

Fatherhood among adolescents in conflict with the law: A family systemic approach

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Resumen (analítico)

The objective of this paper was to analyze the construction of fatherhood in adolescents who are in conflict with the law through an exploratory and qualitative study. Life stories were developed using the in-depth interview technique. The sample consisted of four adolescents in conflict with the law. Through interpretative content analysis, we obtained seven categories, including: emotional context of family origin, family functioning, witnessing family violence and the expression of masculinity by transgressing the law and using drugs. Paternity allows these young fathers to reflect on their own experiences during childhood and develop a paternal role during their transition process out of detention. The main role they assume in their paternity is that of provider, but they also make space to satisfy the affective needs of their children.

Palabras clave

Adolescence, law transgression, fatherhood, masculinities, life stories.

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Información artículo

Este artículo se desprende de una investigación de diseño cualitativo titulada *La construcción de la paternidad en adolescentes en conflicto con la ley y su relación con la transmisión intergeneracional de la carencia afectiva*, realizada entre agosto de 2012 a agosto de 2015, con la financiación de la beca 2128 otorgada por el Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (Conacyt) México. **Área:** psicología; **subárea:** enfoque familiar sistémico.

Paternidad en adolescente en conflicto con la ley: una perspectiva desde la terapia familiar sistémica

Abstract (analytical)

El objetivo fue analizar la construcción de la paternidad en adolescentes en conflicto con la ley. Se llevó a cabo un estudio exploratorio y cualitativo, se construyeron historias de vida a través de la técnica de entrevista a profundidad. La muestra se conformó por cuatro adolescentes en conflicto con la ley. Se hizo un análisis de contenido interpretativo y se obtuvieron siete categorías: contexto emocional de la familia de origen, el funcionamiento familiar, ser testigo de violencia familiar y la expresión de masculinidad al transgredir la ley y usar drogas. La paternidad permite reflexionar acerca de sus experiencias en la infancia, desarrollar un rol paternal en transición, en el que asumen como principal función el proveer, pero dando espacio a satisfacer las necesidades afectivas de sus hijos.

Keywords

Adolescencia, transgresión de la ley, paternidad, masculinidades, historias de vida.

Paternidade em adolescentes em conflito com a lei: uma perspectiva da terapia familiar sistêmica

Resumo (analítico)

O objetivo foi analisar a construção da paternidade em adolescentes em conflito com a lei. Realizou-se um estudo exploratório e qualitativo, as histórias de vida foram construídas por meio da técnica de entrevista em profundidade. A mostra foi composta por quatro adolescentes em conflito com a lei. Por meio da análise de conteúdo interpretativa, obtivemos sete categorias: contexto emocional de origem familiar, funcionamento familiar, testemunho de violência familiar, expressão da masculinidade pela transgressão da lei e uso de drogas. A paternidade permite que reflitam sobre suas vivências na infância, desenvolvam um papel paternal em transição, em que assumem a função principal de prover, mas dando espaço para a satisfação das necessidades afetivas de seus filhos.

Palavras-chave

Adolescência, violação da lei, paternidade, masculinidades, histórias da vida.

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Introduction

According to the 2018 intercensal survey, the population in Mexico was composed of 18.2% adolescents between 10-19 years old, among whom the pregnancy rate had decreased from 77 per every thousand women between 15 and 19 years of age in 2014 to 70.6 per every thousand women (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [Inegi], 2018). The subject of adolescent fathers has been rarely addressed because research has generally focused on motherhood (Botero & Castrillón, 2015; Parra-Cardona *et al.*, 2006).

Fatherhood in male adolescents is further complicated by its correlation with the transgression of the law (Gordon *et al.*, 2011; Shannon & Abrams, 2007); thus, this is considered a risk factor for becoming a young father (Thornberry *et al.*, 2000; Wei *et al.*, 2002), even among high-risk juvenile offenders (Tremblay *et al.*, 2017). Although some studies report that it has not been possible to confirm the relationship between criminal behavior and drug use in adolescents (Jiménez *et al.*, 2016), other studies indicate that adolescents in conflict with the law not only have an increased risk for alcohol (Komatsu & Bazon, 2015) and drug use (Holleran, 2009) but also become young fathers, as judged by the results from different studies, which have identified some factors highly associated with early fatherhood; for instance, these include conduct problems and a record of transgression of the law (Lehti *et al.*, 2012), being born to a young father (Lehti *et al.*, 2012; Sipsma *et al.*, 2010), being raised in a family with scarce resources, or being involved in criminal or alcoholic behavior (Unruh *et al.*, 2004).

Among adolescents, both the transgression of the law (Henggeler & Schaeffer, 2016) and fatherhood might be explained by the ecological model developed by Bronfenbrenner (1994). The model consists of four serial structures (subsystems), which not only allowed us to contextualize the object of study of our research but also to integrate these four subsystems to guide the understanding of the transgression of the law and the phenomenon of fatherhood during adolescence (Frías-Armenta *et al.*, 2003; Khurana & Gavazzi, 2011; Lykken, 2013; Madden-Derdich *et al.*, 2002; Sipsma *et al.*, 2010; Tremblay *et al.*, 2017).

The closest level to the person is the *microsystem*, which is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships that the person experiences in his or her immediate environment, usually the family, which is made up of parents and siblings (Lykken, 2013). For example, experiences in the microsystem could include early exposure to poor socialization as a result of negligent family practice (Lykken, 2013), less supervision, excessive parental control or weak parental authority (Fishman, 1989), maternal/parental abuse, violence between parents, alcohol abuse (Frías-Armenta *et al.*, 2003), and parental hostility (use of hostile discipline, physical punishment or deprivation of privileges) (Ruiz-Ortiz *et al.*, 2017).

The *mesosystem* comprises the interconnection of two or more environments in which the person participates actively. Thus, there are three agents of socialization that influence law transgression: 1) family, including structural factors such as family size, mother's occupation, the absence of one parent, relationship quality, communication, parenting styles and discipline (Lykken, 2013), and family functioning coresponsibility (Ávila-Navarrete, 2017; Henneberger *et al.*, 2016); 2) school, regular expulsion is a risk factor for law transgression, while school achievement is a protective factor (Lykken, 2013); and 3) peer group, using drugs or hanging out with friends who transgress the law (Borrani *et al.*, 2019; Lykken, 2013).

The *exosystem* refers to one or more environments that do not include the person as an active participant but in which events that occur affect what happens in the environment, including the person. This includes the environment of violence or instability present in the neighborhood (Frías-Armenta *et al.*, 2003). In Mexico City, the three towns with the highest crime rate per 100 000 inhabitants are Cuauhtémoc (503.5), Benito Juárez (405.3) and Venustiano Carranza (369) (Procuraduría General de Justicia de la Ciudad de México, 2016). This shows the importance of the neighborhood risk for the recidivism of the transgression of the law (Abrams & Snyder, 2010). Broadcast media such as books, magazines, and television are also parts of the exosystem and influence what is considered the male parental role (Schmitz, 2016).

The *macrosystem* encompasses the prevailing culture and subculture that influences gender roles, gender stereotypes and hegemonic masculinity and its relation with fatherhood (Andrés, 2004; Connell, 2001; De Keijzer, 2003; Rocha & Lozano, 2014; Villaseñor & Castañeda, 2003). In Mexico and Latin America, there is a hegemonic masculinity model (Rocha & Lozano, 2014; Villaseñor & Castañeda, 2003) that describes the man as dominant, which discriminates against and undervalues women and other men who do not

conform to this model (De Keijzer, 2003). Gender, masculinity, fatherhood and emotions are interrelated concepts with reciprocal links framed in sociocultural processes and spaces (Gómez, 2020).

It is important to consider the study of the different contexts that interact in adolescents' experiences and to intervene at different levels with justice-involved youth and their families instead of treating adolescents as *the problem* in isolation (Folk *et al.*, 2019).

The issue of adolescents in conflict with the law has generated concern for Latin American social sciences (González-Laurino, 2015). For example, in Uruguay, sociocriminal control practices have been questioned regarding the ways in which people are judged and/or treated based on their transgression and in specific sociohistorical contexts (López-Gallego *et al.*, 2018). In Chile, this has been studied from a sociocultural position, in which the social interveners of the assisted freedom program generate discursive practices about the lack, the minority, and where they do not have a neutral position but rather carry a subjective vision about adolescents in conflict with the law and the auditor's own position (Valdenegro & Calderón-Flández, 2016). Regarding the interventions that seek to facilitate the reparative and restorative process, in the case of Colombia, re-education and family coresponsibility have been highlighted (Ávila-Navarrete, 2017). The tutelary court system was consolidated with positivist, correctionalist, and social hygiene ideas wherein children and adolescents with deviant behavior are punished and it is justified from a therapeutic perspective (Andrés-Candelas, 2016). Currently, a large number of countries have laws that regulate penal systems for adolescents, which in general are based on the postulates of the comprehensive protection doctrine (Villadiego, 2016).

In Mexico, 94% of the adolescents in conflict with the law who were interviewed by Azaola (2015) reported having had a job throughout their lives and coming from families in which basic services were sometimes lacking; that is, a large portion of the population comes from a context of poverty. Bergman *et al.* (2002) concludes that a large share of the prison population in Mexico is incarcerated for relatively minor crimes; prisons are not inhabited by the most dangerous offenders but by the poorest. Nevertheless, although several risk factors are associated with becoming an adolescent father (Benson, 2004; Thornberry *et al.*, 1997), these are not determinants for adolescent fatherhood to occur.

Fuller (2000) defined fatherhood as a field of cultural and social meanings and practices around reproduction, bonding and the care of children. Parental behaviors vary according to various elements, such as the life cycle of the people (Fuller, 2000), the relationship with the coparent of the child (Rivera, 2013), the support from their family

networks (Bueno *et al.*, 2012), and the consequences of fatherhood on their life project. Then, since in some cases being a parent represents a life reordering, many at-risk adolescents tend to conceptualize fatherhood as a way to reorder their lives and build a future (Cruzat & Aracena, 2006).

To date, few studies have focused on how fatherhood influences the trajectories of adolescents in conflict with law (Khurana & Gavazzi, 2011; Shannon & Abrams, 2007), or the way in which they take responsibility for their children (Ngu & Florsheim, 2011) to focus on fatherhood as a turning point (Shannon & Abrams, 2007). In this regard, Landers *et al.* (2015) found that adolescent parents who live with their children tend to decrease transgressions of the law and seek to fulfill their paternal responsibilities as an attempt to intergenerationally repair their own childhoods.

In this research, we sought to explore and understand how adolescents in conflict with the law construct their fatherhood. To fulfill these goals, we propose the following research questions: a) How do teenage fathers in conflict with the law describe their role as parents? b) How do teenage fathers perceive the relation between their fatherhood and their family of origin? c) How did family functioning develop throughout the life cycle? d) How do teenage fathers define the transgression of the law and fatherhood? e) How is fatherhood influencing the transgression of the law?

Method

Methodological Approach and Definition of the Biographical Method

We support the study from the constructivist paradigm, which presupposes a relativistic ontology because there are multiple realities and a subjectivist epistemology since the researcher and the researched cocreate knowledge with a set of naturalistic methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012).

We conducted qualitative research because we sought to understand the participants' context in depth and thus have closer involvement with them to analyze their meaningful relationships (Rojas, 2008). We used the biographical method and collected data through the interview technique. The life histories of individuals and families were necessary to illuminate fields of human action made invisible by other methods (Mallimaci & Giménez, 2006). The purpose was to provide a holistic, interpretive and naturalistic vision (Denzin

& Lincoln, 2012) of the context of adolescent fatherhood among youth serving an alternative sentence for a transgression of the law. Fatherhood was studied in the natural situation, and we tried to understand or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that adolescents give to it.

We selected cases (Greenstein & Davis, 2012) to confirm and expand upon the emerging thematic and conceptual analyses. We defined adolescent fathers in conflict with the law as the primary cases, and whenever possible, we included the youth, their mothers and their partners as the unit of analysis. To validate the study, theoretical sampling and saturation were performed (Creswell, 2007). In addition, we triangulated data from the interviews with different family members, i.e., the adolescent, his partner and his mother. Triangulation involves simultaneous projection of multiple and contrasting realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). Similarly, we performed a triangulation of techniques, that is, the McMaster model of family functioning (Epstein *et al.*, 1982), the genogram (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985) and the in-depth interviews conducted with the adolescents, their mothers and partners, when possible.

We used the biographical approach, hoping to show the subjective witnessing of a person, through the collection of information about events and valuations of each person's existence (Rodríguez *et al.*, 1999). These data were reflective of a life story obtained through successive interviews with the unit of analysis; thus, we built life stories (Mallimaci & Giménez, 2006). We conducted between three and seven face-to-face meetings to gather data about the multiple perspectives from which the participants viewed their lives, experiences or personal situations, as expressed in their own words (Taylor & Bogdan, 1982).

Participants and Recruitment Procedure

In this study, we recruited adolescent fathers in conflict with the law from a fatherhood reflective group that forms part of the alternate sentence program assigned by the judge in the External Care Community for Adolescents operated by the Office for Treatment of Adolescents of Mexico City's Undersecretariat for Prison Affairs¹ (Honorable Congreso de la Unión, 2007). The principal researcher's position was a participant observer since she was the psychotherapist who coordinated the reflective group. The inclusion criteria were:

¹ The Specialized Communities of Attention for Adolescents in Conflict with the Law are the places where adolescents in conflict with the law coexist with their peers, and at the same time with a whole set of professionals specialized in the treatment of adolescents (psychologists, social workers, lawyers, pedagogues).

1. They are adolescents between 15 and 19 years old.
2. They are parents and cohabit with the mother of their child.
3. The transgression of the law they committed is robbery.

The exclusion criteria were:

1. Having organic damage.
2. Having a serious psychiatric disorder.

In table 1 we describe a brief presentation of each participant.

Table 1
Brief presentation of the participants

Pseudonym / Age	Scholarship	Marital status	Borough	Occupation	Living situation	Children / Age / Sex
Alfredo / 19	Incomplete high school	Free union	Gustavo A. Madero	Employee	Partner, child, and parents	1 / <1 year / Male
Esteban / 17	Incomplete middle school	Free union	Álvaro Obregón	Employee	Partner, child, and in-laws	1 / <1 year / Female
Israel / 18	High school in course	Free union	Cuauhtémoc	Student and employee	Partner and child	1 / <1 year / Female
Josué / 17	Middle school in course	Free union	Azcapotzalco	Merchant	Partner, child, and in-laws	1 / <1 year / Female

Interview Procedure, Data Collection and Qualitative Analyses

We asked the adolescents to «tell me the story of your life», and the manner in which this question unfolded varied from participant to participant. We conducted the interviews face-to-face in a consulting room within the facilities; the language was Spanish, and the content and length varied among individuals (range 50-90 minutes). The topic guide included the following subjects and follow-up questions, although we ensured the coverage of central topics:

1. *Family trigenerational history.* How has the adolescent’s relationship with his family of origin been? What are his oldest childhood memories? Who has fulfilled his needs (affective, basic, educational), and which needs have not yet been fulfilled?

2. *Transgression of the law.* What led him to transgress the law? How did his family react upon learning that he had transgressed the law? How has fatherhood influenced him to continue or discontinue transgressing the law?
3. *Psychoactive substance use.* When did he first start using psychoactive substances? Under what circumstances did he consume them? How has fatherhood influenced him to continue or discontinue using drugs?
4. *The meaning and implications of pregnancy and parenthood.* How did they decide to continue with the pregnancy? How did he and his partner go through the pregnancy? What are the roles that each one plays in relation to their child's care? How has his relationship with his partner changed since parenthood? What is the adolescent's relationship with his child like?

In this study, we sought rigor as well as trustworthiness and transferability by following Creswell's (2007) recommendations. We used a minimum of two possible procedures to form credible findings: a) triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012) through the use of different sources to provide corroborating evidence, such as triangulation of data from the interviews with different family members, that is, the adolescent, his partner and his mother, and a triangulation of techniques, that is, the McMaster model of family functioning (Epstein *et al.*, 1982), the genogram (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985), and the in-depth interviews conducted with the adolescents, their mothers and partners; b) peer review by having the other three researchers check the study process and having ongoing discussions to help create internal audits; and c) a detailed description of the histories and a close relation with the participants were maintained.

Interpretative Content Analysis

Content analysis consisted of the following steps: 1) Read all data to achieve immersion and obtain a sense of the whole, 2) Read word by word to derive codes, 3) Make notes of the researcher's impressions, thoughts, and initial analysis, 4) Codify and identify emergent categories to group codes, and 5) Define each category, subcategory, and code (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). We began analysis by reading the entire transcript and creating case notes. Then, we stored and organized the data using Atlas.ti 7 software (Atlas.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH) and performed interpretative analysis in two phases. First, we performed a vertical analysis in which we coded data about each adolescent's life story so that the respondent was taken as the unit of analysis (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2000). Second, we performed a horizontal comparative analysis that

was formed by common patterns and processes that recurred across the different cases (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2000).

We performed a vertical content analysis to chronologically describe each adolescent's life story regarding family functioning. According to the McMaster model of family functioning (Epstein *et al.*, 1982), the primary function of the family is to maintain the biopsychosocial balance of its members when they face problems in the areas of obstacles or crises, basic needs and development.

We performed a horizontal data analysis to assign codes. Afterwards, we homologated such codes to analyze the adolescents' life stories based on the construction of categories.

Ethical Considerations

The procedures in this study were reviewed by a committee formed by three researchers who are professors with more than 20 years of experience in psychological research. The research was conducted ethically; all participants agreed to participate and signed a letter of consent that stipulated confidentiality, anonymity, and their voluntary and revocable participation in the research (Mondragón-Barrios, 2009). The names of the adolescents and their relatives have been changed to protect confidentiality. We had institutional authorization to conduct this research from the director of the External Care Community for Adolescents.

Results

Vertical content analysis

The vertical analysis allowed us to identify family functioning based on the McMaster Model (Epstein *et al.*, 1982). In table 2, we summarize six areas of functioning of the adolescents' families of origin. Some characteristics of adolescent family functioning are described below.

Table 2
Functioning of the adolescents' origin family

Family composition	Problem-solving: Instrumental / Affective	Communication	Roles	Affective responsiveness: Wellness / Discomfort	Affective involvement	Behavior control
Alfredo (a) Jorge (f) Areli (m) Xóchitl (c)	Parents / Parents	Clear and direct	Traditional	Reasonable / Reasonable	Empathic	Flexible
Esteban (a) Juan (f) Sara (m) Lorena (c)	Parents / Partially solved by mother	Masked and indirect	Traditional	Under-responsiveness / Over-responsiveness (violence)	Devoid of affection	Chaotic
Israel (a) Ernesto (f) Esperanza (m) Verónica (c)	Partially solved by parents / Not solved by parents	Masked, direct	Traditional	Under-responsiveness / Over-responsiveness (violence)	Devoid of affection	Authoritarian
Josué (a) Joaquín (gp) Rocío (gm) Leonor (c)	Solved by grandfather / Solved by grandparents	Masked, direct	Traditional	Reasonable / Under-responsiveness	Excessive from grandparents, absent from parents	Chaotic

Note. (a) Adolescent; (m) mother; (gm) grandmother; (f) father; (gp) grandfather; and (c) couples' pseudonyms.

Functioning in the families of origin of Josué and Esteban tended to be governed by a chaotic behavioral control style because, depending on the circumstances, the father/grandfather could have an authoritarian style and the mothers a lenient style.

My grandpa was the one in control of the house, he was strict and my grandma was always on my side, I was her spoiled one because I used to say: no grandma, I do not want to go to kindergarten, and I didn't go. (Josué)

For Israel, it was his father who had a *laissez-faire* style. According to the adolescent's mother (Esperanza): «I punished them because they were not obedient, whereas their dad spoiled them, and for that reason we argued a lot and I told him not to take away my authority.»

Israel remembers, «My parents used to say behave yourself, "cause you are in someone else's house and you have to behave" (...) although it was smacking the hand or slapping the face, they taught us to respect».

The *roles in the families of origin* tended to be traditional, where the father was the provider and the mother was a housewife; however, in other cases, the mother also fulfilled

the role of provider or began to take on a paid job when she separated from her husband. This contrasts with the nuclear families of the adolescents, since the roles are traditional in the sense that the adolescent works and his partner is a housewife; however, a difference is that they are involved in the parenting, since apart from satisfying the instrumental needs of their children, they also seek to satisfy their affective needs. As mentioned by two of the adolescents' partners

He is very playful with my daughter. (Lorena, Esteban's partner)

I love seeing him when he carries her, I tell him you look beautiful with our girl, they really look alike and she likes to be with him a lot. (Verónica, Israel's partner)

The adolescents' childhood was characterized by *a partial satisfaction of their basic needs* before pregnancy; Esteban began to work when he was 11 years old, and Josué was 15 years old. The development of their expected life cycle did not occur, as the adolescents were prematurely treated as adults by assuming roles that did not correspond to their age. «I worked since I was a little kid (...) I always had to buy my own things, well, since my dad gave me work» (Esteban).

The transition from childhood to adolescence was marked by violence between their parents; three adolescents (Israel, Esteban and Josué) experienced the death of three people very close to them, one due to illness and two due to suicide. Even in those situations, they received little family support: «I saw my uncle dead, when I was about 9 or 10 years old (...) I loved him very much, (...) I saw my uncle dead in his car, he murdered himself, he hung himself» (Esteban).

Horizontal Analysis

Violence in the family of origin

Domestic violence is a social problem that is very common in Mexico and has serious consequences for women and their children. Two adolescents witnessed family violence between their parents when they were young. Israel remember this experience where he defend his mother:

Since I was little they fought (...) even with blows (...) when I was older I used to attack him (...) [despite being a young boy] I've always been big and I used to grab him by the neck until he let her go (...) without her telling me [to defend her] I just did it. (Israel)

On the other hand, Esteban remembers that he has been involved in discussions between his parents; for example, he intervened so that his mother did not leave the house because that meant going without food: «I told her not to leave, to think of us (...), there were times when we didn't eat at the ranch (...) and she said "I don't care, you stay with your father"» (Esteban).

His mother, Sara, reflected:

I would have liked them to have lived in a different way, that they [my children] hadn't experienced their father's nonsense... I tell [my son Esteban] to talk a lot with his partner about what he dislikes and everything, but never mistreat her, not to speak rudely, to speak kindly, not to be explosive.

Esteban has told Lorena about the violence between his parents, as she recalled below: «then I did see him (...) sad about his father's issues, I understood him because I went through the same situation, the same way but no longer right now, my father also hit my mother on two occasions» (Laura).

Trajectory of psychoactive substance consumption and law transgression

In adolescence, men face situations that seek to demonstrate virility and belonging to a group, and one way to achieve it is with transgressive conduct and/or the use of drugs. This conduct is promoted by risk factors in the microsystem and mesosystem, such as poor family or school supervision and neighborhood of residence.

We were invited to rob and they told me how it was, and I told them «let's do it» so they took me to rob on mini-buses (...) When I started hanging out with my cousins I started using drugs [paint thinner], I tried it and I liked it's kinda sweet flavor. (Josué)

Josué began to experiment with inhalants (*thinner*) when he was 11 years old in the company of his cousins. When he was 12 years old, his grandmother admitted him in an *anexo* (a center for treatment of addictions not regulated by law) in which he stayed three months and received physical and psychological abuse. At the age of 13, he began a relationship with Leonor, and at that time, he met other friends with whom he used drugs. He began to consume cannabis, cocaine base (*stone* or *crack*), and amphetamines (*tachas*).

And I was very young, when I arrived they were pure gentlemen, I was 12, and well the first day I think I was drugged and I did not feel so worse, but the next day it dawned and I opened my eyes and it was raw and I said «oh!», I began to see, I felt very bad and I began

to cry because I missed my family. And a month later is the visit and I could not tell them anything until the month passed and I still told them to take me out, because they treated me bad. (Josué)

The adolescent described the neighborhood in which he grew up and its prevailing cultural values as follows: «I was raised in a really tough neighborhood called Tepito, a very tough place 'cause if you're not a thief or a drug dealer you're just nobody» (Israel).

The reaction of Alfredo's father upon learning that his son had been arrested and the experience of being imprisoned.

So he [my dad] tells me, so «why did you steal? What did I teach you wrong? I don't mean to judge you but» (...) for me those years were terrible, not for the jail time but for letting down my parents, and as my dad has always told me: we all make mistakes, ain't nobody perfect. (Alfredo)

When Esteban was released, he remember:

Without stealing and everything (...) I feel better this way, I already have my daughter, nothing like being on the street, walking around and not being locked-up cause they don't let you out, not even from your dorm, it's better on the outside. (Esteban)

The process of assuming a father/mother role

The process of assuming fatherhood began the moment the partner realized she was pregnant, and they faced dilemmas: to continue or terminate the pregnancy and the influence of the traditional, social, religious, and family beliefs regarding pregnancy.

It would never have crossed my mind to abort her because right now many people are longing for a baby, and so, kill a life and when you want one you can't. (Lorena, Esteban's partner)

When she started to feel it, and when you could see her tummy and I hugged her, we kinda realized we were going to be parents. (Esteban)

Ximena wanted to abort the pregnancy to «finish my school», she was afraid of her parents' reaction: «how my parents were going to react and then they were going to understand (...) Hugo considers they don't want [to continue the pregnancy], already after we saw the ultrasounds (...) we were very happy and she was born at 9 months and 1 day» (Hugo).

Alfredo expresses the desire to have a male child bearing his last name: «Not for being macho, but as my dad says you're legitimate» (Alfredo).

Being a father allows the connection with emotions and their expression toward their children that at other times were not allowed due to their social roles: «I have grown fond of my daughter because when I arrive home she begins smiling at me, I carry her and I kiss her, she seems to be very affectionate to me» (Josué).

Implications of being a man

The meanings, beliefs, and roles that adolescents learned and incorporated from their parents, peers, social environment and culture are necessary aspects to be considered as an adult male who assumes fatherhood, for example being responsible.

To be responsible for everything, the good dude is the one who treats a woman well, who responds to having a child, just like I do, a man has more responsibility than a woman. (Alfredo)

When you are a dad, things are not the same as before (...) I don't have any time anymore, because I get up at 8 to go to work and I'm back at 8 and then I have to go on-line to do my schoolwork. (Israel)

Alfredo's plans for his relationship with his son are:

I want to see my son grow up (...) I liked being a father and now I have stopped being a child, now I say I'm already a dad and whatever happens, happens, right? I have to educate him and do things well. (Alfredo)

Adolescent fatherhood as a turning point

Adolescents' fatherhood marks a decrease or an end to the use of psychoactive substances and/or transgressing the law. Fatherhood is a way of giving free passage to the expression of emotions, to having a new meaning and objectives in the adolescent's life and to set a limit to the coexistence with their peer group, which leads to alcohol consumption and being with other women.

I think my daughter was a gift from God to change our lives, well, I used to get high, and nothing was really important to me, and nowadays I do more thinking and I much rather work than get high. (Eteban)

Being a dad gives me strength, seeing my daughter too because before I had no one to fight or work for and now I see her and say if I don't go to work my daughter won't have any diapers. (Israel)

I feel [adult], (...) I never left my girlfriend and then she tells me the baby was born for something' maybe it was to get rid of mess (desmadres).

The course of the partners' relationship

Participants described the course of their relationships from dating to the present, the basis on which they have built it, the expectations and some traditional ideas of love, and the conflicts they have faced and how they have solved them.

Sometimes I don't understand things, like I really want her with me all the time, I do not know why, but I want to have my way of thinking, because she says she needs her own space and I also want to give her her space, I can't always have her like this with me. (Esteban)

Love grows. I think she now kinda looks at me in a different way; now when I'm going to work she says <don't go>, I feel all of those feelings she makes me feel. (Alfredo)

Course of the relationship with parents and in-laws

The adolescents also described the ways in which their parents accepted their fatherhood and the support they receive from them, as well as the traditional roles in which the woman is responsible for care and affection: «I feel more support from my mother-in-law and my father-in-law and (...) I think from my mother it is emotional and from my dad not so emotional» (Israel).

The feedback they receive from their mothers is referred to by the mother of one of the adolescents.

I sometimes say, I see that he is assuming the role of a responsible dad; if his daughter is crying, he stands up and picks her up, and even the girl calms down when she is with him. (Sara, Esteban's mother)

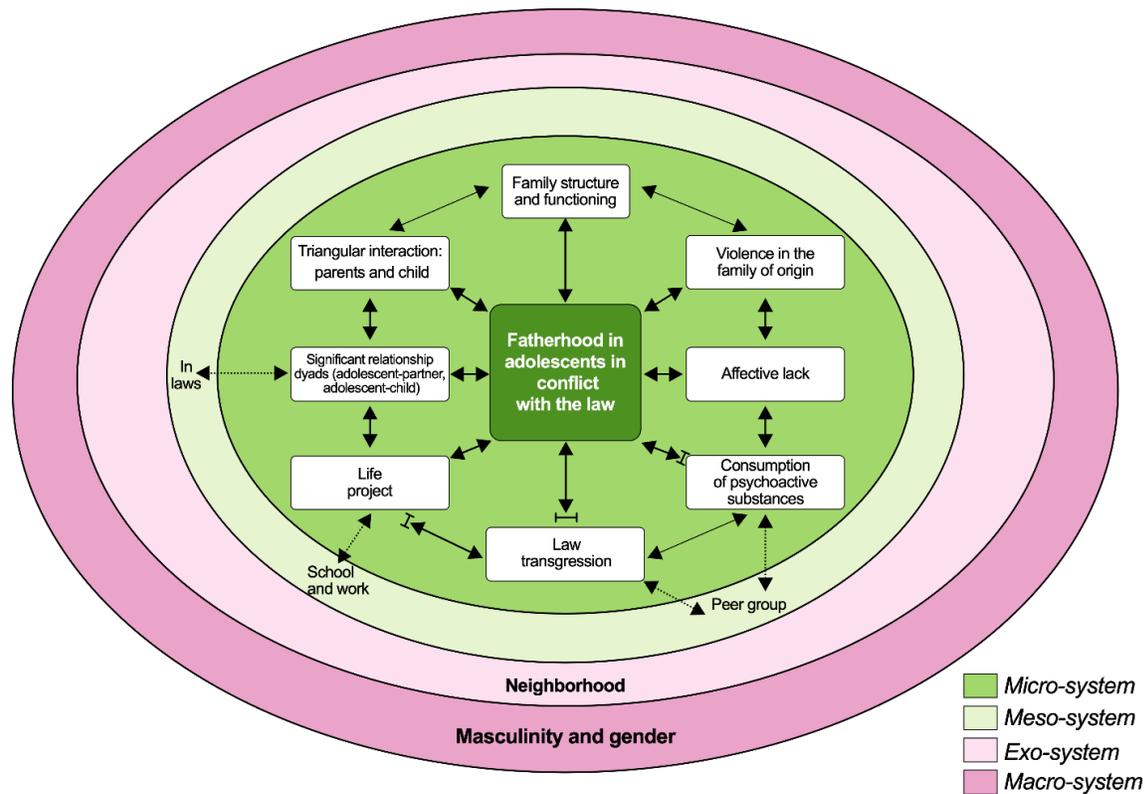
And the shortcomings that they do not want their children to experience as they did, for example Josué wishes: «To give him what I lacked (...), which was to have my parents tell me "come, we'll hug you"».

Discussion

The discussion was carried out based on the seven categories identified in the analysis and according to the time's line of the adolescents' trajectory. We tried to represent them in figure 1.

Figure 1

Relationship between elements of fatherhood among adolescents in conflict with the law



Fatherhood in adolescents in conflict with the law is composed of different elements that are interrelated in a bidirectional and continuous way between the past, present and future of adolescents' lives and in different contextual levels.

Clockwise, we see that the structure and functioning of the family of origin, the violence between the parents and the absence of affection were events that predicted the consumption of psychoactive substances and law transgression in adolescents (Greenwood, 2008; Lykken, 2013; Holleran, 2009). At present, it is important to consider the individual project life, significant relationship dyads (adolescent-partner, adolescent-child) and the

triangular interaction between the parental couple and their son because these interactions conform to the actual adolescent's nuclear family functioning and structure. During adolescence, the male seeks to show his masculinity, since the traditional model foments attitudes and actions that demonstrate strength, autonomy, self-confidence, aggressiveness and courage and confers economic, social and sexual power (Andrés, 2004; Villaseñor & Castañeda, 2003; Zamudio, 2014).

The circles refer to the levels of the ecological model, so we can see in the mesosystem the presence of in-laws as a source of support so that the adolescent can reintegrate to school and/or work. Peer groups generally relate to transgressive conduct and the use of drugs; however, there are also exceptions, and some friendships may favor their paternal role. On the other hand, we cannot overlook the neighborhood where adolescents live and the culture in which they develop. The acquisition of the masculine identity is consolidated through the social learning of norms that inform what a man is obliged to do, what is prohibited and what is allowed, thus constituting an ideology. It is made up of socio-cultural assumptions about gender ideals and stereotypes (Villaseñor & Castañeda, 2003).

Violence in the family of origin. Violence and hegemonic masculinity are related; violence is a resource in a system of domination-subordination that prevails where men have a privileged position, and violence is the instrument to exert their hegemony (González & Fernández, 2009). Violence and crime have been naturalized in regard to acts performed by men (Núñez, 2005). In Mexico, 66 in every 100 women have experience at least one incident of violence (from 15 years old); 43.9% experience violence perpetuated by their partner (Inegi, 2016). The participants who witnessed family violence might have experienced the effect that their parents were less emotionally disposed toward them and less effective in their care (Anderson & Cramer-Benjamin, 1999; Tenenbaum, 2018). One adolescent had an active role during the defense of his mother; consequently, this may have led him to believe that witnessing family violence validates violence as a form of coexistence (Bourassa, 2007) or prompts him to look for another way of relating to his partner. Interestingly, according to our results, the adolescents apparently chose the second option and looked for ways to stop the intergenerational transmission of violence, either by evading the problem or by identifying the ambivalence between wanting to control their partner and the negative consequences in their relationship.

Trajectory of psychoactive substance consumption and law transgression. The consumption of psychoactive substances and law transgression are frequently associated (Greenwood, 2008; Holleran, 2009; Lykken, 2013) and are a common practice among adolescents in

conflict with the law (Bolognini *et al.*, 2007; Contreras *et al.*, 2012; Vaughn *et al.*, 2005). In Mexico, drug use has increased in recent years, and the drug of preference among adolescents is marijuana, followed by inhalants and cocaine. The age of onset is 13 years, in both men and women (Villatoro *et al.*, 2016). We identified that the participants came from families with limited resources; two adolescents began to consume psychoactive substances between 11-12 years old. This is similar to the results of Vega-Cauch y Zumárraga-García (2019), who identified a starting age of 11-12 years. Turner *et al.* (2019) analyzed a socioecological model to explain the relation between law transgression and the use of drugs in different subgroups of adolescents. They identified that low family cohesion and criminal peers are together explanatory factors for adolescents with more life-course-persistent pathways in their law transgression. However, it is important to clarify that the judicial system is selective and that poor people are in prisons (Bergman *et al.*, 2002).

The process of assuming a father/mother role. Fatherhood in adolescents in conflict with the law is a network of individual, family (Bueno *et al.*, 2012) and social elements (Cebotarev, 2003), as well as gender identity (Hernández, 2014) and an opportunity to question male stereotypes (Salguero, 2006a). The fatherhood of poor adolescents intersects economic and social inequalities where they reproduce stereotypes of traditional and hegemonic masculinity in their paternal care logics, which include physically protecting their children from situations of violence and improving housing and community spaces. Thinking about paternal care is to consider it an interweaving between masculine identities and gender social relations (Castilla, 2020).

We observed that the adolescents developed a close relationship with their children; they took care of them, protected them, and sought to fulfill their needs to become a *good father*. These results are consistent with previous literature, which showed that the paternal role means being an involved, present and committed father, who is both a provider and a protector (Shannon & Abrams, 2007) and whose desire is to become a better parent than his own and actively participate in the upbringing of his children (Botero & Castrillón, 2015; Wilkes *et al.*, 2011). We also found that adolescents exercised their paternity mainly based on the responsibility (Stern *et al.*, 2003) of having the economic solvency to fulfill their basic family needs (Salguero, 2006b) and to protect their wife and child (Fuller, 2000).

Implications of being a man. According to Franzoni (2014), the role of providers is strongly maintained within the low socioeconomic strata; consequently, men become either good or bad fathers, which is detrimental to their participation in domestic acti-

vities and raising their children. In this research, we found that adolescents were in a transition (Ortega, 2004) because they continue to play a traditional role as providers, although they were also involved in raising their children or in doing domestic chores (Tovar-Hernández & Rocha, 2012).

Adolescent fatherhood as a turning point. Similar to the findings of Fuller (2000), the participants from this study perceived fatherhood as a way to construct a life project that involves moving away from risk and law transgression (Ortega *et al.*, 2009) and looking after the welfare of their children by meeting their basic and affective needs. Even though it was not a planned pregnancy, they assumed it as a transition from being teenagers to becoming adults. We identified that adolescents want to be good fathers and thus be involved in the lives of their children despite the abandonment or rejection of their own parents. Possibly, as suggested by Parra-Cardona *et al.* (2008), these young parents protect their child from having a life like their own experience-domestic violence, drug use, or a life on the street or in gangs-and providing them with love and support. Moreover, their child becomes a source of increased self-confidence because they represent a reason to live or to prove to themselves and to others that they are capable of carrying out parental activities (Shannon & Abrams, 2007).

The course of the partners' relationship. The results of this study coincide with the motherteens' definition of being a good father described by Coates *et al.* (2011). Some characteristics that motherteens consider as signals of being responsible or being a good father are being there, loving and caring for the child, providing financial support, and playing with the child. The type of relationship that the male has with his coparent is important because it will affect the relationship that he has with his child (Parra-Cardona *et al.*, 2008).

The course of the relationship with parents and in-laws. Fatherhood allows the identification of whether their parents act as a support network (Rodríguez, 2009); in many cases, they are one of the main sources of emotional, affective (Carrillo *et al.*, 2004) and financial support (Bueno *et al.*, 2012). In other cases, the support received by the adolescents' parents is perceived as insufficient to deal with the situation they face (Rivera, 2013).

The strength of this study is the in-depth exploration of the experience of parenting in adolescents in conflict with the law from a systemic and ecological perspective. Therefore, a study can be carried out that seeks to generalize the results and propose an intervention program that promotes closer relationships, with greater differentiation of their families of origin (Bowen, 1991). Adolescents focused on strengthening their own

fatherhood as good fathers by taking a greater interest in their father–child relationship through developing a paternal role in transition, in which they assumed being the providers as their main function, while also giving space to the affective needs of their children (Buston *et al.*, 2012). We agree with Castilla (2020) regarding avoiding binary categories because they can give a simplistic and conditioned perspective. We believe that adolescents are still situated in a hegemonic masculinity context but that they are opening spaces to alternative masculinities; however, this is an unfinished process.

This opening and questioning of hegemonic masculinity allows opening spaces to create an alternate story where adolescents make use of their sense of agency, which makes the exceptions meaningful and helps the person build a new vision of their self (Selekman, 2012). A person is an agent of their own life when they are involved in creating new unique solutions to their dilemmas, specific to the person's circumstances (Anderson, 2005).

The process of building one's own narratives involves turning to the past to look for short stories that the person will later organize and use to explain or justify the present. These little past stories fit the new tale. In the process of retelling one's own story, the images that it produces will facilitate the process of returning to the past through which experiences that fit the new will be highlighted. In this way, the new story will be as constitutive of the person as the old story was (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 2001). According to social constructionism, emotions are not internal processes but the result of cultural norms and precursors of actions (Gómez, 2020).

Conclusions

One of the central aspects of this research was the emphasis on a relational perspective rather than an intrapsychic perspective; for this reason, adolescence is not analyzed as an isolated stage of the individual but as part of the multiple processes (Fruggeri, 2005) that coemerge in families, (i. e., processes of individuation, bond, belonging, protection, etc.) where the family context establishes a group of belonging for the individual but at the same time is responsible for promoting involvement in interpersonal and social contexts. Multi-processualism refers to the activation of processes that can be described at different levels and according to different dimensions: interactive and symbolic processes, relative to individuals, the group as a whole, or the group as part of a broader social community.

In this study, we identified that fatherhood in adolescents in conflict with the law is in a national context of different types of violence (Isunza & Méndez, 2002), limitations

of alternative role models of masculinities (Rocha & Lozano, 2014; Shannon & Abrams, 2007), lack of access to quality schooling, social exclusion, poor living conditions (Dirección General de Tratamiento para Adolescentes, 2008) and the absence of social programs that prevent risk behaviors. The adolescents' life stories were related to events that happened during childhood, such as the emotional context and family functioning, the impact of witnessing family violence (in two of the cases), and the way they learned to express their masculinity by using psychoactive substances and transgressing the law. Fatherhood allowed adolescents to reflect on their own child experiences and prompted them to develop a paternal role in transition (Tovar-Hernández & Rocha, 2012), in which they assumed being the providers as their main function while also giving space to the affective needs of their children (Shannon & Abrams, 2007). This favors *embracing fatherhood*; that is, adolescents develop a voice of optimism and confidence in themselves and in their children, depict deep feelings toward them, and express gratitude toward their child's mother (Shade *et al.*, 2012). Male involvement during childbirth provides opportunities to support improved maternal and newborn health outcomes by changing gender relations, gender roles and norms and the structures that reproduce them (Comrie-Thomson *et al.*, 2015).

Based on our findings, it is possible to consider fatherhood among adolescents in conflict with the law as one element of a possible turning point, that is, a crucial event in which they modify their usual roles, or faces with a new situation or context (Ruiz-Olabuénaga, 1996), that favors seeking a life project, reconsider continuing or not using psychoactive substances and/or law transgression. We consider it fundamental that adolescents identify individual, relational and social resources that allow them to develop an alternative history for their lives.

Limitations

One of the study's foremost limitations was the time stipulated by the judge in the alternate sentence under which the adolescents attended the External Care Community for Adolescents. Interviews were conducted during that time, and when young offenders concluded the alternate sentence, they were not allowed to return to the facilities. Another limitation was the small sample of participants and the variability in attendance of the adolescents' partners and mothers, since they were unable to leave home very often due to their roles as housewives and caregivers, which is related to traditional gender roles. In one case, the adolescent refused to bring his partner with him because he was not willing

to have her involved in something he was solely responsible for, that is, paying the consequences for having committed theft.

For future research, we consider it necessary to interview adolescents' fathers to provide a more in-depth history of family life, thereby enabling professionals to weave together all threads in the construction of adolescent fatherhood. Moreover, it would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study to determine adolescents' fatherhood journey and whether they made the changes mentioned during the interviews, both in the relationship with their partner and through their children's development.

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