

Article

# Impact of Partner Violence on Female Delinquency

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**Abstract:** In recent decades there has been an increase of criminal behavior by women, which is due to social rather than individual change. Feminist analysis points to the existence of an androcentric and patriarchal order, which through the practices of subjectification, builds the identity of the subjects. These practices have been shaped by close affective bonds, including couple bounds, who in turn have constructed them as criminals. Ninety-four women were interviewed in six prisons in four countries. Their life stories were analyzed through Atlas.ti. Affective bonds with the partner and gender violence are the two main categories of analysis. It was found that the affective bonds with the partner that included violent behavior can be a factor leading these women towards crime. The findings suggest that the women were imprisoned, before entering prison, in violent relationships that held them, configuring their subjectivity. The violent partner bonds and female delinquency associated with them are the product of a patriarchal society that does not see a difference between being a victim or being criminal.

**Keywords:** female delinquency; jail; women; crime; gender violence; affective bonds

## 1. Introduction

One of the international problems addressed in recent times is female delinquency, which corresponds to a social rather than individual situation; this is a topic that several authors have addressed in the last 30 years from different perspectives (Nielsen 2016; González et al. 2016; Azaola and Yacamán 1996), reflecting the impact that other people have on the construction of the subjectivity of women as criminals. Various studies indicate that jailed women are characterized by being unemployed, with precarious incomes, by being young adults with children, low schooling, and with criminal family surroundings (Azaola and Yacamán 1996); most of them lack power and have been mistreated most of their lives (and many of them have a history of sexual abuse) (Carrillo Hernández 2012).

Pedroza de la Llave and García (2003) state that factors such as violence, addiction, lack of opportunities, dependence, and extreme poverty are elements that make women much more likely to commit crimes. Other authors talk about the psychosocial dynamics that permeate the interior of the prison (Reidl 1976; Le Breton 1990; Rodríguez et al. 2006; Ordóñez 2006; Calveiro 2010). There are those who have dealt with issues, such as health, intelligence, exposure to economic pressure, and an unfavorable family environment, which characterize incarcerated women (Galván et al. 2006; Azaola and Yacamán 1996).

Those findings offer important nuances to understand crime committed by women. Hanley and Ruppanner (2015) analyzed the effect of fear, or on the contrary well-being, in the context of diverse relationships on female criminality. Also, the ways in which women commit crimes, the specificity of female delinquency, the personal characteristics of delinquent women, and the causal factors that distinguish this group of women from other criminal groups have been researched by Martínez et

al. (2008). In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, the first critical studies on female crime by feminist sociologists and criminologists were published. Their studies highlight the social causes of female crime and the differences in the impact of incarceration on men and women (Almeda and Di Nella 2017; Smart 1976). The androcentrism present in criminology, the stereotypes about female delinquency, the profiles of imprisoned women, and the typology of crimes and convictions were analyzed in the 1980s and 1990s, from a Feminist Critical Criminology or Gender Criminology perspective (Almeda and Di Nella 2017).

All these studies have been helpful in understanding that the needs and challenges of women in prison have always been ignored in favor of those of men. Feminist analyses point to the existence of an androcentric and patriarchal order (Bodelón and Aedo 2015; Yagüe 2007; Almeda 2003; Butler 2001), which through subjectification practices, builds the identity of the subjects. Each subject is the result of its own practices of subjectification; therefore, whenever there are new practices that make it possible to transform the rules and norms that govern the situation, new forms of subjectification are generated and they transform people (Foucault 1988; Butler 2001). Hence, the importance of retrieving the narratives of the women participating in the study is to know these forms of subjectification by analyzing the relationships with partners, and to identify if there is any relationship between gender violence and crime.

The findings of this study represent a valuable approximation to what occurs in the life stories of incarcerated women. Approaching the private lives of women who have been imprisoned in four countries allowed us to highlight the impact that the relationships have had on the commission of the crime. As Madera-Hernández and Herrera-López mentioned, “gender violence is a topic that makes patriarchal practices evident in all forms of expression” (Madera-Hernández and Herrera-López 2010, p. 88). This implies a relationship of power-coercion that in the majority of cases is to be found within the couple. An interesting issue is that this type of relationship (known as conjugal violence, domestic violence, violence by the intimate partner, etc.) implies that other social interaction contexts of the women are affected—family, work, social. It is then a universal, multicausal, and multidimensional phenomenon (Ocampo Otálvaro and Amar Amar 2011) that generates consequences that induce crime.

Similarly, as Martínez (2003) pointed out, partner violence is a social problem that affects a large number of women, where the psychological abuse prevails over physical or sexual abuse, but the presence of one does not exclude the presence of others. Individual, familial, and institutional factors tend to reinforce the image of women’s subordination and ascribe it to a symbolic space that strengthens and preserves violence in its various manifestations. González and Santana (2001) also found that partner violence is influenced by different variables related to the parental family of the women (marital violence, physical punishment, and affection received by the parents), and expectations of the couple (attractiveness, communication). Social stereotypes about gender (man as a provider, woman as a caregiver) also have a lot to do with the couple’s conception of violence (Cantera and Blanch 2010); it is here that conflicts occur with respect to the partners’ expectations and the implications of failing to meet those expectations that are framed within a patriarchal hegemony.

In conclusion, this research supposes a valuable approximation of the possible situations that have led the women to commit crime. The results obtained point to the need to consider a holistic approach, with a gender perspective (Bodelón and Aedo 2015; Yagüe 2007; Yagüe and Cabello 2005; Almeda 2003), to answer the following question: what is the impact of gender violence on the commission of crimes by women? This research takes into consideration important contributions on the conception of power by Foucault (1988), and the feminist perspective by Bodelón and Aedo (2015), Yagüe (2007), Almeda (2003), and Butler (2001). In this study, we also review contributions to symbolic interactionism (Carter and Fuller 2015; Aksan et al. 2009; Stryker and Vryan 2003; Nelson 1998; Deegan and Hill 1987; Blumer 1982) on the psychosocial effects of family crises (Rivera 2013; Schroeder et al. 2010; Krohn et al. 2009), and on the ethics of care (Medina 2016; Gilligan 1985) as a contribution to the withdrawal of crime. It has to be taken into account, in an intersectional approach, that women are not only exposed to

gender oppression, but also to other oppressions derived from race, social class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality, among others (Davis and Bhavnani 2000; Ballesteros and Almeda 2015).

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study, with a qualitative approach, was framed in the socioconstructionist perspective (Gergen 1985; Ibáñez and Jiménez 2001; Ibáñez and Iñiguez 1997) and gender perspective (Harding 2004; Pujal 2005; Butler 1988). The study was carried out through a sociodemographic description and a biographical approach (Bertaux 1999; Cornejo et al. 2008), obtained through interviews of life stories. A total of 94 women were interviewed, of whom 81 were in prison at the time of the interview, and 13 had been imprisoned at some point in their lives. The interviewed women were (or were at some point in their lives) in the prisons of Barcelona (Spain), Montevideo (Uruguay), Oaxaca (Mexico), Florencia, Neiva, and Medellín (Colombia), and were nationals from 15 different countries: Spain, Mexico, Colombia, Portugal, Chile, Mali, Ecuador, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Peru, Guatemala, and Brazil. Among them, there was a Peruvian woman with dual Canadian nationality and a Colombian woman with dual US nationality. The sample aimed at the diversity of personal and psychosocial situations (age, nationality, socioeconomic stratum, criminal typology, maternity, immigration, existence or absence of affective bonds, and recidivism) and the saturation criterion was used.

The information was collected during the period stretching from April 2015 to March 2016; however, six months before we started the process of contacting Universities and Institutes that were working on social projects in the prisons. In this way, the approach to the penitentiary center of Montevideo (Uruguay) was made through the Universidad de La República; to the Tanivet jail in Oaxaca (Mexico) through the Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez and the Asociación Civil Mujeres Unidas (MUGER AC.); to the prison San Cristobal of Medellín (Colombia) through the Universidad Nacional, Abierta y a Distancia; to the prison El Cunday in Florencia (Colombia) through the Fundación Genesis Verde, and to the prison of Wad-Ras in Barcelona (Spain), through the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona.

The interviews were carried out in the library of each prison, or in an office assigned by the management of the facility. As for the women who were already out of prison, they were interviewed in public places or in their respective homes, according to the choice of each interviewee. All the interviewed women were previously informed regarding both the content and objectives of the research, as well as the modalities and procedures that their participation in the study would imply. All of them were free to decide whether or not they wanted to participate in this study. In this way, only those who voluntarily agreed were interviewed. This process was materialized in the signing of an informed consent that was previously reviewed and approved by the academic and ethics committee of the Doctorate of the Department of Social Psychology of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, based on the ethical aspects stated in the Declaration of Helsinki and others (Acevedo-Pérez 2002).

All interviews were transcribed through Scribe Transcription Software, following the criteria of Jefferson (2004). A content analysis was performed through atlas.ti and attention was focused on the interpersonal message produced in each of the interviews through the word cloud, which provided valuable inferences about the conditions of production and reception (Gondim and Bendassolli 2014; Spini et al. 2009).

## 3. Results and Discussion

From the analysis of thematic content, two main categories were found: *Affective bonds* with the partner and *gender violence* (see Table 1). The important finding has been the way women construct themselves, in their own words, as perceived in their multiple roles, and the way in which they believe that others perceive them; although the latter should not be decisive, it ended up being a transversal axis in the majority of studies. In short, their life stories tell us how their subjectivity emerges from the web of everyday relationships, according with Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism (Blumer

1982). Shared meanings are the product of social interaction, which in turn constitutes the individual as a social being. Each subject has the opportunity to negotiate and transform the meanings in the interpretative processes according to their expectations, purposes, and life stories (Carter and Fuller 2015; Aksan et al. 2009).

**Table 1.** Categories of thematic analysis.

Categories	Subcategories
Affective Bonds	Escape Bonds Emotional Dependence Economic Dependence Positive bonds
Gender Violence	Direct Violence Structural Violence Symbolic Violence

### 3.1. Affective Bonds

Affective bonds and gender violence interact with one another, resulting in female delinquency. At this point, it became clear that a person is not built once and for all; identity and subjectivity are in permanent interaction with the environment. Each person is a product of history, and it is this history that allows us to understand how each individual has reached their present position (De Gaulejac 1991), from which they build their environment and build themselves through their bonds with others. These bonds (loaded with emotions and affection) mobilize the actions of the subject to get them out of a static moment, and through dialectic and symbolic interactions with the others, lead them to recognize their existence (identity). In identity theory, Mead's proposals on the reflexivity of self and society are applied to understand how identities motivate behavior and emotions in social interactions (McCall and Simmons 1978). In the search for freedom and happiness, responding to the expectations generated by society, the bonds hold women by dictating patterns of behavior and ways of feeling that are marked by hegemonic norms. As mentioned by Schur (1984), the labeling of women deviating from these norms is a stigma used to achieve social control. Gender roles are constructed and restrict the free development of women and promote the reproduction of inequalities (Schur 1984; Lipman-Blumen 1984; Maher 1997). Crime can be a form of resistance against this social control (Asencio and Burke 2011). Some bonds lead them to prison when they try to change or escape from a violent relationship, and other bonds mobilize them to take responsibility for others (usually children or dependents), constructing themselves as capable (*Escape bonds*). This will depend on what Berger and Luckman (1989) said about their conditions of existence, which are the product of their accumulated experiences.

The category *Affective bonds* is formed by the following subcategories: Escape bonds, Emotional dependence, Economic dependence, and Positive bonds.

#### 3.1.1. Escape Bonds

Practically all the stories refer to having suffered gender or domestic violence. These women report that in the commission of the crime they saw an opportunity to escape the violent relationships that held them.

What do I think led me to commit the crime? ... mmm ... the need to escape the situation I was fleeing ... and fleeing from one thing I got into something worse ... Do you understand it? I wanted my freedom, and fleeing from that man ... I did what I did ... ( ... ) That went from one thing to the other, because ... I left my parents' house with him (ex-husband), not for love, but to escape from my mother, from her mistreatments ... ( ... ), and then I escaped from him and I got into this (the crime) (ES (P1) 05).

Original version:

¿Qué qué creo que me llevó a cometer el delito? ... mmm ... pues el necesitar escapar de la situación que estaba huyendo, ... y huyéndole a una cosa me metí en algo peor ... ¿Si entiende? Yo quería mi libertad, y huyéndole a ese hombre ... hice lo que hice ... ( ... ) Eso fue yendo de una cosa a la otra, porque ... yo me fui con el (ex esposo) de mi casa no por amor, sino huyéndole a mi mamá, a los maltratos ... ( ... ), y después me escapé de él y me metí en esto (el delito) (ES(P1)05).

This fragment reflects the situation of many women, that in trying to escape violence, face more violence. The woman speaking in this testimony clearly expresses how, in her escape from the mistreatment by her parents in childhood, she decides to go and live with a man who also raped her. Subsequently, in the attempt to escape from this violent relationship, she turns to drug trafficking as a means of survival; this activity eventually leads her to prison. Thus, the bond of the couple in female delinquents is caused by trying to escape from parental home violence. It is as if they had previously been imprisoned in an unequal and violent relationship, deprived of freedom.

### 3.1.2. Emotional Dependence

One of the characteristics of gender violence is the emotional manipulation that generates a strong emotional dependence in the woman on her aggressor. The same interactions between parents and children from an early age become an educator in such dependence (West and Zimmerman 1977). Deegan and Hill (1987) and Dennis and Martin (2005) state that women are constructed through symbolic interactions that are mostly mediated by power, and it would not be possible to understand this logic of women's subjectivity without understanding the presence of the "other" and its interconnections.

We have found in the stories of women numerous examples of this situation.

Well I was still with him because I did not want to be alone ( ... ), that was very strange because we split off and then we came back again. We did this for many years, and I endured that he humiliated me, that he hit me ... because then finally ... he was with me, and when he wanted to behave well, he did it (ME (P3) 18).

Original version:

Pues yo seguía con él porque no quería estar sola ( ... ), eso era muy extraño porque nos dejábamos y luego volvíamos. Así lo hicimos durante muchos años, y yo me aguantaba que me humillara, me pegara ... , porque pues finalmente ... él hacía compañía, y cuando quería portarse bien, pues lo hacía (ME(P3)18).

This is the expression of a Mexican woman who endured violence by her partner for many years, in exchange for the company he provided. This emotional dependence was loaded with previous issues of failure and abandonment that made her vulnerable to other types of violence or social reactions, including the stereotype of solitude as a problem or product of not meeting the social standards that ask women "not to be alone". The myths of romantic love participate in the social construction of the mandates that guide the practices (Cubells and Calsamiglia 2015; Sánchez-Sicilia and Cubells 2018). In this case, the myth of the "half-orange"<sup>1</sup> builds the idea that to be complete it is necessary to have a partner. Not being alone is associated with protection, care, backup, and security, but it is also associated with the idea that women who are not alone deserve not being alone, and women who are alone are inadequate and deserve being alone.

As Almeda and Di Nella (2017) and Lagarde (2005) mentioned, all women are prisoners and captives, subject to the captivity of our generic condition of women; that is, captive by different forms

<sup>1</sup> Translation of the Spanish expression "media naranja", which amounts to "soul mate".

of oppression. In this study, we pay attention to how the bonds lead subjects to certain actions and how, in turn, they form and lead new subjectivities. These findings show how oppressive affective bonds are; bonds that, in a way, “imprison” women, as they lose their sense of autonomy and control over their lives. Metaphorically, this emotional dependence acts as a prison that limits their field of action; it is an invisible symbolic space, and most of the time, it is imperceptible. Some interviewed women became aware of this emotional dependence when they were already in physical prison.

### 3.1.3. Economic Dependence

Within the pre-prison captivity, which also appears as a relevant element in the constitution of the affective bond with the partner, economic dependency appears, due to the confluence of social factors of inequality, lack of opportunities, or poverty that put women at a disadvantage (Aristizábal and Cubells 2018). This situation, often unrelated to their will, makes them dependent and leads them to hold on to their partner in order to guarantee the economic support of the home and satisfy the basic needs of their dependent children or relatives.

We were so poor that we had to settle for what he (partner) brought. The only thing that mattered to me was that my children did not lack food; if they ate, even if it was bread with “aguapanela”, then I was calm ( . . . ) I had to endure many things with him, but he was the one who brought the food to the house (CO (P4) 13).

Original version:

Éramos tan pobres que nos tocaba conformarnos con lo que el (pareja) trajera. A mi lo único que me importaba era que a mis hijos no les faltara la comida; si ellos comían, aunque fuera un pan con aguapanela, ya yo estaba tranquila ( . . . ) A mi me tocó soportar muchas cosas con él, pero pues el era el que llevaba la remesa a la casa (CO(P4)13).

### 3.1.4. Positive Bonds

In other expressions (less frequent in the stories), the relationship with the partner is positive and leads to positive actions. Different studies affirm that positive links or a perception of care are protective factors for health in men and women (Henson et al. 2017; Brodowski and Fischman 2013; Werner 2000). Bagozzi et al. (1999) state that the effects of interpersonal relationships are different between men and women, and different according to culture. It would be interesting to delve into these differences in future research.

Now that I feel more relieved, I have a new partner, he is outside waiting for me, I met him when I was a girl, I talk a lot with him, although perhaps he does not understand me in everything, but at least he listens to me and lets me say what I want, and if there is a day that I do not want him to come, he respects me and he does not come, okay? (UR (P2) 11).

Original version:

Ahora como que me siento más aliviada, tengo una nueva pareja tá, el está afuera esperando por mí, lo conocí cuando era niña tá, hablo mucho con el, aunque el igual no me entiende en todo, pero al menos me escucha tá y me deja decir lo que quiero, y si si hay día que no quiero que venga, pues me respeta y no viene, tá (UR(P2)11).

The positive relationship with a new empowering partner emerges from this narrative of a Uruguayan woman—she sees her identity as a valued, autonomous woman with the possibility to choose, propose, and act, where, in one way or another, she feels cared for by another person. This type of bond was not very common among the 94 women we interviewed; however, as five women talked about it, it was necessary to mention it.

A bond with the partner as described above turns out to be empowering because it gives back to the woman the agency to rebuild herself. According to [Esteban and Amurrio \(2010\)](#), the emotional field is also a fertile ground for articulating strategies, which implies understanding feelings not as something immutable, but to conceive that they have a plasticity that social actors and actresses shuffle in a more or less conscious way ([Esteban and Amurrio 2010](#)). The bond that empowers can be a strategy in itself that allows one to transcend situations of limitation to situations of construction.

In short, the analysis carried out in this section is based on the concept practices of subjectification that Foucault used to refer to every discourse (practice) that is both a subject and an object, revaluing the experience that is developed through them (subjective practices). Thus, it could be said that the women who participated in this study are involved in practices of subjectification (bonds with the partner), and therefore, a variation in them will have an effect on the formation or transformation of the practices that empower them and that lead them to freedom. In this way, when a new practice (such as love or violence) is initiated, it implicitly has a bonding that promotes it, and therefore the field of experience is expanded to generate transformations, creating new forms of subjectification that direct individuals towards crime or towards withdrawal.

As has been seen so far, in their narratives the women built bonds with their partners as powerful agents mobilizing them towards crime, and in other cases towards withdrawal. In this mobilizing condition, the concept of bonds previously defined by [Aristizábal and Cubells \(2017\)](#) arises, here referred to as “bonds with partner”, marked by a strong emotional charge, and in turn that mobilizes the production of positive or negative actions; from the bonds with partner subjectivity emerges. This analysis defends the premise that women were imprisoned before entering prison, through bonds that encapsulated them as they were regulated by social norms and gender mandates and the expectations they generate.

I was very foolish . . . I thought that with him I had touched the sky and at that moment I did not think of anything else, I did not think what I was doing. I have always been very impulsive and practically I have done what I wanted with my life, but when one does not think and is carried away by what the other says, then this happens, I ended up doing everything that he wanted ( . . . ) I am not a thief and I have never been, I do not know why I let myself go . . . maybe for love . . . (UR (P2) 16).

Original version:

Fui muy tonta . . . Creí que con él había encontrado el cielo y en ese momento no pensé en nada más, no pensaba bien lo que estaba haciendo. Yo siempre he sido muy impulsiva y prácticamente he hecho lo que he querido con mi vida, pero cuando uno no piensa y se deja llevar por lo que diga el otro, entonces pasa esto, terminé haciendo todo lo que él quiso ( . . . ) Yo no soy ladrona y nunca lo he sido, no se porque me dejé llevar . . . tal vez por amor . . . (UR(P2)16).

In this fragment, the interviewed woman does not identify herself as a thief, even though she committed robberies, since she identifies this action as a response to a mistreating relationship in which she is held by love, a “mistake that I committed for a man”. It is clear that in the bond with the partner there are “manipulations” that are recognized as dangerous, because instead of empowering, they anchor and imprison women.

### 3.2. Gender Violence

Violence is a practice that is learned throughout life ([Jiménez Bautista 2011](#)), and in turn it is conditioned by the environment, social, and cultural context in which it develops. This became visible in all the life stories of the interviewees, especially in their relationships. Some of them stated at the outset that they had never been raped, but violence was evident in their narratives; in some cases, it was much more visible than in others, but to some extent all of them had experienced situations of

violence throughout their lives. The analysis of the thematic contents allowed us to find three types of gender violence: direct, structural, and symbolic.

### 3.2.1. Direct Violence

Direct violence is generated by the aggressor himself, and in this case there were three subcategories: physical abuse, psychological abuse, and sexual abuse. For the women, it seemed that there was a chain of violence that had begun in childhood and continued to spread throughout their lives, with their partners and even strangers.

Most women described experiences of physical abuse:

At the age of 20 I went with a man who is the father of my daughters, but not in love, but to leave the house. I thought it was just cooking and doing the home chores that my mother did, but unfortunately I lasted 25 years with him . . . it was a physical abuse from him all the time, I endured it because of my daughters, because they were very small . . . but then I got bored and bored and bored, until . . . I endured everything, everything, until I could not anymore. I exploded, and I could not anymore. It was a very great sadness (crying) (CO (L6) 08).

A man who, since I married him, there were beatings, insults, maltreatment, infidelity, abandonment . . . I was the one who worked to support him. He humiliated me so bad that even he denied me food! This is how my life went, from blows . . . so many things . . . hunger! Miseries! Humiliations! (CO (P6) 02).

Original version:

A los 20 años me fui con un señor que es el papa de mis hijas, pero no enamorada, sino por irme de la casa; yo pensaba que sólo se trataba de cocinar y hacer los deberes de la casa que mi mamá hacía, pero desafortunadamente dure como 25 años con él . . . eso fue un maltrato físico de parte de él a cada rato, que me aguanté por mis hijas, porque estaban muy pequeñas . . . , pero después me fui aburriendo y aburriendo y aburriendo, hasta que . . . me le aguante todo, todo, hasta que ya no pude más; ya me exploté y ya no pude más. Fue una tristeza muy grande (llanto) (CO(L6)08).

Un hombre que desde que yo me casé con el, fueron golpes, insultos, malos tratos, infidelidades, abandonos . . . Yo era la que trabajaba para mantenerlo, ¡me humillaba tan feo, que hasta la comida me la negaba! Así trascurrió mi vida, de golpes . . . tantas cosas . . . ¡Hambres! ¡Miseries! ¡Humillaciones! (CO(P6)02).

Clearly, in this example, a woman is mistreated by her partner, but here gender violence is fundamental, since from her childhood she observed how her mother had to endure the same treatment from her father, simply because it was assumed that, to be a good mother, wife, and daughter, women had to endure this treatment. She had on her side the weight of the gender violence that demanded of her to have to endure any type of mistreatment so as to be considered a heroine who, for the sake of her children, voluntarily accepts the sacrifice.

Sexual Abuse:

Sometimes these memories come, when he put his penis in my mouth when I was a child . . . ( . . . ) and then my brothers wanted to continue doing the same with me . . . and himself (ES (L1) 02).

If I did not want to, then I had to want to anyway (UR (P2) 14).

Original version:



A veces vienen esos recuerdos, cuando el me metía su pene a la boca cuando yo era niña ... ( ... ) y después mis hermanos quisieron seguir haciendo lo mismo conmigo ... y él (ES(L1)02).

Si yo no quería, pues tenía que querer de todos modos (UR(P2) 14).

Most women did not report sexual abuse from their partners because they felt that was part of their responsibilities as a wife or partner. However, deepening in their narratives, they stated that they felt obliged to be available as a sexual object whenever their partners wanted to; it is evident that direct violence is intersected here with structural violence, where their practices are subjected to social norms that indicate that being good wives means to be always available.

Others spoke of psychological abuse:

Whenever he wanted, he was sleeping at home, and when he did not want to, he would not be coming ... If I complained, at once he would start to yell at me and treat me in a bad way ... He never hit me, but he did say horrible things, like that I was of no use (ME (P3) 16).

Original version:

Él cuando quería, iba dormir a la casa y, cuando no, no ... Si yo le hacía algún reclamo entonces de una comenzaba a gritarme y a tratarme feo ( ... ) El nunca me pegaba, pero si me decía cosas horribles, como que yo no servía para nada (ME(P3)16).

This type of relationship limited her ability to express opinions, to act, and even to feel. [Toledo-Jofré \(2012\)](#) would call her a subject of social suffering, where subjectivity bears the marks of social domination, the subject is subject to dependence and control, and finally she is a victim of the social structure ([Franssen 1997](#)). As pointed out by other authors, gender violence has negatively impacted the identity of women and their social well-being, because they are women ([Long 2009](#); [Human Rights Watch 2008](#); [Higonnet 2007](#)).

A minority expressed that they had not experienced violence, but just among this minority other violent practices were observed, such as abandonment or making them an accomplice of crime and abusive control on their lives.

No, my parents never hit me, nor did I see them treat each other badly, what's more, they were never at home, they always left me with the nanny ... neither did my partner, he treated me very well ... , mmm ... I just did not like it when he made me travel with him to distract the police, as if we were a family going for a walk and carrying that (drug) in the car (CO (P6) 22).

Original version:

No, mis padres nunca me pegaron, ni tampoco los vi tratarse mal entre ellos, es más, ellos nunca estaban en casa, siempre me dejaban con la nana ... tampoco mi pareja, el me trataba muy bien ... , mmm ... sólo que no me gustaba cuando me hacía viajar con él para despistar a la policía, como si fuéramos una familia que va de paseo y llevar de eso (droga) en el carro (CO(P6)22).

In general, women referred to these violent practices as part of their daily lives, to the point of naturalizing them. Many of them experienced these events as cycles that tended to be repeated in different environments, moving from the violent family cycle, to the violent school cycle, then to the violent cycle with their partners or at work, among others. These findings confirm what [Aristizábal et al. \(2015\)](#) wrote, saying that although there are better opportunities for women in the public space, the persistence of gender inequality in the private space is clear. We also confirm the findings of [González et al. \(2016\)](#), [Bodelón and Aedo \(2015\)](#), [Yagüe \(2007\)](#), and [Almeda \(2003\)](#): gender violence, the product of a patriarchal society, is generally manifested in the majority of women who have reached prison; and, in particular, in all the women interviewed in our study.

### 3.2.2. Structural Violence

Unlike direct violence, there is structural violence that is organized from the system—the structure. [Aristizábal and Cubells \(2017\)](#) affirmed that many criminal actions are influenced by extreme situations of structural violence, which, according to the findings of this study, continue to influence life behind bars, fueling the direct violence practiced by the condemned, as well as the gender violence experienced by them. Structural violence is the macro level of the system; this represents the conceptions of patriarchy that condition society and thereby enable different forms of transgression.

I had to be beautiful for him . . . he demanded it from me . . . I had to take care of myself and be well dressed because otherwise, mmm, he would not forgive me . . . And then I got fatter and that was terrible (ES (P1) 10).

Original version:

Yo tenía que estar guapa para él . . . él me lo exigía . . . Tenía que cuidarme y andar bien vestida porque, de lo contrario, mmm, no me lo perdonaba ( . . . ) Ya después me engordé y eso fue terrible (ES(P1)10).

The canon of women's beauty is structural, the aesthetic demands that have been imposed since childhood become more demanding ([Ventura 2000](#)). To be accepted and desired, women have to overcome their own nature to reach the nature of the structure. Regardless of whether the woman has or does not have the means to live up to the canon, she must strive to achieve it in order not to be excluded or rejected. This is a type of violence that, as evidenced in the previous story, is naturalized from their homes, to the point that they consider their obligation to be always beautiful for others (not even for themselves).

I had to stay at home, he would not let me out, he said that if I left then who would care for the kids, take care of the *milpa* and cook the *tortillas*? ( . . . ) If he came and did not have his food ready, then a big problem was set up; but, if everything was right, he would bring us something (ES (P3) 05).

Original version:

Yo tenía que quedarme en casa; él no me permitía salir; él decía que, si yo me salía, entonces ¿quien iba a cuidar los chamacos, cuidar la milpa y hacer las tortillas? ( . . . ) Si él llegaba y no tenía su comida lista, entonces se armaba un problema bien grande; pero, si todo estaba bien, él nos llevaba alguna cosa (ES(P3)05).

Another type of structural violence is the enforcement of traditional household duties (cleaning, cooking food, tidying up, among others); chores that, as manifested in the story, even if they could be shared by men, were attributed as the exclusive obligation of women. This type of structural violence is considered part of an immovable system, and therefore must be fulfilled. It is also evident that this type of violence has a set of benefits and deprivations that in one way or another keep the structure firm: "but if everything was right, he would bring us something."

### 3.2.3. Symbolic Violence

As for symbolic violence, it is imperceptible and hidden for the oppressed who reproduce it as their own; the power of domination is assumed over others naturally in culture, and therefore it is accepted and hard to identify. At a micro level, structural violence is found in the interactions where meanings are configured. According to [Gil Rodríguez and Lloret \(2007\)](#), this type of violence is linked to the construction of gender identities, and therefore, anyone who does not follow gender norms and social imperatives is susceptible to suffer it. This type of violence is an "invisible process that is

impregnated in bodies, emotions, desires, and behaviors, and cannot be disconnected from how we constitute ourselves as men and women" (Gil Rodríguez and Lloret 2007, p. 20). The women in our study assumed as a natural norm the oppression of symbolic violence, as well as the roles assigned to men and women.

He told me that I was his only help, his only love, that if I did not help him, then who would help him? ( . . . ) I believed him . . . but after they caught me, he never called me again and they told me that he is now with another woman (CO (P4) 10).

Original version:

El me decía que yo era su única ayuda, su único amor, que, si yo no lo ayudaba, ¿entonces quien lo iba a ayudar? ( . . . ) Yo le creí . . . , pero después que me cogieron presa el nunca más me volvió a llamar y ya me contaron que está con otra (CO(P4)10).

In these sentences, it is clear that the woman assumes the role assigned to women as caregivers, but she is not reciprocated when she needs help, so that if she does not meet the expectations of a patriarchal society, then she is thrown out from the relationship. The interesting thing is that women enter this game of powers and continue to replicate those shared meanings, even when they go against them. This type of violence is imperceptible; it is found in interactions where they are negotiating meanings. Finally, there are aggressive practices that are naturalized and are concealed in a range of powers granted by the same environment (Bourdieu 2007; Jiménez Bautista and Aguilar 2013).

Violence is a social practice that is not exclusive to a specific environment, and that takes its force in the naturalization of its effects. For this study, violence will be identified as any type of activity, action, discourse, or social element used under the cover of bonding that undermines the integrity of women. In this work, there was evidence of violence in the daily lives of women who committed crimes, which they did not even recognize as such; it is here that the distinction between being a victim or being delinquent became imperceptible.

In a patriarchal society, women are expected to take care of their children. However, this is not expected of men and they will be not badly looked at if they don't, because it is an obligation that society has imposed exclusively on women. Generating an expectation of women is a type of violence. When the woman is framed within a role that demands not only to be responsible for her own happiness, but moreover, to be responsible for the happiness of others, from this moment on this is a form of violence, and with this violence a level of high demands on women is enclosed, and this constantly reinforces her frustration at not being what society expects of her.

As mentioned by Palma (2011), women carry an enormous weight on their shoulders, answering the traditional mandate of being mothers and good wives, not only for their family but for the whole community. "These women, in addition to caring for their family, must care for the neighbor, they must take care of the neighbor of the neighbor, and they must take care of the community. It is part of the obligations of femininity; it is for this same reason that they are also judged" (Palma 2011, p. 17).

The interconnection between the affective bonds of partners, mandates of gender, and gender violence in all forms can be an influential factor in the commission of a crime. This confluence highlights the vulnerability of women who have established weak, absent, and oppressive ties with their partners and who are victims of direct, structural, or symbolic violence in a context of inequality, lack of opportunity, and poverty. Further, as Cubells and Calsamiglia state, the criminal justice system presupposes no agency of women and it creates perverse effects. In order to extricate oneself from a situation of gender violence in a marriage or partnership, it is necessary that the woman has agency. If the solution to gender violence is enacted in a system that reproduces the same power relations found in the relationship, then the very same negation of agency that the woman experiences from her partner, or former partner, occurs. The attempt to solve the problem with the same logic, thus, reproduces the problem, and is often bound to fail (Cubells and Calsamiglia 2018).

#### 4. Conclusions

The main contribution of this study is the introduction of women's voices. The life stories of these women allow us to identify and understand the facilitating factors of female crime and the protective factors that lead to withdrawal. In this way, we generate situated knowledge—in the sense proposed by Haraway (1988)—about the oppressions that women experience for different reasons (gender, race, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, etc.) and their relationship with crime, in four different countries: Spain, Uruguay, Mexico, and Colombia.

Through this study, 94 women presented themselves as they are perceived, not as the researchers perceived them or as the theory defines them, but each one has constructed herself throughout their stories in a dynamic, symbolic, and constant interaction with society. They explain how their relationships with their partners have had a transcendental effect on the commission of the crime. Here, each one had the opportunity to express through their stories that the bonds with their partners have mostly been moved through violence, and that in one way or another led them towards crime. This type of relationship is framed within the parameters of a patriarchal society.

First, the thematic content analysis showed that the interviewed women in the context of the prison were already “incarcerated” before entering prison as victims of gender violence, generally promoted by their partners. We use the concept “incarcerated” (without referring to any particular institution) as a symbolic place of confinement, where the imprisoned lose their sense of autonomy and control over their lives. In this way, violence makes them vulnerable, reduces their options, and limits them in freely making their decisions.

They end up in jail from escaping a relationship of mistreatment, and in this flight, they turn to crime. We conclude that there is a clear relationship between being a victim and being a delinquent (delinquent, as they are categorized by the system), and that once they enter jail, only the delinquent category is taken into account.

The experiences reported, the subjectivity opinions expressed, and the literature consulted highlight how a certain social construct of what it means to be a woman in our patriarchal society bonds them to the care of others. A questioning of the differences in the construction of genders oriented to the production of new egalitarian subjectivities would suppose an emancipatory change in the social practices that would bring improvements to the explanatory factors of delinquency. This study brings a proposal for education with a gender perspective. What would happen if the responsibility of care was not just for women? What would have happened if men had been assigned early responsibilities to care for the other, to be in solidarity with the pain of others, to share the multiple social burdens of the feminine gender? Would there be any change in the criminal behavior of men? Would global crime diminish?

The findings lead us to consider that we are dealing with a society of care, where, paradoxically, the capitalist economic model strengthens selfishness and individual initiative to the detriment of community and society, weakening ties of affection and family. The women we interviewed are victims of the society we have; they are not ill, nor are they different from us. They are only victims of the unfavorable circumstances that they have had to live in, where a way to survive is by executing criminal actions. Seeing these problems beyond jail or punishment is an important step forward to understanding it more broadly.

What is the key so that women do not commit crimes? In the first instance, we need not only to see women but also society from a gender perspective, realizing that there are practices throughout the life of each woman that lead them to commit a crime. As noted above, violence by their partners, parents or caregivers, and society leads them to crime. When this holistic understanding is taken into account, we realize that women are no longer to be considered only as victims, and it is simply a question of creating the conditions of possibility for the development of new identity bonds, which link them to positive actions and that empower them, so that from their new subjectivity, they can say no.

Despite the high number of interviews in such a hermetic context as penitentiary institutions and the different profiles of the interviewees (nationality, social background, age, institution where they were imprisoned), the results can't be generalized because the research design is based on "Situated Knowledge" (Haraway 1988).

The results of this study contribute to the understanding of female delinquency, and therefore, it is useful for the design and development of intervention policies aimed at the prevention of crime. In this sense, social policies aimed at promoting an egalitarian, inclusive society with effective gender violence prevention programs contribute to the prevention of crime. Likewise, promoting protective factors of crime, such as the ethics of care not only for women, would probably contribute to reducing male crime. This last point arises as a research question that we will try to answer in future studies.

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