girls experience more caregiver victimization ($OR = 1.56$, 95% $CI=1.21-2.02$), sexual victimization ($OR = 2.46$, 95% $CI=1.73-3.50$), and electronic victimization ($OR = 1.81$, 95% $CI=1.33-2.47$), in their lifetime. Older adolescents experienced more witnessing victimization ($OR = 1.48$, 95% $CI=1.16-1.88$) and caregiver victimization ($OR = 1.52$, 95% $CI=1.15-2.00$) during the past year.

Conclusions: This study is the first to be carried out in Mexico with an instrument that enables cross-cultural comparisons. Our findings highlight the necessity to increase research in this field to improve both intervention programs and public policies to prevent child victimization.

Introduction

The high levels of interpersonal violence in Mexico have been widely documented (see, for example, Leenen & Cervantes-Trejo, 2014; Secretaría de Salud, 2006). Most of the efforts made by the Mexican Government to understand the magnitude and consequences of this problem have mainly focused on the victimization of adults, using self-report surveys (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2018). Child victimization, however, has received less attention, with only a few official reports released to date (for example, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2015, 2017; Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2014). Thus, there are not enough official data on child victimization to create appropriate public policies (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2017; UNICEF, 2018).

Despite the lack of official data, some non-governmental organizations have tried to show the plight of Mexican children by recording data on children homicides and disappearance. According to data from the Network for the rights of children and adolescents in Mexico (Red por los derechos de la infancia en México [REDIM], 2018), from 2007 to 2017, 13,217 children and adolescents have been murdered, mostly boys from 15 to 17 years old. Regarding the disappearances, REDIM (2018) reports that until April 2018, 6614 children and adolescents have officially disappeared in México, and 6 in 10 are girls. Also, academic research on child victimization in Mexico has documented high levels of specific forms of violence. Cross-sectional studies using self-report surveys have revealed incidences of sexual abuse ranging from 2.9% to 18.7% (Chavez et al., 2009; Frías & Erviti, 2014; Pineda-Lucatero, Trujillo-Hernández, Millán-Guerrero, & Vásquez, 2009), rates of bullying ranging from 20.1% to 68.2% (Joffre et al., 2011; Valadez, 2008), rates of cyberbullying ranging from 14.3% to 41.9% (Lucio, 2009; Vega-López, González-Pérez, & Quintero-Vega, 2013), incidences of caregiver victimization ranging from 11% to 66%, depending on the type of maltreatment assessed (Caballero, Ramos, González, & Saltijeral, 2010; Díaz-Olavarrieta et al., 2011; UNICEF, 2015), rates of community violence of 81.7% (Gómez & Lucio, 2016), incidences of family violence ranging from 14% in the south of Mexico to 19% in the north of Mexico (see Suárez & Menkes, 2006), and rates of dating violence ranging from 19% to 46% (Frías, 2016; Ludin, Bottiani, Debnam, Orozco, & Bradshaw, 2018; Rivera-Rivera, Allen-Leigh, Rodríguez-Ortega, Chávez-Ayala, & Lazcano-Ponce, 2007).

A lack of attention on child victimization is not exclusive to Mexico, with international interest in this area increasing only

recently. According to Finkelhor (2007), this neglect is due to the fragmented studies in this field. Investigations on child and youth victimization have focused only on particular contexts and types of violence and have not produced a comprehensive picture, thereby wrongly indicating that children experience less victimization than adults. However, many studies have demonstrated that children who suffer one type of victimization are more likely to experience other types (Finkelhor, Hamby, Ormrod, & Turner, 2005; Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2006). Thus, there is a possibility that victimization may become a lifetime condition in some children. Moreover, multiple experiences of victimization, called poly-victimization (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007a), are associated with higher levels of mental health problems (Turner et al., 2006) and is considered a risk factor for psychopathology in childhood and adolescence (Guerra, Pereda, Guiler, & Abad, 2016; Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2010).

The reported incidences of poly-victimization vary depending on the method that has been used to measure it. The incidences of poly-victimization, when defined as high levels of victimization that are above the average for the child's own group during a year (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005a), have been reported to range from 9% in Canada (Cyr et al., 2013) to 37% in Chile (Pinto-Cortez, Pereda, & Álvarez-Lister, 2017). Regarding lifetime poly-

victimization, Finkelhor, Ormrod, and Turner, 2009a; Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2009b) identified the top 10% of children and adolescents with the highest levels of multiple victimizations as poly-victims. Using this approach, adolescents aged 12 to 14 years who are classed as lifetime poly-victims have been reported to have experienced 7–14 different types of victimization, while those aged 15 to 17 years have suffered 9–15 different types of victimization, depending on the country (Cyr et al., 2013; Finkelhor et al., 2009a; Pereda, Guilera, & Abad, 2014; Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017; Radford, Corral, Bradley, & Fisher, 2013).

Research on poly-victimization in childhood and adolescence has been conducted throughout the world. Most of the studies that have been published in different continents have used the same conceptual framework and standard measures, demonstrating the high levels of exposure to violence in children and, to some extent, enabling cultural comparisons between America (Cyr et al., 2013; Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017), Europe (Aho, Gren-Landell, & Svedin, 2014; Ellonen & Salmi, 2011; Pereda et al., 2014; Radford et al., 2013), and Asia (Dong, Cao, Cheng, Cui, & Li, 2013; Le, Holton, Nguyen, Wolfe, & Fisher, 2015).

In Mexico, there is little information on child and youth poly-victimization. The only investigation carried out on this in Mexico was by Frías and Finkelhor (2017), who analyzed data on bullying, cyberbullying, theft, physical assault, sexual abuse, robberies with and without violence, threats and extortion experienced by adolescents aged between 12 and 17 years from the 2014 Social Cohesion Survey for the Prevention of Violence and Crime (see Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2018). They found that 10% of adolescents experienced four or more different types of victimization. However, due to the fairly narrow range of the types of victimization analyzed, their results do not provide a comprehensive picture of victimization and poly-victimization in Mexican children. Furthermore, their use of different methods to assess victimization does not allow for comparisons with the results of the studies conducted in other countries.

1.1. Objective of the study

The present study aimed to assess the scope of adolescent victimization and poly-victimization in a community sample from Western Mexico, investigating both lifetime and past-year victimization. We also analyzed sex and age differences, based on previous research (Cyr et al., 2013; Finkelhor, Hamby et al., 2005; Pereda et al., 2014; Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017). Understanding gender patterns in different types of victimization is necessary to design accurate prevention and intervention programs. In addition, to determine the prevalence of poly-victimization, we used a methodology that enabled us to compare our results with those of other studies that have been conducted in countries with similar cultures such as Spain (Pereda et al., 2014) and Chile (Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017).

Based on the findings of previous studies, we propose that the rates of victimization and poly-victimization in Mexico will be similar to those of other Latin American countries (Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017) and slightly higher than those of European (Aho et al., 2014; Ellonen & Salmi, 2011; Pereda et al., 2014; Radford et al., 2013) and North American countries (Cyr et al., 2013; Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005b). We also expect to find gender differences in the types of victimization experienced, with boys more likely to experience victimization related to conventional crimes and community violence and girls more likely to suffer sexual

Table 1
Characteristics of the study participants.

Variable	Male		Female		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Age, years						
12-14	240	42.6	279	55.4	519	48.6
15-17	324	57.4	225	44.6	549	51.4
Family composition						
Two parents	377	66.8	339	67.2	716	67.0
Single parent (mother)	121	21.5	105	20.8	226	21.1
Single parent (father)	12	2.1	8	1.6	20	1.9
Mother and stepfather	29	5.1	27	5.4	56	5.2
Father and stepmother	4	0.7	7	1.4	11	1.0
Other	17	3.0	15	3.0	32	3.1
Refused to answer	4	0.7	3	0.6	7	0.7
Parent's education level						
Father						
No or incomplete education primary school	27	6.3	35	8.8	62	7.5
Primary school	74	17.3	84	21.0	158	19.1
Secondary school	171	40.3	160	39.8	331	40.0
High school	100	23.4	87	21.8	187	22.6
University	53	12.4	32	8.0	85	10.3
Postgraduate studies	1	0.2	3	0.8	4	0.5
Currently working	465	82.4	413	81.9	878	92.0
Mother						
No or incomplete education primary school	25	5.4	27	6.2	52	5.7
Primary school	70	15.0	81	18.5	151	16.7
Secondary school	194	41.8	194	44.0	388	42.9
High school	126	27	102	23.2	228	25.2
University	48	10.3	33	7.5	81	9.0
Postgraduate studies	2	0.4	3	0.7	5	0.6

victimization, caregiver victimization and exposure to family violence (Aho et al., 2014; Cyr et al., 2013; Finkelhor, Hamby et al., 2005; Pereda et al., 2014; Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017). However, we still expect the rates of poly-victimization to be equal for both sexes. Regarding age, we hypothesize that the older adolescents will have higher rates of lifetime poly-victimization than younger adolescents (Finkelhor et al., 2009a, 2009b) and that the past-year victimization rates will be different for the two age groups (12–14 years and 15–17 years) given the discrepancies in previous research findings regarding age differences in past-year victimization incidences (Cyr et al., 2013; Finkelhor, Hamby et al., 2005; Pereda et al., 2014; Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017).

2. Method

2.1. Sample

The sample was composed of 1068 adolescents (504 females and 564 males). Participants were recruited from six public high schools in Morelia City, Western Mexico, using a non-probability sampling procedure. In total, 10 schools were invited to participate into the investigation. We only received a positive answer from six schools. The groups that answered the questionnaires were chosen by the school's directors, according to the schedule that was convenient for the school. We included only students aged between 12 and 17 years old ($M = 14.45$ years, $SD = 1.54$). Questionnaires from adolescents with cognitive problems were dismissing ($n = 1$). We collected 1110 questionnaires. Those which had 10 or more missing items were excluded ($n = 41$). Table 1 shows their main socio-demographic characteristics.

2.2. Procedure

This cross-sectional study was approved by the research department of the Universidad Latina de América (located in Morelia city), before data collection took place, and was guided by the Mexican General Law for Children and Adolescents (*Ley General de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes*, approved in 2014). The participant's parents or guardians signed an informed consent that explained the research aims. The adolescents were informed that their participation was anonymous, voluntary and that they could stop answering the questionnaire if they felt uncomfortable at any moment. They gave verbal consent after being informed of the aims of the study. The percentage of parents/adolescents who consented to participate in the study was 99.2%. The main researcher and two psychology senior university students administered the questionnaire in the adolescents' school classes in early 2016.

2.3. Measures

Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ; Finkelhor, Hamby et al., 2005). The Spanish version of the questionnaire (Pereda, Gallardo-Pujol, & Guilera, 2016) was adapted to the Mexican culture with the authors' permission. Due to the high frequency of kidnapping in Mexico (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2016a), two new items were added to the questionnaire, one to the conventional crime domain and the other to the witnessing or indirect victimization domain. This version of the JVQ described 38 forms of victimization divided into six domains: (a) conventional crime (10 items), (b) caregiver victimization (4 items), (c) peer and sibling victimization (6 items), (d) sexual victimization (6 items), (e) witnessing and indirect victimization (10 items), and (f) electronic victimization (2 items). The JVQ and its Spanish version have been demonstrated to be a valid and reliable tool for assessing the experiences of violence in children and adolescents (Finkelhor, Hamby et al., 2005; Pereda et al., 2014).

2.4. Data analysis

Descriptive analyses were conducted to determine the prevalence of various forms of victimization in adolescents both during their lifetime and in the past year. Past-year poly-victimization rates were measured following the Screener Sum Version proposed by Finkelhor, Ormrod et al. (2005a), summing the total number of victimization types experienced by each participant (38). The poly-victims were divided into two groups according to the distinction made by Finkelhor, Ormrod et al. (2005a): low poly-victimization group (those who reported four to seven experiences of victimization) and high poly-victimization group (those who reported seven or more experiences of victimization). To explore the prevalence of lifetime poly-victimization, the top decile of the sample was the threshold used to identify poly-victims. This threshold was utilized due to victimizations accumulating with age (Finkelhor et al., 2009a, 2009b). Odds ratios were used to determine if there were differences between the genders (male vs female) and age groups (younger adolescents aged 12–14 years vs older adolescents aged 15–17 years), when its 95% confidence interval did not include the 1 value ($p < .05$). In order to compare the number of lifetime victimizations between age and gender groups, the Mann–Whitney U statistic was applied, and the significance level was set at $p < .05$. Missing values were handled using listwise deletion method.

3. Results

3.1. Demographics

One-thousand and sixty-eight students completed the questionnaire (52.8% males and 47.2% females). Most of the respondents lived with their two parents (67%). Regarding parent's education level, the majority of both fathers and mothers, have completed secondary school (40% and 42.9% respectively) and high school (22.6% and 25.2% respectively). Almost all of the fathers were working at the time the study was carried out (92%) and less than half of the mothers had a job (44.2%).

3.2. Victimizations

In our sample, 85.5% of the adolescents (85.3% of males and 85.7% of females, $OR = 1.03$, 95% CI [0.73, 1.45]) reported at least one experience of victimization during their lives, while 78% (77.1% of males and 79% of females, $OR = 1.11$, 95% CI [0.83, 1.48]) reported at least one in the past year. The differences between the male and female participants were not significant. The number of victimizations reported ranged from 1 to 20 for past-year cases and 1 to 21 for lifetime experiences. No age differences were found in the rates of both lifetime and past-year victimization (83.4% for adolescents aged 12–14 years and 87.4% for adolescents aged 15–17 years, $OR = 1.38$, 95% CI [0.98, 1.94] and 76.1% for adolescents aged 12–14 years and 79.8% for adolescents aged 15–17 years, $OR = 1.23$, 95% CI [0.92, 1.65], respectively). However, the average number of victimizations was higher in the older adolescents (see Table 4) for both lifetime and past-year victimization ($U = 167,663$, $p < 0.05$ and $U = 160,790.500$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). Regarding genders, there were no statistical differences in the average number of victimizations at both frame times ($U = 147,109$, $p > 0.05$ and $U = 144,044$, $p > 0.05$, respectively). Tables 2 and 3 present the prevalence of the different types of lifetime and past-year victimization classified in the JVQ categories and subcategories. Differences between the age groups and genders are also presented.

3.3. Conventional crime

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, 65.6% of the adolescents were victims of conventional crimes during their lifetime and 55.5% during the past year. In particular, 53.7% reported lifetime *property victimization* (robbery, personal theft, and vandalism). There were no differences based on age ($OR = 0.94$, 95% $CI=0.73-1.19$) or gender ($OR = 0.94$, 95% $CI=0.71-1.20$). By contrast, older adolescents and boys suffered more lifetime *crimes against persons* (*assault with or without a weapon, attempted and threatened assault, kidnapping and bias attack*) than the younger adolescents ($OR = 1.74$, 95% $CI=1.36-2.23$) and girls ($OR = 0.76$, 95% $CI=0.59-0.97$). Similar trends were observed for past-year victimization experiences, with no differences observed for *property victimization* between the genders ($OR = 0.99$, 95% $CI=0.78-1.26$) or age groups ($OR = 0.90$, 95% $CI=0.70-1.14$) but boys and older adolescents being more likely to experience *crimes against persons* than girls ($OR = 0.75$, 95% $CI=0.58-0.97$) and younger adolescents ($OR = 1.69$, 95% $CI=1.30-2.19$) The most common crime that the participants fell victim to was theft for both lifetime and past-year experiences.

Table 2
Lifetime victimization in Mexican adolescents.

Victimization	Lifetime victimization									
	Victimized		Age group (%)			Gender (%)				
	<i>n</i>	%	12-14	15-17	OR	95% C.I.	M	F	OR	95% C.I.
C. Conventional crimes	701	65.6	63.6	67.6	1.19	0.92-1.53	67.2	63.9	0.86	0.67-1.11
Property victimization	574	53.7	54.5	53.0	0.94	0.73-1.19	54.4	53.0	0.94	0.71-1.20
C1. Robbery	146	13.7	14.9	12.6	0.82	0.58-1.16	15.7	11.5	0.69*	0.49-0.99
C2. Personal theft	343	32.3	30.9	33.3	1.12	0.87-1.45	29.9	34.9	1.25	0.97-1.62
C3. Vandalism	334	31.4	34.2	28.7	0.77	0.59-1.00	32.5	30.2	0.89	0.69-1.16
Crimes against persons	453	42.4	35.5	49.0	1.74*	1.36-2.23	45.6	38.9	0.76*	0.59-0.97
C4. Assault with a weapon	128	12.1	6.8	17.0	2.81*	1.87-4.24	16.8	6.8	0.36*	0.23-0.54
C5. Assault without a weapon	151	14.2	8.5	19.6	2.60*	1.79-3.79	16.5	11.7	0.67*	0.47-0.95
C6. Attempted assault	115	10.8	9.9	11.7	1.20	0.81-1.78	10.9	10.7	0.98	0.66-1.44
C7. Threatened assault	228	21.5	17.8	24.9	1.52*	1.13-2.05	23.4	19.3	0.78	0.58-1.04
C8. Attempted kidnapping	31	2.9	2.7	3.1	1.15	0.56-2.36	2.3	3.6	1.55	0.75-3.21
C9. Kidnapping	6	0.6	0.8	0.4	0.47	0.86-2.57	0.5	0.6	1.11	0.22-5.54
C10. Bias attack	76	7.1	5.8	8.4	1.48	0.92-2.39	6.2	8.2	1.33	0.83-2.12
M. Caregiver victimization	361	33.8	27.9	39.3	1.67*	1.29-2.16	29.1	39.1	1.56*	1.21-2.02
M1. Physical abuse	223	21.0	17.8	23.9	1.45*	1.07-1.95	20.2	21.9	1.10	.082-1.48
M2. Psychological/emotional abuse	219	20.7	15.7	25.4	1.82*	1.34-2.47	14	28.3	2.42*	1.78-3.30
M3. Neglect	22	2.1	1.4	2.8	2.05	0.83-5.08	1.4	2.8	1.97	0.82-4.75
M4. Custodial interference/family abduction	51	4.8	4.7	5.0	1.06	0.60-1.87	3.0	6.8	2.32*	1.28-4.20
P. Peer and sibling victimization	522	48.9	44.1	53.4	1.44*	1.13-1.84	51.4	46.0	0.80	0.63-1.02
P1. Gang or group assault	97	9.1	5.4	12.7	2.52*	1.60-3.99	12.9	5.0	0.35*	0.22-0.56
P2. Peer or sibling assault	282	26.7	26.4	26.9	1.02	0.78-1.35	25.7	27.8	1.11	0.84-1.46
P3. Non-sexual genital assault	122	11.5	9.7	13.2	1.41	0.96-2.07	17.7	4.6	0.22*	0.13-0.35
P4. Physical intimidation	84	7.9	7.6	8.2	1.09	0.70-1.71	5.9	10.1	1.81*	1.14-2.85
P5. Verbal/relational aggression	171	16.1	13.2	18.9	1.53*	1.09-2.13	12.3	20.3	1.80*	1.29-2.52
P6. Dating violence	48	4.5	3.7	5.3	1.46	0.81-2.64	6.4	2.4	0.35*	0.18-0.69
S. Sexual victimization	161	15.1	11.9	18	1.62*	1.15-2.28	9.8	21.0	2.46*	1.73-3.50
With physical contact	107	10.0	7.3	12.6	1.82*	1.20-2.75	5.7	14.9	2.90*	1.88-4.48
S1. Sexual abuse/assault by a known adult	56	5.3	3.5	7.0	2.07*	1.16-3.68	1.8	9.2	5.56*	2.77-11.14

S2. Sexual abuse/assault by an unknown adult	24	2.3	1.9	2.6	1.32	0.58-3.01	0.9	3.8	4.37*	1.62-11.80
S3. Sexual abuse/assault by a peer /sibling	30	2.8	1.9	3.7	1.92	0.89-4.15	2.7	3.0	1.11	.541-2.31
S4. Forced sex (including attempts)	29	2.7	1.4	4.0	3.04*	1.29-7.19	1.6	4.0	2.54*	1.14-5.64
Without physical contact	84	7.9	6.7	8.9	1.35	0.86-2.12	6.4	9.5	1.54	0.98-2.42
S5. Flashing/sexual exposure	54	5.1	4.1	6.0	1.51	0.86-2.65	5.0	5.2	1.03	0.59-1.79
S6. Verbal sexual harassment	38	3.6	3.3	3.8	1.17	0.61-2.24	2.0	5.4	2.83*	1.38-5.76
W. Witnessing and indirect victimization	652	61.0	54.5	67.2	1.71*	1.33-2.19	59.6	62.7	1.14	0.89-1.46
Family violence	201	18.8	16.2	21.3	1.40*	1.02-1.91	14.9	23.2	1.72*	1.26-2.35
W1. Witness to domestic violence	139	13.1	11.4	14.6	1.32	0.92-1.90	11.1	15.3	1.45*	1.01-2.07
W2. Witness to parent assault to sibling	93	8.8	7.4	10.1	1.40	0.91-2.17	6.1	11.7	2.05*	1.32-3.18
Community violence	602	56.4	50.1	62.3	1.64*	1.29-2.10	55.9	56.9	1.04	0.82-1.33
W3. Witness to assault with a weapon	268	25.3	19.2	31.0	1.88*	1.41-2.50	27.8	22.5	0.75*	0.57-0.99
W4. Witness to assault without a weapon	224	21.1	23.1	19.0	1.28	0.95-1.72	21.3	20.9	0.97	0.72-1.31
W5. Burglary of family house	158	14.9	14.7	15.0	1.02	0.72-1.43	12.5	17.5	1.48*	1.05-2.08
W6. Murder of family member or friend	170	16.0	13.6	18.3	1.42*	1.02-1.99	13.1	19.3	1.59*	1.14-2.21
W7. Witness to a murder	88	8.3	6.8	9.7	1.47	0.94-2.30	9.5	7.0	0.71	0.45-1.11
W8. Exposure to random shootings, etc.	244	23.0	21.3	24.5	1.19	0.89-1.59	24.1	21.7	0.87	0.65-1.16
W9. Exposure to war or ethnic conflict	33	3.1	1.7	4.4	2.58*	1.19-5.61	3.6	2.6	0.71	0.35-1.45
W10. Witness to a kidnapping	28	2.6	2.3	2.9	1.26	0.59-2.70	2.7	2.6	0.96	0.45-2.04
INT. Electronic victimization	208	19.5	13.7	25.0	2.09*	1.52-2.87	15.1	24.4	1.81*	1.33-2.47
INT1. Harassment	113	10.6	7.9	13.2	1.76*	1.17-2.63	8.1	13.5	1.78*	1.20-2.65
INT2. Sexual solicitations	150	14.1	10.1	17.9	1.94*	1.35-2.79	10.2	18.5	2.00*	1.40-2.85

* The 95% confidence interval does not include the null value (OR = 1).

3.4. Caregiver victimization

More than a third of the respondents (33.8%) experienced caregiver victimization in their lifetime. The female participants reported this type of victimization more often than the male participants ($OR = 1.56$, 95% $CI=1.21-2.02$), as did the older adolescents compared to the younger participants ($OR = 1.67$, 95% $CI=1.29-2.16$). During the past year, 25.7% of the sample suffered caregiver victimization, with girls and older adolescents more likely to suffer this than boys ($OR = 1.79$, 95% $CI=1.36-2.37$) and younger adolescents ($OR = 1.52$, 95% $CI=1.15-2.00$). The most common forms of caregiver victimization reported were *physical* and *emotional abuse*.

Table 3
Past-year victimization in Mexican adolescents.

Victimization	Past-year victimization									
	Victimized		Age group (%)				Gender (%)			
	<i>n</i>	%	12-14	15-17	OR	95% C.I.	M	F	OR	95% C.I.
C. Conventional crimes	593	55.5	53.2	57.7	1.20	0.94-1.53	56.7	54.2	0.90	0.70-1.14
Property victimization	484	45.3	46.6	44.1	0.90	0.70-1.14	45.4	45.2	0.99	0.78-1.26
C1. Robbery	116	10.9	12.9	8.9	0.66*	0.44-0.97	12.8	8.7	0.65*	0.44-0.97
C2. Personal theft	303	28.4	26.6	30.1	1.18	0.90-1.54	25.5	31.7	1.35*	1.03-1.76
C3. Vandalism	259	24.3	26.6	22.3	0.79	0.59-1.04	25.1	23.5	0.91	0.68-1.20
Crimes against persons	349	32.7	26.8	38.3	1.69*	1.30-2.19	35.6	29.4	0.75*	0.58-0.97
C4. Assault with a weapon	92	8.6	5.4	11.7	2.31*	1.46-3.67	12.9	3.8	0.26*	0.15-0.44
C5. Assault without a weapon	110	10.3	6.6	13.8	2.29*	1.50-3.50	12.2	8.1	0.63*	0.42-0.95
C6. Attempted assault	72	6.7	6.4	7.1	1.12	0.69-1.82	6.7	6.7	1.00	0.62-1.61
C7. Threatened assault	161	15.1	12.5	17.6	1.48*	1.05-2.09	16.4	13.7	0.80	0.57-1.13
C8. Attempted kidnapping	15	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.42	0.50-4.03	1.2	1.6	1.28	0.46-3.55
C9. Kidnapping	4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.94	0.13-6.72	0.4	0.4	1.11	0.15-7.96
C10. Bias attack	51	4.8	3.5	6.0	1.78	0.99-3.20	4.6	4.8	1.08	0.61-1.9
M. Caregiver victimization	274	25.7	21.6	29.5	1.52*	1.15-2.00	20.4	31.5	1.79*	1.36-2.37
M1. Physical abuse	147	13.8	12.9	14.6	1.15	0.81-1.62	13.9	13.7	0.99	0.69-1.40
M2. Psychological/emotional abuse	176	16.5	12.5	20.4	1.78*	1.28-2.49	10.1	23.8	2.76*	1.96-3.89
M3. Neglect	15	1.4	0.6	2.2	3.84*	1.07-13.69	1.1	1.8	1.69	0.59-4.78
M4. Custodial interference/family abduction	24	2.2	2.5	2.0	0.79	0.35-1.79	1.4	3.2	2.27	0.96-5.37
P. Peer and sibling victimization	408	38.2	36.2	40.1	1.17	0.91-1.50	42.0	33.9	0.70*	0.55-0.90
P1. Gang or group assault	70	6.6	3.1	9.9	3.43*	1.94-6.08	9.6	3.2	0.30*	0.17-0.54
P2. Peer or sibling assault	212	19.9	21.3	18.6	0.84	0.62-1.14	19.3	20.6	1.08	0.80-1.46
P3. Non-sexual genital assault	96	9.0	9.1	8.9	0.98	0.64-1.49	14.2	3.2	0.19*	0.11-0.34
P4. Physical intimidation	62	5.8	6.6	5.1	0.76	0.45-1.28	4.3	7.5	1.82*	1.08-3.09
P5. Verbal/relational aggression	105	9.8	8.9	10.8	1.24	0.82-1.86	7.7	12.4	1.70*	1.13-2.56
P6. Dating violence	36	3.4	2.5	4.2	1.70	0.85-3.39	4.6	2.0	0.41*	0.20-0.87
S. Sexual victimization	90	8.4	8.1	8.7	1.08	0.70-1.67	6.7	10.3	1.59*	1.02-2.46
With physical contact	53	5.0	4.6	5.3	1.15	0.66-2.00	3.4	6.7	2.07*	1.16-3.68
S1. Sexual abuse/assault by a known adult	21	2.0	1.7	2.2	1.27	0.53-3.04	0.5	3.6	6.92*	2.02-23.66
S2. Sexual abuse/assault by an unknown adult	8	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.94	0.23-3.79	0.4	1.2	3.39	0.68-16.91
S3. Sexual abuse/assault by a peer /sibling	21	2.0	1.9	2.0	1.04	0.43-2.47	2.1	1.8	0.83	0.34-2.00
S4. Forced sex (including attempts)	18	1.7	1.0	2.4	2.49	0.88-7.04	1.2	2.2	1.77	0.68-4.61
Without physical contact	51	4.8	4.6	4.9	1.06	0.60-1.87	4.4	5.2	1.17	0.66-2.05
S5. Flashing/sexual exposure	33	3.1	2.7	3.5	1.29	0.64-2.60	3.5	2.6	0.72	0.35-1.46

S6. Verbal sexual harassment	23	2.2	2.3	2.0	0.86	0.37-1.97	1.2	3.2	2.60*	1.06-6.39
W. Witnessing and indirect victimization	479	44.9	39.9	49.5	1.48*	1.16-1.88	45.6	44.0	0.94	0.73-1.19
Family violence	107	10.0	9.1	10.9	1.23	0.82-1.84	8.2	12.1	1.55*	1.03-2.32
W1. Witness to domestic violence	60	5.6	5.2	6.0	1.16	0.69-1.96	4.8	6.5	1.39	0.82-2.35
W2. Witness to parent assault to sibling	55	5.1	4.8	5.5	1.14	0.66-1.97	3.7	6.7	1.87*	1.07-3.26
Community violence	442	41.4	37	45.5	1.42*	1.11-1.81	43.8	38.7	0.81	0.63-1.03
W3. Witness to assault with a weapon	195	18.3	12.8	23.7	2.11*	1.53-2.93	20.7	15.8	0.71*	0.52-0.98
W4. Witness to assault without a weapon	165	15.4	13.5	17.4	1.34	0.96-1.88	17.5	13.4	0.72	0.52—1.02
W5. Burglary of family house	83	7.8	7.5	8.0	1.07	0.68-1.67	6.4	9.3	1.51	0.96-2.37
W6. Murder of family member or friend	100	9.4	7.6	11.2	1.54*	1.01-2.34	7.7	11.4	1.54*	1.01—2.33
W7. Witness to a murder	57	5.3	5.0	5.7	1.13	0.66-1.93	6.7	3.8	0.54*	0.30-0.95
W8. Exposure to random shootings, etc.	146	13.7	13.3	14.1	1.07	0.75-1.51	14.6	12.7	0.85	0.59-1.20
W9. Exposure to war or ethnic conflict	14	1.3	0.8	1.8	2.38	0.74-7.66	1.4	1.2	0.83	0.28-2.43
W10. Witness to a kidnapping	18	1.7	1.7	1.6	0.94	0.37-2.39	1.6	1.8	1.12	0.44-2.84
INT. Electronic victimization	169	15.8	11.9	19.5	1.78*	1.27-2.50	11.9	20.2	1.88*	1.34-2.63
INT1. Harassment	90	8.4	7.1	9.7	1.39	0.89-2.15	5.9	11.3	2.05*	1.31-3.20
INT2. Sexual solicitations	122	11.4	8.7	14.1	1.72*	1.16-2.54	8.5	14.8	1.86*	1.26-2.74

* The 95% confidence interval does not include the null value ($OR = 1$).

3.5. Peer and sibling victimization

Almost half of the adolescents (48.9%) reported peer and sibling victimization during their lifetime. The older adolescents suffered more peer and sibling victimization than the younger participants ($OR = 1.44$, 95% $CI=1.13-1.84$). Differences between the genders were not statistically significant. By contrast, 38.2% of the participants reported peer and sibling victimization during the past year. No significant differences were found between the age groups, but we did observe that boys were more likely to be *assaulted by a peer or sibling* than girls ($OR = 0.70$, 95% $CI=0.55-0.90$). In both their lifetime and in the past year, boys were more likely to suffer a *gang or group assault* ($OR = 0.35$, 95% $CI=0.22-0.56$ and $OR = 0.30$, 95% $CI=0.17-0.54$, respectively), a *non-sexual genital assault* ($OR = 0.22$, 95% $CI=0.13-0.35$ and $OR = 0.19$, 95% $CI=0.11-0.34$, respectively) and be a target of *dating violence* ($OR = 0.35$, 95% $CI=0.18-0.69$ and $OR = 0.41$, 95% $CI=0.20-0.87$, respectively) than girls, while girls were more likely to be a target of *physical intimidation* ($OR = 1.81$, 95% $CI=1.14-2.85$ and $OR = 1.82$, 95% $CI=1.08-3.09$, respectively) and *verbal/relational victimization* ($OR = 1.80$, 95% $CI=1.29-2.52$ and $OR = 1.70$, 95% $CI=1.13-2.56$, respectively) than boys. The most common victimization reported was *peer or sibling assault* for both lifetime and past-year experiences.

3.6. Sexual victimization

In our sample, 15.1% experienced sexual victimization during their lifetime and 8.4% during the past year. Lifetime *sexual victimization with physical contact* (which includes *sexual abuse/assault by a known adult, unknown adult, siblings or peers and forced sex*) was more frequently reported (10%) than *sexual victimization without physical contact* (*flashing/sexual exposure and verbal sexual harassment*) (7.9%). The prevalence of past-year *sexual victimization with physical contact* (5.0%) was slightly higher than that of past-year *sexual victimization without physical contact* (4.8%). In general, girls were significantly more likely to suffer sexual victimization than boys ($OR = 2.46$, 95% $CI=1.73-3.50$ and $OR = 1.59$, 95% $CI=1.02-2.46$, respectively), while the older adolescents were more likely to experience sexual victimization ($OR = 1.62$, 95% $CI=1.15-2.28$) during their lifetime. For both lifetime and past-year experiences, *sexual abuse by an unknown adult* and *flashing/sexual exposure* were the most common forms of sexual victimization reported.

3.7. Witnessing and indirect victimization

Among the respondents, 61% reported witnessing and indirect victimization during their lifetime and 44.9% during the past year. The most frequent types of indirect victimization reported were *witness to an assault with a weapon* (25.3% for lifetime experiences and 23.7% for past-year experiences), *exposure to random shootings* (23% for lifetime experiences and 13.7% for past-year experiences), and *witness to an assault without a weapon* (21.1% for lifetime experiences and 15.4% for past-year experiences). In general, older adolescents reported indirect victimization more frequently than younger adolescents. Girls reported *family violence* (*witness to domestic violence* and *witness to parent assault to sibling*) more often than the boys for both lifetime and past-year experiences ($OR = 1.72$, 95% $CI=1.26-2.35$ and $OR = 1.55$, 95% $CI=1.03-2.32$, respectively).

3.8. Electronic victimization

Regarding electronic victimization, 19.5% of the adolescents reported this type of victimization during their lifetime and 15.8% during the past year. Being *exposed to sexual solicitations* was reported more often than *electronic harassment*, with the older adolescents and girls reporting this type of victimization more frequently.

3.9. Poly-victimization

As shown in Table 4, almost half of the adolescents (44.2%) reported 1–3 different experiences of victimization, 22.3% reported 4–6 experiences of victimization (low poly-victimization), and 13.6% reported more than 7

experiences of victimization (high poly- victimization). Regarding the poly-victims, there were no differences in relation to gender or age.

The top 10% of the sample with the highest levels of victimization were identified as lifetime poly-victims. The 90th percentile was 9 or more victimizations for the younger adolescents and 12 or more victimizations for the older adolescents (Table 4).

Table 4
Number of victimizations and score thresholds according to age.

	Lifetime (%)			Past year (%)		
	12-14 years (n = 519)	15-17 years (n = 549)	Total (n = 1068)	12-14 years (n = 519)	15-17 years (n = 549)	Total (n = 1068)
No victimization	16.6	12.6	14.5	23.9	20.2	22.0
1-3 victimizations	n/a	n/a	n/a	45.1	39.3	42.0
4-6 victimizations	n/a	n/a	n/a	20.4	24.0	22.3
7 or more victimizations	n/a	n/a	n/a	10.6	16.4	13.6
Number of victims	433	480	913	395	438	833
Mean number of victimizations among victims (SD)	3.87 (3.7)	5.11 (4.2)	4.51 (3.14)	2.80 (3.1)	3.47 (3.3)	3.14 (3.2)
% children with above average number of victimizations	32.5	40.0	40.2	31.0	30.9	35.9
Number of victimizations in the 90th percentile	9+	12+	11+	7+	8+	7+
% children with number of victimizations above the 90th percentile	9.4	7.3	8.1	7.9	7.8	9.6

4. Discussion

The main aim of this study was to establish the prevalence of victimization and poly-victimization in a community sample of adolescents from western Mexico, also analyzing any age and gender differences. There is insufficient information on child and adolescent victimization in Mexico, with the types of victimization analyzed to date being limited (Frías & Finkelhor, 2017; Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2016b). In this regard, this is the first study to comprehensively analyze adolescent victimization in Mexico using an approach suggested by Finkelhor, Ormrod et al. (2005a) that enables cross-cultural comparisons.

In line with the results of previous studies, our findings confirmed the wide range of violence suffered by adolescents. In our sample, most of the participants (78% during the last year and 85.5% during their lifetime) experienced at least one type of victimization. Past-year victimization rates in Mexican adolescents were higher than those reported for European (63.6% in Sweden (Aho et al., 2014), 64.6% in Finland (Ellonen & Salmi, 2011), 69% in Spain (Pereda et al., 2014), and 57.1% in the United Kingdom (Radford et al., 2013)), North American and South American samples (61% in Canada (Cyr et al., 2013), 69.3% in the United States (Finkelhor et al., 2009a, 2009b), and 76.8% in Chile (Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017)). The lifetime victimization rates reported in this study were slightly higher than those found in North America (76% in Canada (Cyr et al., 2013) and 79.6% in the United States (Finkelhor et al., 2009a, 2009b)) and Europe (83% in Sweden (Aho et al., 2014), 83% in Spain (Pereda et al., 2014), and 83.7% in the United Kingdom (Radford et al., 2013)), but lower than that observed in a Chilean sample (89%; Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017). Thus, we can confirm that the historically high prevalence of violence in Latin America (see, for example, the review by Imbusch, Misse, & Carrión, 2011) has not improved in Mexico.

When focusing on the different types of victimization experienced, we observed that falling victim to conventional crimes (65.6% during their lifetime and 55.5% during the past year) and witnessing violence (61% during their lifetime and 44.9% during the past year) were the most frequently experienced types of victimization. This demonstrates that Mexican adolescents may experience different types of victimizations that have been normally attributed only to adults. For example, the National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Safety assessed victimizations associated with assault, kidnapping, witness to a murder, or exposure to random shootings only in people aged over 18 years (see Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2018). Our results suggest that future surveys should also include adolescents aged below 18 years given that they frequently suffer these types of interpersonal violence too.

Sexual victimization (15.1% during their lifetime and 8.4% during the past year) was reported the least frequently among all the different types of victimization. Nevertheless, its prevalence was still higher than that reported in most studies conducted with Mexican samples (e.g., 2.9% in Chavez et al. (2009), 6.7% in Frías and Erviti (2014), and 4.3% in Ramos-Lira et al. (1998). Variations in prevalence may be due to differences in the methodologies used to assess sexual victimization, such as differences in the definition of child sexual abuse, the use of different instruments to identify victims, or even the diversity in the characteristics of the samples (see Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gómez-Benito, 2009).

Caregiver victimization was more frequently reported by older adolescents (39.3% during their lifetime and 29.5% during the past year) and girls (39.1% during their lifetime and 31.5% during the past year). Our results show that girls and boys experienced physical abuse in a similar frequency. This result is different than the one reported by a National

Survey (UNICEF, 2015) in which boys experienced more physical abuse than girls. Also, the prevalence found in our sample is lower than the prevalence informed in other studies carried out in Mexico (Caballero et al., 2010; UNICEF, 2015). This lower prevalence may be due to differences in the characteristics of the samples and also differences in the methodologies used to assess caregiver victimization.

Studies conducted in other countries have shown trends that are similar to those reported in this study when analyzing the types of victimization experienced. Victimization to conventional crimes and indirect victimization are reported the most frequently, while sexual victimization is the least commonly reported (Cyr et al., 2013; Finkelhor, Hamby et al., 2005; Pereda et al., 2014). However, the high rates of violence suffered by Mexican and Chilean (Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017) adolescents compared to European and North American adolescents suggest that adolescents from Latin American countries tend to experience more victimizations than those from other continents.

4.1. Age and gender differences

We observed that Mexican girls experienced more violence than boys in all the domains analyzed except for falling victim to conventional crimes. Specifically, girls experienced more emotional abuse, family abductions, sexual abuse by known and unknown adults, forced sex, verbal sexual harassment, family violence, physical intimidation by a peer or sibling, verbal/relational aggression, burglary of a family house, murder of a family member, and electronic victimization. By contrast, boys experienced more robberies, assault with a weapon, gang or group assault, non-sexual genital assault, and dating violence, and were more likely to witness an assault with a weapon. Thus, the victimization spectrum is wider for females than males, as has been documented by Frías (2014). Pinto-Cortez et al. (2017) found similar results in a Chilean sample with the same age range. This indicates that girls in Latin America have to cope with higher levels of violence than those in other cultures (Wilson, 2014). However, it should not be forgotten that boys are also victims of other types of violence that is not only related to conventional crimes. Our observation that victimization to dating violence was more common in boys than girls has also been reported in previous studies using the same instrument in similar cultures (Pereda et al., 2014; Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017), demonstrating that boys can also be victims in intimate relationships. Thus, the patterns of victimization differ between the sexes and should be taken into consideration when creating victimization prevention programs (Finkelhor et al., 2009b).

Older adolescents experienced more lifetime victimizations than the younger participants in all the domains except conventional crimes. This has also been observed previously (Cyr et al., 2013; Finkelhor, Ormrod et al., 2005b), with older adolescents having had more time to experience victimization. This trend was also found for past-year victimization, except for sexual victimization and peer and sibling victimization. There were no differences between the age groups (12–14 vs 15–17) for sexual victimization, which has also been reported in the studies conducted in Spain and Chile (Pereda et al., 2014; Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017). These similar observations may be due to cultural similarities. Peer victimization has been reported to decrease with age (Finkelhor et al., 2009b). However, we did not observe this in our participants, with the rates of past-year peer and sibling victimization being similar in the younger and older adolescents. Similarly, Frías and Finkelhor (2017) showed that older children were more likely to suffer bullying and cyberbullying than younger children.

4.2. Poly-victimization

Research on poly-victimization in children and adolescents has become important around the world, but only one study on this has been conducted to date in Mexico (see Frías & Finkelhor, 2017). Given the high levels of violence in Mexico and the effects of poly-victimization on mental health, information on this subject is very important (Cuevas, Finkelhor, Clifford, Ormrod, & Turner, 2010; Turner et al., 2010). Poly-victimization compromises mental wellbeing in adolescents and increases the risk of re-victimization (Cuevas, Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2009; Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007b; Turner et al., 2010).

Based on the suggestions of Finkelhor et al. (2009a), adolescents with at least four different experiences of victimization in the past year and at least 11 experiences of victimization throughout their lifetime were considered poly-victims. More than a quarter of the Mexican adolescents in our sample were identified as past-year poly-victims, with no differences found between the genders. These rates were higher than those found in Europe (10.3% in Sweden (Aho et al., 2014), 8.89% in Finland (Ellonen & Salmi, 2011), and 19.3% in Spain (Pereda et al., 2014)) and North America (20% in Canada (Cyr et al., 2013) and 22% in the United States (Finkelhor, Ormrod et al., 2005a)), but slightly lower than that reported in Chile (37%; Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017). Regarding lifetime poly-victimization, the cut-off point of 11 experiences of victimization was higher than that for European samples (10 in Sweden (Aho et al., 2014) and 8 in Spain (Pereda et al., 2014)) and lower than that for the Chilean sample (12; Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017). Thus, our results demonstrate that most Mexican children and adolescents suffer different types of violence, and that violence in Latin America seems to be more the norm than the exception (Pinto-Cortez et al., 2017). In addition, the high rates of poly-victimization in our participants highlight the need to identify and help poly-victims to avoid mental health problems and the risk of reproducing violent behaviors. Ignoring this problem will negatively affect the economic and social development of the country (see Buvinic, Morrison, & Orlando, 2005). Our results also confirm the need for a comprehensive study of violence, including further research on poly-victimization in children and adolescents that is practically non-existent in Mexico (Buvinic et al., 2005; Imbusch et al., 2011).

4.3. Limitations

This study had several limitations. The sample was from a specific state in Mexico and only included schooled adolescents. Thus, the results may not be representative of the entire population of Mexican adolescents. The average school years to Mexican population above 15 years old is 9.2, which is equivalent to complete secondary school (see

Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación, 2019). The reasons why children are not schooled include poverty, child labor, having disabilities and speaking an indigenous language (UNICEF, 2016). Thus, our sample contained children from urban areas and specific families that had enough resources to send their children to school. This could have affected the rates of victimization reported, which could have been even higher if a representative sample of adolescents in Mexico was analyzed. Furthermore, data were collected from a self-report questionnaire, which could have been affected by incomplete comprehension of the questions and memory bias. Memory bias, such as telescoping, that is, when an event is remembered to have occurred at a time that is different to when it had actually occurred, can be forward or backward, with forward telescoping producing false positives and backward telescoping producing false negatives when recalling experiences of past-year victimization. It is important to mention that this study is focused in examine gender and age differences, and this multiple contrast analyses could increase type 1 error (Ranganathan, Pramesh, & Buyse, 2016). In addition, the original JVQ was modified to include two questions regarding kidnapping, which could have influenced the results and increased the prevalence of victimization associated with conventional crimes and indirect victimization.

4.4. Conclusion

This is the first study with a Mexican sample of adolescents to use an instrument that evaluated victimization in multiple domains and also identified poly-victims. Despite some methodological issues in identifying poly-victims that should be taken into account (see the analysis by Segura, Pereda, & Guilera, 2018), using the JVQ enabled us to make cross-cultural comparisons. Our results demonstrated the wide range of victimization that Mexican adolescents cope with in multiple contexts. Victimization traditionally attributed to adults are also common in adolescents. This should be taken into consideration when creating public policies to prevent child victimization and intervention programs for victims. Governments, non-profit organizations, and professionals should understand this problem from the perspective of developmental victimology and design early interventions by bearing in mind all the possible scenarios that could involve violence. Given the considerable burden of victimization experienced by Mexican adolescents, it is important to guarantee their right to a life free from violence, especially females, who are exposed to a wider spectrum of victimization.

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