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Neither NEET nor Unemployed: Mexican Youth Homicide Inmates in Organised Crime

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Abstract

Since 2007, academia, media and politicians in Mexico have discussed the causes and precursors of the Mexican Drug War. One of the contentious points is the profile of those participating in the violent conflict. Many from diverse positions have pointed out that the Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) youth population is the leading participant. These assertions have cultivated policy design for the federal government with a new first job trainee program. I dispute this characterisation with data from vital statistics and the recent official inmate survey. Rather than a set fixed profile, I propose an adaptable life-course development description using the inmate survey data with a logit analysis of the probability of being sentenced for homicide in Mexico since 2006, the year of the war onset. By theoretically criticising NEET, I propose studying youth transitions to adulthood and socioeconomic marginalisation instead. The primary purpose of these criticisms is to inform and improve development policies focused on youth crime prevention and reduce violence in Mexico and other countries in Latin America facing increasing violent youth crime.

Keywords: NEET, Violent Crime, Unemployment, Homicide, Youth, Marginalisation.

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Ni Ninis ni desempleados:

Jóvenes en crimen organizado y presos por homicidio en México
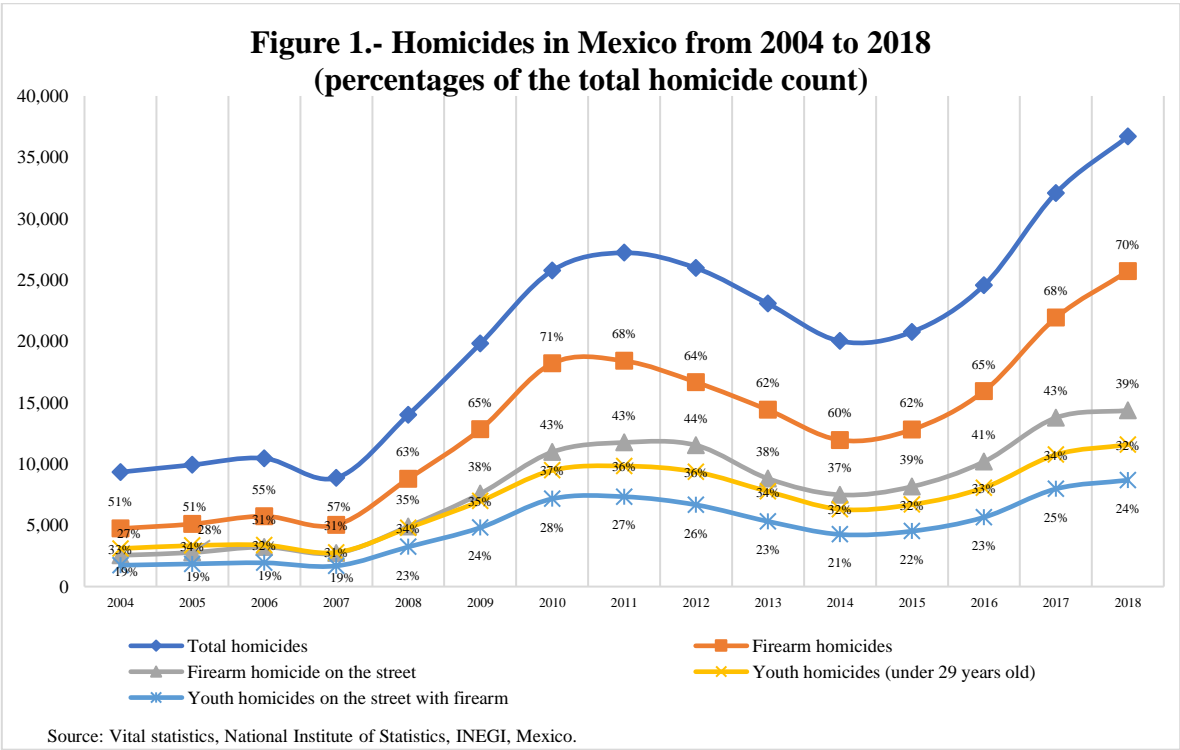
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Resumen

Desde 2007, la academia, medios y políticos han discutido sobre las causas y precursores de la Guerra contra las Drogas en México. Uno de los puntos más disputados es el perfil de aquellos que participan en el conflicto violento. Algunos desde diversas posiciones han argumentado que los jóvenes Ni en Educación, ni Empleo, ni en Entrenamiento (Nini coloquialmente en español) son el principal participante. Estas aseveraciones han inspirado el diseño de política pública con el diseño de un programa de entrenamiento para el primer empleo. En cambio, se rebate esta caracterización con datos provenientes de las estadísticas vitales y encuestas de personas privadas de la libertad. En lugar de un perfil fijo, propongo una descripción adaptada desde un enfoque de curso de vida usando los datos de la última Encuesta Nacional de Personas Privadas de la Libertad (ENPOL), a partir de un análisis de probabilidades de ser sentenciado por homicidio en México desde 2006, año del inicio de la Guerra contra las Drogas en México. Al criticar teóricamente el término Nini, en su lugar se sugiere estudiar transiciones de la juventud a la adultez y marginación socioeconómica. El propósito principal de estas críticas es informar y mejorar políticas de desarrollo enforcadas en reducción del crimen juvenil y el crimen violento en México y América Latina.

Palabras clave: Ninis, Crimen violento, Desempleo, Homicidio, Juventud, Marginalización.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2007 the homicide rates in Mexico have increased after a long decline because of the deployment of the militarised War on Drugs by then-President Felipe Calderón (Espinosa & Rubin, 2015; Atuesta & Pérez, 2018; Phillips, 2015). According to the Mexican National Institute of Statistics (INEGI in Spanish), homicide rates have passed from less than 9 per 100 thousand inhabitants in 2005 to 25 since 2017. In 2010 the homicide rate was 20. Exactly that year, the Rector of the National University of Mexico (UNAM), José Narro, argued that the *Not in Education, Employment, or Training* (NEET) youth were up for recruitment by drug trafficking criminal organisations (Olivares, 2010). These declarations proved controversial and are still up for debate nowadays, but data seemed to have some support for this claim. In **figure 1** can be seen that most homicide victims in Mexico were young men, particularly on the streets with firearms.

Figure 1.- Homicides in Mexico from 2004 to 2018 (percentages of the total homicide count)

Source: Vital statistics, National Institute of Statistics, INEGI, Mexico.

Since then, research has focused on this share of the youth population in Mexico as the primary source of recruitment for organised crime. Murayama (2012) called them the "reserve army of the organised

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crime". Afterwards, Gómez and Merino (2012) and De Hoyos and colleagues (2016) found a correlation between municipal homicide rates and the share of the NEET youth male population. Considering these results, the president Andrés Manuel López Obrador launched the program "*Jóvenes construyendo el futuro*" (Youth Building Future) since 2019 to offer paid internships to NEET youth in business and government offices for one year (DOF, 2019) and expanded the studentship programs to all levels (DOF, 2020, 2020a). Since the campaign, López Obrador (2019) publicly said these programs would offer jobs and schools to the NEET population and prevent them from joining organised crime. "Becarios si, sicarios no" (Students yes, no hitman).

The NEET has gained relevance since 1997, when the UK Education Department proposed it. A fair amount of criticism came afterwards. My argument in this paper is that, although I concur that there is a linkage between educational attainment and unemployment with violent crime, widely discussed in criminology literature, this concept comes with several theoretical and empirical problems that foster inadequate policy design, discriminatory labelling, and misunderstanding life-course of transitions to adulthood and violent crime. By using the NEET concept, crucial causal mechanisms are shadowed by oversimplification.

In the first section, I will do a brief literature review of the NEET concept, particularly for the Mexican case, and highlight the theoretical and empirical problems. Afterwards, I will compare how the scholars using the NEET concept did not reflect and debate the long-standing youth in violent crime literature in sociology and criminology. The second section contends with the research on NEET and violent crime in Mexico by showing the data from vital statistics and inmate surveys. Mainly, I will show a test of the NEET concept using logit analysis of the most recent inmate survey. In the last section, I discuss the results with a brief appeal to nuance the profiling of violent youth crime from a life-course development and marginalisation perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since its release in 1997, the NEET concept has gained relevance in policy and research circuits. Yates and Payne (2007) reviewed the history of the coinage of this concept. From the very beginning, the Department of Education in the United Kingdom identified the NEET population as a source of social problems such as drug abuse and crime. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2008) began to use this concept to analyse trends worldwide. However, this concept is a problem. The NEET research has been constructed from the statistical bracket rather than the experiences of youth. Therefore, it distorts how youth transition from school, employment and training by "freezing" their lives in a single moment in their life course. Indeed, all statistic classifications rely on data collection at some point, but not all concepts are linked to permanent statuses, such as NEET. Unemployment and education are intermittent over time, depending on age, personal circumstances, and the economic outlook.

Theoretical problems of NEET

The main theoretical problem with the NEET concept is that its formation comes from the combination of temporary markers of socioeconomic development. This concept "freezes" the people classified into the category rather than studying its dynamic components. In other words, the NEET keeps the ones studied in that condition, assuming it must be overcome because those in it cannot escape it quickly. As Collier and colleagues (2006) recall from the essentially contested concepts remarks by Gallie, this reduces how open is the concept to use for interpretation. NEET is too closed -because unemployment, schooling and training are phases and dynamic, not static. This concept only allows understanding to get into or out of the NEET condition. At the same time, the NEET scholars do not consider that education, employment, or training do not constantly interact and present themselves in combo for more extended periods in time, but rather in diverse sequences. For example, depending on the job market dynamics, when someone transitions from school to work, vice versa, and training in the middle. These transitions are widely studied in social mobility literature (Boudon,

1974; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993; Raftery & Hout, 1993; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 2002; Breen & Jonsson, 2005). Unsurprisingly, this transition variable sequencing was noted by several researchers using NEET in diverse countries and regions (Maguire, 2015; Thompson, 2011; Tamesberg & Bacher, 2014; Mauro & Miltra, 2020; Furlong, 2006).

Other researchers have noted the diverse experiences of youth classified in NEET. Holte (2018) notices that, while this statistical bracket can be used for some purposes, youth experiences in this condition are temporary. As Chen (2010) mentioned, being NEET is not a causal choice to explain how youth decided to join training problems in Taiwan. Moreover, Powers (1996) found that the idleness condition differs between diverse racial background groups. While it is understandable that Holte and colleagues (2018) argue that NEET can shed light on structural factors behind marginalisation, Roberts (2020), Liska and Walawender (2018) and Maguire (2015) criticise that the concept creates a standardised way of transitioning to adulthood and prescribing negative morality to youth in this bracket. As diverse experiences in the cited literature show, NEET does not equate immediately to a prefix set of decisions or behaviours.

Keynes (1936) said, "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.". In this discussion, I think the practicality of NEET tended to be influenced by Hirschi and Gottfredson's (1990) legacy in control theory in criminology. Nevertheless, this also carries the nuances of their theory and their criticisms. They propose that the propensity to commit crimes comes from the lack of two controls: inner -self-control- and social. This feature is shared with the general strain theory (Agnew, 1992; Messner & Rosenfeld, 2012). Usually, when these controls -school, family, religion- and lack of impulse control during young age, crime becomes more likely in some groups. All these theories share the common traits of the deviance theories by Durkheim, developed later by Merton (1949).

These theories and approaches have nuanced causal mechanisms that do not constrain idleness or NEET precisely. NEET literature assumes that the lack of control becomes permanent or that the

propensity is the most likely in that phase. Nonetheless, these theories have been evaluated by critical criminology for labelling youth (regardless of if they are NEET or in some racialisation category) as having more propensity to crime (Becker, 1963; Matza, 1964) and later creating criminalisation by stigma and moral panic (Goffman, 1959; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Cohen, 2011).

There has been research from the labelling theory angle in Mexico (Assua, 2019; Dautrey, 2014; Reguillo, 2012). Furthermore, the NEET focus has been criticised for the marginalisation that "youth at risk" creates (te Riele, 2006; Follesø, 2015). Furthermore, these reviews on the NEET concept have been more robust than the usual done apprising anomie theories because NEET lacked theoretical and empirical background when formulated. While anomie theories have insights on causal mechanisms on wider behavioural, NEET research just assumes the idleness as a risky condition.

Empirical problems of NETT

NEET also presents practical problems regarding how it helps to make counts and what is counted when dealing with violent crime. Hutchinson and colleagues (2013) argue that administrations in the UK have failed to address the NEET status because the policies have not had an effect so far, basically because it is a transitory phase. For the Mexican case, Negrete and Leyva (2013) studied a cohort of NEET youth between surveys and found several problems. First, the famous 7 million NEET in Mexico called by Rector Narro in 2010 based on the 2005 National Youth Survey (Olivares & Paul, 2010) was an overestimation because it did not consider that unemployment is only counted for those actively seeking a job. Just for those actively seeking a job, there were 1 million, 213 165 youth between 14 and 29 years old in 2010. Second, those NEETs were not economically deprived when analysed by socioeconomic status. 34% were from the low strata they calculated, 50.85% from the middle, 13.69% from the middle-high, and 1.46% from the high ones. Third, months later, they interviewed the same NEET cohort on five different subsequent occasions. The researchers found that less than 11% of those initially NEET remained NEET after the first visit. That number varied from each visit, on average, 10%. In other words, most NEETs surveyed transitioned to studying,

working or domestic labour in one moment. Naturally, making policy for such a moving target is complicated. And not valid as a deprived population because it covers beyond poor or vulnerable youth.

Noticeable, Negrete and Leyva (2013) found a similar tendency to Arceo and Campos's (2011) findings: most NEETs in Mexico are women who are non-actively seeking a job because they are domestic labour. Without counting those not seeking a job, more than 78.4% of NEETs are women in domestic non-paid labour. Recently, Mora and Urbina (2021) analysed the Youth Building Future programme and criticised that it is not designed for crime prevention because it follows the NEET criteria and half of the recipients of the program are women, and not all the recipients come from vulnerable backgrounds or municipalities with high homicide rates. However, the programme could be the beginning of a first employment policy. However, as Arceo (2018) criticised, it is not designed for crime, reducing the beneficiaries to NEET.

Some of these criticisms are easily identifiable in Gómez and Merino's (2012) and De Hoyos and colleagues (2016) research. Both papers reproduce the freezing of NEET stock (theoretical and empirically). Indeed, the authors studied young NEET men to avoid the overwhelming majority skewness toward women in domestic labour. Both papers show similar results with some relevant differences. Schooling rates are relevant to explaining homicide rates, but employment is inconsistent in the several models in both papers. In both papers, the authors recognise that multicollinearity and endogeneity are possible: homicide rates can cause these, and there is a clear correlation between NEET indicators' components and the aggregated variable. Nevertheless, employment and schooling are relevant in both papers. However, its effect interacting with NEET changes between models when it would have been expected that the effects of some variables would disappear. It is expected from employment, as found before (Juárez *et al.* 2022). In De Hoyos and colleagues' research, NEET is only significant in the northern border states. In both models' income inequality and hourly income is relevant, as other research has pointed out (Ramírez de Garay, 2014; Enamorado *et al.*, 2016), but

the presence of it with NEET is not clarified: if they are idle, why labour income is relevant with income inequality? This result could mean that organised crime is recruiting NEET, or NEET is irrelevant because they were already recruited. Otherwise, other research has pointed more toward school dropout rather than idleness as a condition (Ingram, 2014; Gleditsch *et al*., 2022).

I hypothesise that the NEET concept cannot be studied from an ecological criminology perspective (municipal data on homicide) because the NEET is not a stock easily distinguishable from the transitioning in their life, and aggregated components should be studied separately. In the words of Cullen and Kulig (2018), this kind of research has two weaknesses. First, it neglects the profile of the offenders, in this case, by using homicide rates but not understanding data on whom committed those crimes or the profile of the homicide victim. Furthermore, second, indeed criminalising the victims as the perpetrators when we do not have judicial data to determine if they are the same group (even if they are similar). In fairness, inmate data was scarce during this debate, so previous literature is not at fault. Nevertheless, it is necessary to test it considering the life-course criminology perspective for investigating homicide offenders.

DATA AND METHODS

The previous literature has shown the limitations of ecological studies of homicide rates to elucidate if NEET is valid or not to explain this phenomenon. Life-course criminology is the alternative I have decided to approach for two reasons. The practical one is that INEGI (2021) has produced a National Inmate Survey (ENPOL in Spanish) that allows us to study homicide inmates' profiles that we could not do from a quantitative point of view (for qualitative research on inmates revise Azaola, 2018). This data allows us to study events, socioeconomic markers, and control by other criminal justice factors considering that crime involvement is a career. Also, inmate surveys allow us to look at transitions toward crime offending (Farrington, 1979; Pyrooz et al., 2020; Morizot, 2019).

I will study if NEET has explanatory value and test other variables discussed in the literature to craft a more detailed profile of the youth committing homicides in the Mexican Drug with the data in ENPOL. I will perform categorical outcome variables logistic regression for the probability of being sentenced for homicide since 2006 as an approximation (Britt & Weisburg, 2009; Baker *et al.,* 2013). Also, I will briefly compare the sociodemographic data of both Mexican youth homicide inmates and homicide victims to test some assumptions made in the previous literature.

Descriptive data of youth in violent crime in Mexico

The descriptive sociodemographic data is relevant to know the amount of those who were either victimised for homicide or captured for committing homicides. **Table 1** is shown the homicide victim profile from 2007 to 2018. I show different cross-comparison with the data available in the death certificates. This data shows an approximation of the Mexican Drug War deaths, mostly the victims of a firearm on the street. As can be seen, most homicide victims had less than nine years of schooling, and more than 99% had employment of some kind. This trend reflects the inaccuracy NEET rate: if almost every homicide victim had employment, almost no victim was NEET. Interestingly, informality (no social security when the death certificate was issued) is relatively high and higher when younger, showing early signs of precarity in employment and child labour.

| Table 1.- Homicide victims' profiles from 2007 to 2018 in Mexico (totals and percentages)				
	All homicide victims	Male homicide victims	Youth male homicide victims	Youth male victims (under 29 years old) with a firearm on the street
Unemployed	0.6%	0.60%	0.28%	0.23%
Under 29 years of schooling	68.75%	69.57%	74.2%	74.38%
Informal worker	35.99%	37.10%	41.77%	42.35%
NEET	0.03%	0.02%	0.02%	0.00%
Total	276,267	245,538	92,441	44,144
Source: INEGI, Vital statistics				

Two important caveats: the occupation data in the INEGI vital statistics show a 14.87% of "non-specified" occupational status for the same period. This figure means that the civil registry did not have any data on occupation, so we do not know if they were unemployed or occupied. Also, occupation does not mark a student, so the NEET calculated was via those who were not occupied, had less than nine years of schooling, and were over 15 when students in Mexico finished secondary school. Unemployment was calculated by the sum of those not working and looking for work. Nonetheless, NEET is not relevant for explaining homicide victims' profiles.

Regarding age, as can be noticed in **figure 2**, the age of the victims begins to increase from 13 years and peaks around 28 years old, gradually decreasing. This trend concurs with the broad evidence accumulated on the matter for the United States and Europe (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983; Farrington, 1986). There are several discussions on why crime involvement at a young age and in that age range. There are at least three explanations. First, like any other career, crime begins at a young age and does not require long schooling professionalisation. This theory is the criminal career perspective (Piquero et al. 2003). The second theory is biosocial: at a young age, some men develop personalities closer to crime as lower risk avoidance and physical strength, and they are still in the emotional maturation period (Loeber & Le Blanc, 1990). The third one is social strains: the weakening of social controls (school, family, and religion) in a critical age of transition to adulthood can increase the propensity to crime (Sampson & Laub, 1995). All theories complement the life-course development framework: some events are relevant in critical ages and transitions.

Figure 2.- Male homicides from 2007 to 2018 by firearm on the street acumulated by age
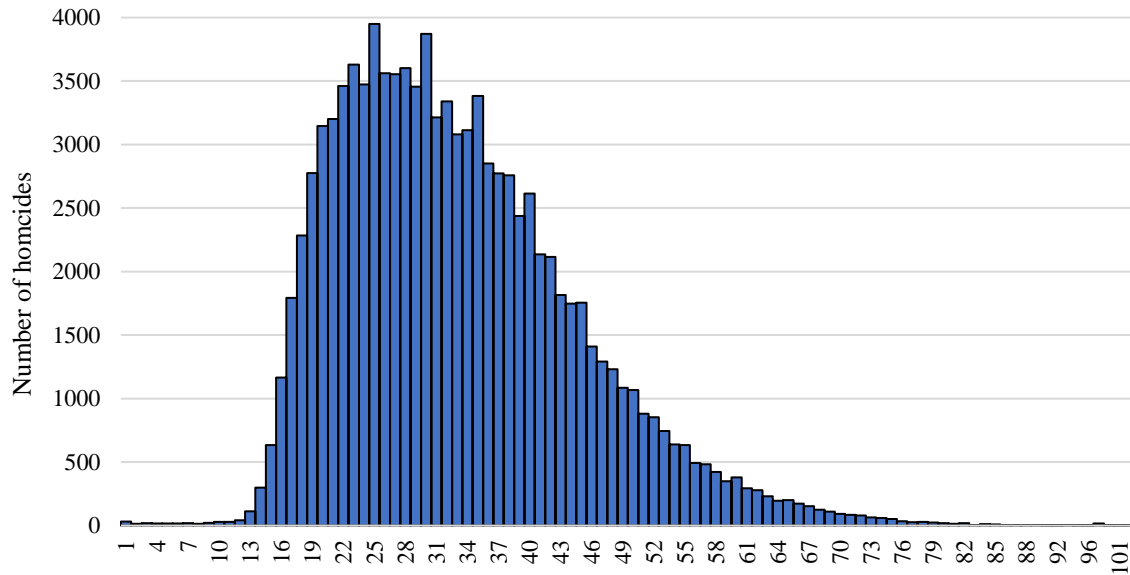
Source: Vital statistics, INEGI. N: 101, 769

Regarding homicide inmates in Mexico, **table 2** shows the primary sociodemographic data of homicide inmates in ENPOL 2021, just counting those detained after 2006, the year of the Mexican Drug War onset. **The profile of the majority (over 70%)** is male, declared having not enough income to buy food at some point in their life, having an income lower than the highest income bracket (over 11 000 pesos) of those who declared in the survey, had employment as farmers or manual workers, and had regular alcoholic consumption. Subsequently, **more than half were** under 29 years old when they were detained, single, parents, left school because they needed to work, had less than nine years of schooling, had darker skin tone than the general population, and consumed drugs. **Less than half were** in prison before, or their parents were in prison, were abused by their parents, lived in a mother-only household, and were born either in the northern or southern states. Finally, **the less represented in the survey were** NEET, indigenous language speakers, and those who left school to support their parents or had experience working in the military or the police.

Table 2. Frequencies of variables of interest regarding the homicide inmate population in ENPOL 2021 captured after the onset of the Mexican Drug War in 2006
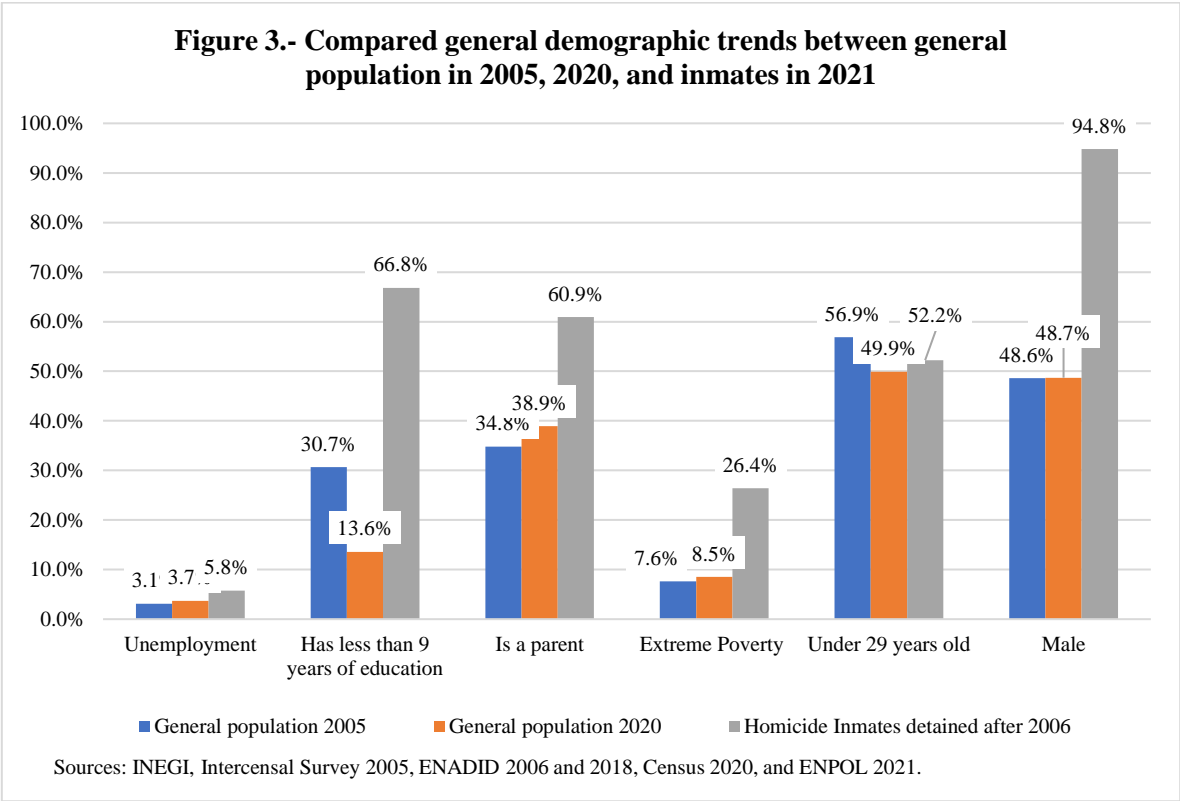
Theories of violence	Variables in theories	The inmate was or had…	Total and percentages
		Total (percentages relate to the total)	29, 411
Life-course development	Transition to adulthood	under 29 years old when detained	52.23%
		male	94.82%
		a parent	61.31%
		single	54.74
	Parental influence	parents with criminal records	5.10%
		been abused by parents	19.05%
		left school because of bullying	19.22%
	Criminal career	been in prison before	13.31%
		previous experience working in police or military forces	9.65%
Socioeconomic and environmental factors	Schooling and inequality	not enough income to eat	90.72%
		income lower than the higher income bracket	79.49%
		left school because of the need to work	54.77%
		left school to support family members	0.52%

		less than nine years of schooling	66.82%
		living in a female head household	13.3%
	Regional and social inequality	born in a southern state	19.76%
		born in a northern border state	25.5%
		was unemployed and not in school	5.27%
	Employment	had an employment	93.64%
		a farmer or a manual worker	70.77%
Criminal justice and discrimination	Labelling and racial discrimination	an indigenous language speaker	5.75%
		darker skin colour than the average population in Mexico	57.17%
	Criminal justice corruption	a lawyer present when he was presented to the prosecutor	19.77%
		tortured by police or prosecutors while detained	39.70%
		received threats to declare himself guilty	50.27%
	Drug consumption	regular alcohol consumption	82.58%
		regular drug consumption (except alcohol)	59.36%

Source, INEG, ENPOL 2021.

Inmate data portrays a different profile than what the literature for the Mexican case has shown so far. This profile is not unique and steady but rather incrementally towards socioeconomic marginalisation that NEET cannot show with clarity. Moreover, most of them are young (we used the ample under 29 years range in Mexican Youth Law), but it is also a phenomenon among young adults.

Figure 3 shows the general trends in population compared with the inmate population. The marginalisation conditions of those who commit and are sentenced for homicide in Mexico are shown. Their age also reflects the ageing of the general population in Mexico. However, they become parents earlier and are slighter more unemployed. However, they are overwhelmingly less educated and experience more extreme poverty. Proportionally more people in the general population had gained more than nine years of schooling after 15 years than the inmates (the period when the drug war happened). This fact means that the inmate population are those who lost the opportunities that everyone has been gaining progressively. Again, NEET overshadows this tendency: those who commit violent crimes in Mexico come from a significantly marginalised share of the population.

Figure 3.- Compared general demographic trends between general population in 2005, 2020, and inmates in 2021

Sources: INEGI, Intercensal Survey 2005, ENADID 2006 and 2018, Census 2020, and ENPOL 2021.

ENPOL 2021 methods and limitations on logit regression

The National Inmate Survey (ENPOL, INEGI, 2021) is the second iteration of the first inmate survey in Mexico's history. Both surveys were conducted to revise the advances of the justice system reform since 2016. Therefore, I must warrant the limitations on the data so that further analysis and interpretation consider how the effects of the justice system also shape results. Nonetheless, inmate surveys are one of the best tools to study people in violent crime.

The first limitation is that the justice system generally cannot process the overall crimes committed in Mexico. Zepeda (2014) has found that more than 90% of crimes are not processed through the justice system. Therefore, those who go to trial and conviction are a skewed minority. Second, an extraordinary crime justice regime for organised crime (preventive prison crimes) allows authorities to retain detainees with no evidence to gather evidence to present the detainee in front of a judge (Madrazo, 2014).

Moreover, usually, inmates are tortured into confessing crimes they are suspected of committing (Magaloni *et al*., 2020; Silva & Padilla, 2020). Third, the reform to the justice system in 2016 required that no detainee could be imprisoned while waiting for a trial, and if in case of being a person that does not speak Spanish or does not have a lawyer, the State is obliged to provide it (Caballero, 2019). This reform caused a decline in the prison population, but it has increased since 2018 because the government of López Obrador added new crimes to the preventive prison regime (INEGI, 2022a; Rodríguez & Barrón, 2021). I will control some judicial system biases, as seen in **Table 2**.

I will study which of the mentioned variables, including NEET and other socioeconomic variables, with controls from other theories mentioned in the theoretical problems of NEET with a logistical regression model for categorical outcomes. These variables must be interpreted as covariates. This interpretation means that all variables affect probabilities between themselves. With this model, I study the probability of being sentenced for homicide since 2006 with a categorical variable. Therefore, I can calculate how much the probability increases by all variables compared to the overall

inmate population. Meaning that the interpretation of results must be how much the probabilities are among all inmates. Binomial logistical model is used in criminology for inmate surveys and other survey crime data, and surveys with gang member information -that we do not have in ENPOL-usually show the same probability rates for homicide inmates whether they were classified as members of organised crime (Britt & Weisburd, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2018). I present the significance of the results with 90, 95 and 99 per cent of confidence and calculated by marginals effects, meaning in percentages of probability, because it is more understandable to present the effects rather than odd ratios (Long, 2006; Long & Mustillo, 2018). **Table 3** shows the results.

RESULTS

Several insights come from the results in **Table 3**. First, the variables that do not show results: neither NEET, having employment, leaving school to support their family, being single or being a parent. These results mean that some primary markers of transitions to adulthood have a low effect on the probability of being sentenced for homicide.

   Now I comment on the results using some precedents in theories of violent crime. First, being male and under 29 years old increases probabilities. In this case, it is confirmed that there is a basic young male profile and early transitions to the crime before transitioning to other markers of adulthood such as marriage or having kids. Parental influence is relevant in the model: parents' abuse and criminal records increase probabilities. Research has shown how negative parental influence pushes aggressiveness and crime (Farrington, 2011; Vecchio et al., 2018). The results show a relation between being sentenced for homicide and schooling, inequality, poverty, leaving school to work, and being a manual or farmer worker. These outcomes show the necessity to work in marginalised conditions and how crime provides income (Fajzynlber et al., 2002; Agnew, 1992). Female households increase the probability of being sentenced for homicide. Research has pointed out that a lack of parental vigilance and care can foster criminal involvement (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Messner & Sampson, 1991). Mother-only households in Latin America are working headed by a

woman without access to childcare services due to high informality rates (Acevedo *et al.*, 2021). Finally, alcohol consumption is related to aggressive behaviour and increases the probability of being sentenced for homicide (Vaughn *et al*., 2018).

On the set of variables of the criminal justice system and discriminatory labels, probabilities increase for indigenous speaker inmates without translators in the trial, for people with darker skin measured with the PERLA scale (Dixon & Telles, 2017), and for those who were tortured or threaten to declare themselves guilty. Discrimination and abuse are essential to explain that youth and young adults are sentenced for homicide (Kleck, 1981).

How to interpret the negative probabilities in the results? My interpretation is that the positive covariates turn others into negatives. In the case of bullying, the effect of abuse by parents probably causes the change. In the case of nine years of schooling, they are dropping out because they need to work covers more of the educational phenomenon. The presence of a lawyer reduces legal system biases. The consumption of alcohol is overrepresented regarding the effect of other drugs. Furthermore, the case of those born in a northern state, with the no effect of being born in a southern state, shows that criminal organisations are probably not only recruiting in those regions.

I wanted to discuss three covariates: manual or farmer workers, previous experience from the police or military, and parents with criminal records. My argument is that we are viewing transitions from legal to illegal occupations rather than directly from school to crime. Recent research has shown that some recruitment and intersection of farming with drug smuggling happens in poppy croplands in several regions of Mexico (Álvarez, 2021; Crisis Group, 2020). In the case of former soldiers and police forces have the right skills for being sicarios: training on security and weapons use (Valdés y Pérez Aguirre, 2017; Wilson, 2012; Gauthier, 2020; Chaudhry et al., 2021). Furthermore, the transformation from a farmer or manual worker to crime for overcoming precarious labour (Evans & Furlong, 2019). In sum, young men in some conditions of inequality and poverty with a history of

family abuse, low schooling, and propensity to aggressiveness due to early childhood abuse transition to precarious or armed labour, to later transition to crime labour.

Table 3. Logistic binomial regressions for the probability of being sentenced for homicide		
Variables in theories	(1 for those who replied) The inmate was or had…	ENPOL 2021 (homicide inmates captured after the War Onset in 2006)
Transition to adulthood	under 29 years old when detained	3.4%***
	male	0.9%***
	a parent	0.02%
	single	-0.2%
Parental influence	parents with criminal records	1.8%***
	been abused by parents	0.8%***
	left school because of bullying	-0.04%***
Criminal career	been in prison before	-1.5%***
	previous experience working in police or military forces	1.5%***
Schooling and inequality	not enough income to eat	1.4%***
	income lower than the higher income bracket	0.5%***
	left school because of the need to work	0.6%***
	left school to support family members	-0.5%
	less than nine years of schooling	-0.3%*
Regional and social inequality	living in a female head household	2.5%***
	born in a southern state	-0.1%
	born in a northern border state	-1.2%***
Employment	was unemployed and not in school	3.2
	had an employment	-0.02%
	a farmer or a manual worker	1%***
Labelling and racial discrimination	an indigenous language speaker with no translator	5.9%***
	darker skin colour than the average population in Mexico	1.4%***
Criminal justice corruption	a lawyer present when he was presented to the prosecutor	-2.4%***
	tortured by police or prosecutors while detained	2.4%***
	received threats to declare himself guilty	1.1%***
Drug consumption	regular alcohol consumption	0.4%**
	regular drug consumption (except alcohol)	-1%***
Number of observations		222, 226

*$p < 0.10$ ** $p < 0.05$ *** $p < 0.01$

Robustness checks

Two robustness checks are usually done for logit models. First is the likelihood ratio chi-square test to revise goodness to fit that is 0.0 that the model predictors converge after multiple iterations, that is the case of this model (Britt & Weisburd, 2009). Also, the probability of multicollinearity is possible.

In that case, a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test is performed, and all variables must be under 5 (Daoud, 2017). For this model, all variables showed a VIF under 2. The model testing is provided with the replication data annexed to the paper.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

There are two essential circumstances regarding **table 3** results. First, NEET showed low utility and theoretical depth in explaining youth participation in violent crime in Mexico. Not only did the minority of "NEET youth" participate in violent crime in Mexico, but covariance with other variables that could control the odds of being sentenced for homicide has no effect. Somewhat different components of training, education, and employment separate showed relevant results: firearm knowledge (by police or army training), dropping out of school for the need to work, and working in precarious employment. These are diverse scenarios in which the NEET categorisation has long overshadowed youth transitions towards violent labour.

The second is what can be found when NEET is not under our guiding analysis framework. Not only the richness of the life-course transitions from youth to adulthood by being in precarious or firearm labour, but also by exploring factors that maybe are correlated with being NEET, but this concept does not show clearly: abusive family relations or parental absence because of the lack of childcare for working mothers, alcohol consumption, and skin tone discrimination. Maybe NEET shows youth marginalisation under market economies, but the variety of living experiences goes beyond not having employment or going to school. These are transitions and points in time, not stuck times. The marginalisation also is related to strategies to survive in risky situations (Podder, 2015) and a bounded agency (Evans, 2007) argues. Idleness as a "lazy tendency" to crime seems to underscore that, as Hoffman (2011) said, violence is also hard labour. It might sound that easy money in gang literature (Rodgers & Baird, 2015) has been misunderstood in NEET and crime literature for Mexico as just "lazy" money.

Again, the probabilities and profiles shown here must not be understood as static but as pieces of the puzzle to observe transitions to violent crime and what factors contribute further to the recruitment of young men into organised crime. This agenda has two methodological challenges. First, how to adapt, replicate and improve quantitative research done in high-income industrialised societies in Latin America with chronic data scarcity (Bergman, 2018). New datasets must be developed in the future: longitudinal panels, psychological testing, and improving current inmate surveys to untangle the discussed variables before. Even from ENPOL, there is much work to be done by studying intersections and covariances. I hope that this study helped in that direction.

On the qualitative side, progress has been made by several female Mexican researchers in understanding Mexico (Chávez, 2020; Azaola, 2018, García, 2018), and some of their findings coincide with the profile shown in this paper. For example, masculine identities, marginalisation, and neoliberal discourses of wealth inequality. This side of the research agenda addresses something quantitative data cannot: how to explain why some young men decide to join risky labour? Income cannot be the only explanation because not all risk calculations are the same for everyone. Furthermore, as Collins (2009) says, the overwhelming majority of young men do not engage in crime and violence. Anthropology and sociology have significant roles in explaining these decisions and identity transformations.

Four issues from the results arise understudied and necessary to address to link social mobility, crime and violence, and youth labour markets: first family and peers' sociability. As cited before, abuse, neglect and absence are significant factors behind aggressive, risk-taking, and antisocial behaviour development. Ramírez de Garay (2018) proposes studying further for the Mexican case. Peers are fundamental for gang studies (Henry et al. 2001), but little has been done for Mexico. Both peers, non-vigilance of children and youth, and abuse are marked by labour markets that strain working mothers in Latin America. Second is the role of drug consumption and alcohol in developing aggressive behaviour. Beyond labelling users of drugs as violent, there is solid research in this field

paired with socioeconomic marginalisation (Hart, 2017). The third is the crucial axis of youth and racial discrimination. Mexico experiences both, and a new strain of studies shows how it operates in other fields like labour markets (Arceo & Campos, 2014). The introduction of the PERLA Scale in ENPOL by INEGI is a significant advancement in that direction. Finally, masculinities in Mexico is another variable to comprehend youth in crime identities (Baird, 2012).

Finally, there are two ramifications on the field of development policy design using the NEET concept drawn from these results. First, for crime prevention, this concept shows how a misguided youth profile can drive to failed policy design for the case of Youth Building Future. Nevertheless, this is not permanent "damage". Better to decompose the ingredients of NEET and rethink policy further because a fixed design could bring results. For example, how first employment programs could be fixed considering the data? I imagine that focusing on some regionally determined professions with different ages could help. However, the original instinct of education or employment policies for crime prevention is not wrong (Sherman et al., 2002). The worst consequence of disregarding socioeconomic factors in crime prevention policy would be repeating the mistake of eliminating them rather than evaluating and re-design, as happened in Mexico in 2016. The second is to question (again) if NEET is useful for broader development policy because of its empirical and theoretical problems. Based on this article's results, research on different variables could lead to a new set of policies for crime prevention based on development and human security perspective. For example, to address the necessity of creating care systems to protect and nurture early childhood as a crime prevention policy (García *et al.*, 2019; Barr & Smith, 2021; Madero *et al.*, 2016). Further research is necessary on how these policies intersect with the broader field of social mobility policies, mainly focused on reducing the reproduction of intergenerational poverty and inequality that shape a vital share of youth in crime lives.

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