

## Status of youth in Mexico and drug trafficking. Binomial of the emergence of a subculture

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**Abstract:** Analyze the current problems in Mexico around drug trafficking, since the co-optation of children and young people by organized crime groups has been perceived as one of the most worrying situations that affect society. Method. It raises the possibility of observing the object-subject of investigation based on the differential association theory and its implication in the drug trafficking subculture, since although this theory has not been created for the Mexican case, it houses an interesting application that can pay to a better understanding of the problem raised. Result / conclusions. Based on data obtained from different sources, including social and crime theoretical developments, the relatively recent nature of youth participation within the drug trafficking subculture in Mexico.

**Keywords:** drug trafficking, youth, differential association theory, subculture.

### 1. Introduction

Mexico harbors a set of problems, among which some of them demand more urgent solutions. The cooptation of children and young people within the ranks of drug trafficking has been one of the major concerns of Mexican governments at its three levels, as well as of numerous civil society organizations, which can be observed in the various public programs implemented around to this problem.

The subculture of drug trafficking has permeated many of the country's communities in such a way that it has managed to create a new cultural perception, in which the fascination for the life of the drug trafficker becomes a model yearned for by children and young people. As described in this document, in view of a large part of the Mexican population, this model represents the only way to achieve social mobility, since the legal mechanisms to do so, such as study and a well-paid job, have been left out of the reach of the majority.

The existence of a drug trafficking subculture is an increasingly dangerous reality. Córdova (2007) points out that the different criminal groups have generated and segregated a symbolic mode of ideological and cultural perception, which has contributed to the creation of ethical and moral justifications around a self-legitimation of illegal activities.

The objectives of this document are:

- (1) analyze the different causal explanations for the adherence of young Mexicans to illegal drug trafficking activities, and briefly mention the dimension of said problem and;
- (2) develop a review of the nascent drug trafficking subculture as a social phenomenon from the theory of differential association, since from this theoretical perspective it allows to explain to some extent the reason for the inclination of some sectors of society towards activities crimes of drug trafficking.

### 2. Method and materials

#### 1. Differential Association Theory and the Drug Trafficking Subculture in Mexico

The participation of some sectors of society in illicit drug trafficking activities, particularly Mexican children and youth, is analyzed in light of the differential association theory put forward by Sutherland (as cited in Giddens, 2010).

This theory postulates that a society can contain several subcultures that must simultaneously coexist different social environments within it, which are susceptible to finding tendencies towards the commission of legal or illegal actions. Individuals who are part of the group influenced by the social environment can become criminals if they are related to those who are, so criminal behavior is a social product that is learned.

It is possible to identify that the differential association theory fits or is understood within the processes of roots that drug trafficking activities have generated in the localities of the country, translating into the solidification of a kind of "values" that entire communities have developed for be able to interact within said illegal system.

Among them, it is possible to find courage, loyalty and honor, which are often raised as requirements for action within the organization, such as when facing both the authorities and the rival groups with which they usually be in conflict.

Within the collective imagination that society conceives in relation to drug lords in Mexico, it should be noted that the organic roots that they have in their communities of origin is linked not only to the benefits they grant, their exploits or their adventures such as Cordova (2007) points out, but also with a series of popular symbols, which act as a connecting element between the illicit activities they carry out and the community that admires them.

One of the elements that has fostered the dissemination and growing fascination for the drug trafficking issue have been the actions of police and military groups, as well as the mass media, since the stories that revolve around the arrests or the The atrocities of the leaders of the different cartels tend to generate mythologies that solidify the veneration and the roots of the community towards the growing subculture of drug trafficking in the country.

Specifically, it can be pointed out that the government apparatus has been a determining factor through neglect or insufficient attention to vulnerable groups, which drug trafficking has known how to serve in order to obtain some benefit from them, either through their loyalty and the protection that it provides. means or through the production activities of the illicit substances. An essential and distinctive element of every culture within a given society is its ability to generate rules, in it there are coercive resources through which criminal actors exercise control, the main resource is violence, which for Córdoba (2007), of drug trafficking, which has unwritten rules that are accepted by those who recognize them, either voluntarily or imposed.

It should be taken into account that within the construction of the drug trafficking subculture in Mexico there have been elements that little by little have allowed its solidification and that have contributed to strengthening the internal cohesion of organizations dedicated to drug trafficking, such is the case of a language characteristic; communication codes or keys as well as de facto regulations, elements that tend to be typical of apparent sects, brotherhoods or mafias. Castillo and Pansters (2007) point out that gang members wear distinctive clothing and tattoos as symbols of identity, such as tear-shaped tattoos under the eyes that indicate the number of murders, to name just one. These gangs are in fact youth self-defense organizations in enemy territories.

In this way, it is possible to appreciate that in the national reality, drug trafficking has resulted in a subculture as postulated by the differential association theory, to which a large number of criminal groups are added, such as those that Castillo and Pansters (2007) they comment, they also share a language, particular keys, clothing and other symbols of identity.

Córdoba (2007) affirms that crime is a central element of contemporary society and that the social deviation that occurs is possibly associated with sociocultural conditions, situations and circumstances. It should be noted that within the possible Mexican sociocultural deviation, the primary element or a relevant factor is the economic remuneration obtained by participating in illicit drug trafficking activities. Hence, it is a growing subculture, capable of producing fascination in society, where individuals of all ages and from all origins find a place, however it is children and young people with limited resources who are mostly attracted by the pleasures and the life of drug traffickers.

In the drug trafficking subculture, it is possible to appreciate that violence is the means through which its members settle their controversies. Within the criminal groups dedicated to said illicit activity, a large number of actors with diverse activities converge, among which it is possible to find: growers, laboratory specialists, transporters, distributors, surveillance and attack groups and even legal and financial professionals among others. (Castells, 1999).

Considering the possible reasons why the individuals of a group decide to join this new subculture that is increasingly nurtured, it is relevant what for Reguillo (2001) consists of the true dimension of the problem, which is composed of individuals who have been tempted or forced by the power of criminal groups linked to drug trafficking through money and corruption. In this way, it is observed that within the complex causal framework of crime among young people and their participation in drug trafficking, cultural influence is situated as an element that connects various risk factors, resulting in a position of vulnerability that ends for allowing the start of criminal careers among Mexican children and youth.

### **3. Discussion**

## **1. Dimension and causal explanations of the inclusion of Mexican children and youth in drug trafficking**

Currently Mexico has a large generation of young people: half of the population is twenty-six years old or less (INEGI, 2010). Many of the young Mexicans develop in environments plagued by extreme poverty, violence, lack of education and opportunities, which are conditions that exist in urban conglomerates, rural communities of the national territory (Altamirano, 2018). Said factors are present - to a greater or lesser extent - in all societies, but what is most striking is the cultural factor that surrounds the problem under study, that is, the drug trafficking subculture.

There is a generally accepted way to measure crime levels in societies, which is made up of three main indicators: insecurity perception surveys, victimization surveys, and homicide registries. The World Bank (2012) stated that in 2010, there were five states in the country that concentrated 56.7% of homicides to this social group: Baja California, State of Mexico, Chihuahua, Guerrero and Sinaloa. Of the aforementioned, the state of Chihuahua is the Mexican entity with the highest rise in this indicator, since the rate rises to seventy homicides of young people for every one hundred thousand inhabitants, according to the same international organization.

It was observed that the states with the highest number of gangs are: Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Jalisco, Federal District and the State of Mexico (SSP, 2010). It has been identified that there are states with few but extremely dangerous gangs, in which the individuals that comprise them are violent and increasingly younger, such is the case of what happened in Chiapas, Chihuahua and Sinaloa, where gangs have been associated with the main drug cartels in the country. The exact number of individuals from this social group who are involved in drug trafficking activities is unknown, however statistical data on the existing level of crime reveal an important participation.

### **1.1 Poverty**

Various theoretical developments and studies agree that it is incorrect to think that poverty is synonymous with crime, since it has been found that there are extremely poor communities that do not suffer from this phenomenon. However, this problem cannot be completely isolated, since it is a reality that the incidence of crime worsens in marginalized environments. Mexico is a country with high levels of poverty. It is estimated that 45.5% of the population is in a situation of poverty; 35.7% in moderate poverty and 9.8% in extreme poverty (CONEVAL, 2012), which means that a large part of the country is immersed in this problem.

The poorest young Mexicans have also been located in the national territory through various studies, of which it is observed that three states in the country are experiencing this problem to a greater extent. Chiapas is the State with the highest number of young people living in extreme poverty, as 75.3% are in this condition. For its part, Guerrero has 70.2% of its young people in the same vulnerable situation, and finally Puebla registers 63% of extreme poverty among its young people (IMJUVE, 2013).

The states that report the lowest number of poverty among their youth are: Nuevo León with 22.9%, Coahuila with 26.1% and Sonora with 27.3% (IMJUVE, 2013). Of the three states mentioned, only Nuevo León has a high number of youth gangs, since both Coahuila and Sonora have gangs but they are not so many or so dangerous. Likewise, it is observed that juvenile criminal participation in Nuevo León is related to the drug cartels that operate there (SSP, 2010).

### **1.2 Lack of access to educational opportunities and school dropouts**

There are certain problems in Mexico that are a reflection of the inequality that exists in the country. One of them is differentiated access to educational options, as well as school dropout, which in turn is the product of a series of socio-economic, personal and educational factors.

One of the factors generated by school dropouts and that is related to crime is the low level of income. According to the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE, 2011), those who managed to complete their upper secondary level studies receive a salary 37% higher than those who do not. Consequently, it is considered that school dropout can be considered as an obstacle in the social mobility of the Mexican population, since with a low level of studies young people have less and less possibilities of getting ahead. Similarly, it is understood that school dropout exacerbates social inequalities,

However, not all young Mexicans are affected in the same way by school dropout, an element of inequality is involved in this situation that accentuates the vulnerability of the poorest. Although a reform was enacted in Mexico that instructed the compulsory nature of upper secondary education since 2012, the high dropout rates

have not reduced. According to the Ministry of Public Education (SEP, 2012), 80% of young people who are located in the highest quintiles in terms of the economic income of their families complete their studies at this level, which is in contrast to what happens with young people from the lowest income quintiles, of which only 20% manage to complete upper secondary education.

A tool that allows us to observe the situation of school dropout in a longitudinal way is the analysis of the educational trajectory in the last two decades, which is nothing more than the statistical summary of those children who began primary school and how many of them achieved complete upper secondary education (mandatory by law since 2012).

Finally, it is recovered that 43% of young Mexicans have studied at the secondary level, 28.2% have done so at the high school level, and only 10.5% have managed to obtain a professional level (IMJUVE, 2013). Similarly, the lack of opportunities and the lack of work are socioeconomic risk factors that affect juvenile delinquency. In Mexico, 24.7% of young people between 15 and 29 years old do not study or work (IMJUVE, 2013), which will be discussed later.

### **1.3 Unemployment among young people**

Unemployment is one of the factors that have the greatest direct impact on the decision of young Mexicans to commit crimes. One of the reasons is the relationship between job insecurity and the age of young people since it is marked by the level of educational instruction they have when they enter the labor market. For example, it was observed through the 2010 National Youth Survey (IMJUVE, 2011) that young people under 20 years of age are naturally employed with less schooling than those between 20 and 24 years old, this means that if they find a work -in the best of cases-, it is precarious and has terrible working conditions in such a way that the opportunity to get easy money - in this case through drug trafficking - ends up being a much more affordable and attractive way.

To find out what the situation has been in Mexico in terms of youth unemployment, it is worth noting that in the last decade, the number of young people between 12 and 29 years of age who were working was 46.8% (De Oliveira, 2006). This figure includes both formal and informal jobs, where the latter far exceed the former. Unemployment among young Mexicans should be considered as a criminal risk factor, since, as has been stated, the Mexican reality demonstrates this and that is where the lack of employment or precarious employment is combined with risk factors of another nature; such as those associated with peer groups, the social-community and the cultural factor.

As mentioned above, there is a group within this area that has attracted attention in recent years, such is the case of those young people who do not study and who are also unemployed, who have been defined with the term "ninis". In this regard, Arceo and Campos (2011) point out that in Mexico there are around seven million of these young people, a figure that coincides with that expressed by the Mexican Institute of Youth (IMJUVE, 2013), who are at high risk of starting criminal careers.

According to data presented by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2011), the number of young people between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine who are in this situation amounts to 7,226,000, of which approximately 1,931,000 are between fifteen and nineteen years old; 2,673,000 are between twenty and twenty-four years old and; 2,622,000 are between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine.

### **1.4 Availability of firearms**

The number of young people involved in illegal activities has been climbing to worrying levels, engaging in increasingly violent activities such as those related to drug trafficking. Now, it is observed that the availability of weapons in Mexico has been increasing, as a result of which is that firearms have been used in most of the crimes committed, although the greatest manifestation of use is evident in the confrontations between cartels. of drug trafficking, and between these and the government police forces.

According to Astorga (2010), the availability of weapons does not in itself increase violence, but it is a facilitator to commit increasingly violent crimes and increases the difficulty of containing it. It also points out that criminal organizations, including drug cartels, increasingly obtain weapons, which mostly come from the United States. In addition to this, the price of the same is increasingly affordable, which allows criminal organizations to have sophisticated weapons at low cost.

Considering that the vast majority of illegal weapons in Mexico come from the United States, it is worth noting that according to Astorga (2010) there are nineteen formal crossings on the border between the two countries, and countless informal crossings through which the themselves. In the United States, there are around one hundred thousand sales permit holders and of them twelve thousand are in the border area with Mexico.

It has been identified that the illegal weapons available in Mexico are mainly in the possession of three large criminal groups: the Gulf organizations, the Pacific organizations and their ramifications, among others.

The North American regulatory framework on firearms and the lack of an effective strategy on the part of the Mexican government have allowed openings through which thousands of illegal weapons have been able to enter the national territory, this situation has generated an increase in violence of the crimes committed, and if it is related to the escalation of new young offenders, it is observed that in the hands of adolescents there are dangerous weapons that even the country's police do not possess.

### **1.5 Alcohol and drug use**

Alcohol and drug addiction is an issue that has been consistently addressed by the Mexican government as well as by civil society organizations interested in this problem. One of the instruments that have been used to measure the dependence of Mexicans on certain legal and illegal drugs is the National Survey of Addictions (ENA), which is carried out with the participation of the National Center for the Prevention and Control of Addictions (CENADIC), the National Commission against Addictions (CONADIC), the Ramón de la Fuente National Institute of Psychiatry, the National Institute of Public Health and the Ministry of Health of the Government of Mexico. Their results offer relevant information, since they allow an approximation to the real dimension of the problem,

According to Ortiz, Martínez and Meza (2014) it is pertinent to point out that “Marijuana: This substance has the highest consumption level of the substances studied 89.9%. The user of this substance begins before the age of 11: 0.3%, however the most affected group is that of 15 to 19 years of age: 45.1%. The most frequent route of administration is smoking: 98.9%. The average number of problems perceived by users before and after starting consumption is 2.22 and 2.84 respectively. The proportion of users of this substance who perceive a problem is 7.8% and 96.3% respectively. (...) Cocaine: This substance occupies the second place of consumption in this evaluation: 40.0%. The user of this substance starts from the age of 11, however, the most affected group is that of 15 to 19: 52.6%. The most frequent routes of administration are: smoked: 60.4% and inhaled: 38.6%. The average number of problems perceived by users before and after starting consumption is 2.32 and 3.57 respectively. The proportion of users of this substance who perceive a problem is 17.2% and 95.3% respectively. The names reported by users are: Cocaine 65.3.3% and Crack: 34.0%. (...) Inhalants: In this evaluation they represent 39.6% of substance use "ever". The user of this substance starts before the age of 11: 2.3%, and yet the most affected group is 15 to 19 years of age: 49.0%. The most frequent route of administration is inhalation in 100% of cases. The average number of problems perceived by users before and after starting consumption is 2.57 / 3.38 respectively. The proportion of users of this substance who perceive a problem is 9.6% and 96.3% respectively. The name of Inhalables most reported is Active: 84.8% (p. 1.22, 4.13)”(pp. 12 and 13).

One of the main public programs in charge of addressing the problem has been the development of Youth Integration Centers (CIJ). According to the data presented by the CIJ of the country, the main drug addictions (both legal and illegal) that were treated are: in the first place to alcohol with 19.9%, followed by cocaine with 12.5%, marijuana with 15.16% and for last inhalants with 14.1%. Another important piece of data (due to its link with risk factors) is that 45% of young addicts have just finished high school, in the same way, it was stated that the vast majority of applicants came from a low socioeconomic level. In short, young people in poverty, with low education and with drug addictions, a combination of vulnerability to the start of criminal careers.

## **4. Outcome**

### **1. Institutional facilitators: impunity and lack of proportionality in sanctions**

One of the most relevant facilitators of crime is the triviality of the sentences that are imposed on them by the Mexican justice system. It is worth noting that the most common criminal activity by young people is robbery. However, it has also been possible to identify their participation in the commission of extortions, kidnappings and homicides, which are considered within the modality of organized crime, this according to data exposed by the Mexican Foundation for Social Reintegration, REINTEGRA, AC

In Mexico, the Mexican justice system does not apply criminal laws in the same way for an adult as for a child or a young person under eighteen years of age, since they have been considered unimpeachable, because their actions are the result of the influences of the social environment or their parents. (Cruz and Cruz, 2010). The prevailing arguments that give life to juvenile justice in the country, given that they are still in a formative process, their immaturity and inexperience exposes them to be easily influenced by the contexts in which they are

developed. In this case, we are talking about family risk factors, associated with the peer group and social-community factors.

As can be seen, the theoretical developments in the matter expose the affectation that children and young people can have, before the influence of these risk factors. It should be understood as attributable to the condition composed of the knowledge and will of the subject when committing the illicit act, which necessarily implies the ability to understand and want the results that will be obtained after its commission. (Cruz and Cruz, 2010). The unimputability is on the contrary; the inability to understand and to want the results of the illicit act, for which it has been considered that children and young people as well as the incapacitated are not, nor can they be imputable.

However, the causes by which young Mexicans are forced to begin criminal careers in the service of drug trafficking are usually arranged in categorizations from the simplest to the most complex, however it is possible to summarize that generally the attention is focused on the causes socioeconomic, family, social order and in the different facilitators of crime. However, the problem under study requires the incorporation of different approaches and the influence of culture in the adherence of children and young people to drug trafficking in order to be understood.

## 5. Conclusions

All existing cartels in Mexico use young people without exception within their organizations, nowadays these are not only co-opted for transfer activities where they serve as a decoy, but now a strong tendency to integrate them into criminal activities can be observed more heinous and violent. The participation of minors is increasing, every day more of them are recruited to expand the ranks of organizations linked to drug trafficking and in the same way, every day some lose not only their freedom but their lives, either in front of the armed forces of the State or, in the face of the onslaught of rival groups.

The problem of drug trafficking in Mexico is an old situation that is strongly rooted in society through the generation of its own subculture, a cultural derivative in which broad sectors of society coexist and participate, among which the children and young people is the most susceptible to being affected. The adherence of Mexican children and youth to the ranks of organized crime represents an urgent situation that continues to go unattended, even in the face of the efforts made through the implementation of the National Plan for Social Prevention against Violence and Crime (DOF, 04/30 /2014).

Possibly the present generation of children and young people is experiencing one of the greatest known threats in the history of the country, which is why an effective strategy aimed at preventing crime and adhering to groups is urgent. Poverty, lack of education, employment and growing needs have been bringing young people closer to joining the criminal activities of drug trafficking, offering their services at any link in the production chain of drugs, in the transfer or in the security forces at the service of the cartels.

The usefulness of carrying out an analysis based on a cultural approach lies in the possibility of being able to appreciate from another perspective how it is that the criminal careers of children and young people are born within drug trafficking, since understanding the environment and the influence of this subculture make it possible to identify the coexistence of other risk factors and crime facilitators.

As previously expressed, the drug trafficker's lifestyle has been consolidated in a subcultural configuration desired by children and young people, his motivation to commit crimes is largely explained under this logic. Understanding in this way the inclusion of this social group in drug trafficking allows for a complete panorama through which more effective and efficient public prevention policies can be designed and implemented.

As a result of this, it is essential to seek a balance between attention to causes and effects, that is, together with the impulse of a preventive approach, the reintegration into society of those who have been co-opted by drug trafficking must be decisively supported, since It is necessary to stop criminalizing marginalized youth and, on the contrary, it is imperative to establish mechanisms so that they can be reintegrated, since young people have so far a double character: as victims and perpetrators.

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