

**Social Deterioration and Participation in Drug Trafficking in the State of Sonora****Deterioro social y participación en el tráfico de drogas en el estado de Sonora**Francisco Manuel Piña Osuna<sup>1</sup> and Juan Poom Medina<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

This paper draws upon social theories that outline different contextual factors in law-breaking to explore the association between certain aspects of social deterioration in a sample of individuals and their participation in drug trafficking, by using a quantitative methodology and a new database obtained from the records of 371 inmates convicted of drug crimes in the state of Sonora (Mexico). The findings show that having a criminal record, using illegal drugs, poverty, educational lag, family disintegration, and residence in the state influence participation in drug trafficking. This analysis contributes to a discussion of the factors that facilitate the spread of crime in northern Mexico and notes that a deterioration in social conditions is a crucial factor in choosing to engage in criminal activity.

*Keywords:* 1. drug trafficking, 2. social deterioration, 3. prisoners, 4. Sonora, 5. northern Mexico.

## RESUMEN

En este artículo se analiza la existencia de una asociación entre algunas condiciones del deterioro social de una muestra de individuos y su participación dentro del tráfico de drogas, partiendo de teorías sociales que señalan distintos factores del contexto detrás de la trasgresión de la ley. Por medio de una metodología cuantitativa y una nueva base de datos que surge del estudio de 371 expedientes de personas presas por delitos de drogas en el estado de Sonora, México, los hallazgos muestran que antecedentes penales, consumo de drogas, condición de pobreza, rezago educativo, desintegración familiar y residencia en dicho estado influyen en la participación en actividades de tráfico de drogas. Este análisis contribuye a la discusión sobre algunos de los elementos que facilitan la reproducción de la delincuencia en el norte de México y señala que el deterioro de las condiciones sociales son elementos cruciales en la adhesión a actividades delictivas.

*Palabras clave:* 1. tráfico de drogas, 2. deterioro social, 3. reclusos, 4. Sonora, 5. norte de México.

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## INTRODUCTION

Drug trafficking activities have experienced significant growth, affecting the rule of law in Latin America as a result of their profound impact on society (Centro de Investigación para el Desarrollo A. C., 2009, p. 6; Latin American School of Social Sciences [FLACSO], 2007, p. 11; Organization of American States, 2008, p. 12). In Mexico, drug trafficking is understood to mean “any activity aimed at commercializing drugs considered illegal by the General Health Law in Mexico” (Pérez, 2012, p. 3)<sup>3</sup>. This definition also considers drug trafficking to be a process that begins with the growing or procurement of precursors, continues with the processing and manufacturing of the final product, and concludes with its sale and distribution. The concept also acknowledges that trafficking is usually performed by various groups that specialize in certain stages of the sales chain (Pérez, 2012).

Figures provided by Ríos and Sabet show that, by 2008, drug trafficking had become the fifth largest source of employment in the industrial sector in Mexico, with around 468,000 people engaged in drug trafficking in some way – most in planting, cultivation, production, and protection (Ríos & Sabet, 2008, p. 10, 17).

On the other hand, statistics from the National Public Security System also show a systematic increase in drug trafficking-related crime in Mexico; there were between 20,000 and 30,000 crimes recorded from 2000 to 2006, but in 2007 this figure shot up to over 80,000 (Federal Government, 2011). A study by Resa (2014) based on criminal justice data in Mexico reported that the number of people convicted for drug trafficking-related crimes doubled in ten years, as there were 10,000 convicts in 2003, and by 2012 they numbered over 20,000.

Sonora<sup>4</sup> is a case in point within this context of escalating drug trafficking activity, as in the space of ten years it has come to rank third in drug trafficking-related crimes, with the second highest rate of convicts (Resa, 2014, p. 37). For example, the municipality of Benjamín Hill in Sonora, located 162 kilometers south of the U.S. border, exhibits the highest proportion of residents convicted for drug trafficking-related crimes (12.34 per 1,000 citizens). In addition, a further six of the ten municipalities with the highest rate of convicts in Mexico for such crimes are in Sonora<sup>5</sup> (National Institute of Statistics and Geography [INEGI], 2014). This worsened in 2013 and 2014, when Sonora had the second highest level of drug trafficking-related crime of all states in the country (Office of the Attorney General of the Republic [PGR], 2015).

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<sup>3</sup> The General Health Law for the United Mexican States (2007) states which narcotics (Chapter V, Article 234) and psychotropics (Chapter VI, Article 245) are considered illegal. The same criterion will be adopted in this study.

<sup>4</sup> State in northwestern Mexico (coordinates 29°38'46"N 110°52'08"W) with the second largest land area in the country (9.2% of the total area). It comprises 72 municipalities and has a population of over 2,850,000. It borders Chihuahua (to the east), Baja California and the Sea of Cortés (to the west), Sinaloa (to the south), and Arizona and New Mexico (to the north), and is characterized by an extremely hot and mostly desert climate.

<sup>5</sup> General Plutarco Elías Calles, Sáric, Arizpe, Onavas, Naco, and Caborca.

In light of the above, this study draws from an argument from social theory that suggests there are various factors from one's social context that influence the decision to break the law (Durkheim, 1982; Merton, 1938). The key objective is to test some of those contextual factors associated, in theory, with law-breaking through participation in drug trafficking activities in Sonora.

It is acknowledged that engaging in unlawful activity is multifactorial and cannot be explained solely by contextual factors. However, this theoretical perspective – which analyzes the effect of context on human actions – was chosen as a first step in contributing to the study of the drug trafficking phenomenon. Evidence on the kind of contextual factors that influence the decision to engage in drug trafficking is presented to support this argument, based on a new database constructed by reviewing and analyzing the prison records of 371 inmates serving sentences at the Social Reinsertion Center 1 (Cereso 1) in the city of Hermosillo, in Sonora.

This study is divided into six parts: the first presents theoretical approaches regarding the impact of social conditions on law-breaking behavior; the second reviews previous literature on the topic; the third develops the hypotheses that draw on these theoretical arguments; the fourth describes the sample, variables, and data; the fifth presents and discusses the findings; and the sixth presents the main conclusions.

## THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXT ON LAW-BREAKING BEHAVIOR

Rule-breaking behavior influenced by social structure is associated with the drug trafficking phenomenon. Angenent and De Man (1996, p. 2) report that law-breaking is seen, first and foremost, as an expression of deviant behavior, understood as any action performed by an individual that departs from conventional norms or standards and is considered undesirable and unacceptable by the society in which the individual acts. Vasallo Barrueta (2001, p. 3) stresses that the spectrum of deviant behavior is broad and includes criminal behavior, in which individuals display an attitude that violates the legal limits dictated by society. The author notes that the scope of deviant behavior encompasses all socially-dictated norms, whereas criminal behavior – like drug trafficking – is an act specifically characterized by the fact that it violates legislation. Social theory has put forward proposals explaining transgressive behavior, particularly violations of law. These theoretical approaches are developed below.

### *Durkheim's concept of anomie*

Emile Durkheim (1998, p. 8-11) sought to explain the importance of society in norm transgression through the concept of anomie. The author suggests that society is a set of feelings, ideas, beliefs, and values constructed by the community, whose main roles are to integrate the individuals it encompasses and regulate its members' behavior by establishing norms. In the same way, the author believes that if society fulfills these roles properly, both society and individuals will enjoy a scenario of stability with the necessary elements to achieve full

individual and collective development. On the other hand, if the social structure is unable to integrate its members or regulate their actions, it lapses into a situation of anomie. This has very negative implications, such as the emergence of behavior outside of norms (Durkheim, 1998).

The French sociologist also argues that social integration and regulation are achieved through bonds between members of society who seek to create a “collective consciousness” (Durkheim, 1982, p. 433) based on shared beliefs and practices among members, in which any deviation is seen as a threat to society and any disruption of norms is punished by members of society. Although this punishment acts as a form of control over individuals’ actions, Durkheim asserts that modern society has undergone profound changes in the role played by individuals, science, religion, tradition, and above all, economically. These aspects have become dissociated to the point of compromising the bonds traditionally established to organize and bind members of society. This condition is what Durkheim (1998, p.13) calls *anomie*, and weakens the forms of control used to subdue individuals; the limits of individual acts become ambiguous, blurring the lines between good and bad, and legal and illegal. In this context of ambiguity, individuals may violate norms, as they do not clearly understand the limits for their behavior.

Durkheim (1982) believes that the weakening of the controls imposed by society is the crucial element that enables norm transgression. However, this disinhibition is not only the result of the individual becoming aware of this weakening of norms; rather, the transgression is also explained by a feeling of frustration and unease with respect to one’s own social conditions. It is on this basis that the social disadvantages experienced by certain members of the community constitute a line of research that was later revisited by some of Durkheim’s readers.

#### *Social anomie and its effect on engaging in crime*

Robert K. Merton (1995, p. 138) expands on the concept of anomie proposed by Durkheim and transposes it into the domain of law-breaking. For him, modern culture has produced a disruption of social norms, in which there exists a prevailing mismatch between the objectives that society considers acceptable and the legitimate means to access these objectives. He believes that socioeconomic variables play a fundamental role, as when they are compromised, individuals tend to direct their action toward less accepted lifestyles, such as crime. Furthermore, the author states that society has two major sociocultural elements associated with life goals: on the one hand, aspirational elements “that are worth striving for”; and, on the other, permissible and socially acceptable ways to achieve these goals (Merton, 1938, p. 673).

Merton (1938, p. 674) cautions that all social agents employ socially permissible methods during the process toward achieving social mobility, such as employment, fair competition, education, and support from family and institutions, yet it is these very social structures that exert pressure on people to avoid conformism as they pursue socioeconomic progress. As a result, those in such conditions are more likely to exhibit deviant behavior to achieve their ends.

Deviant behavior is the product of a clash between socioculturally imposed aspirations and the means to achieve them. This disjunction means that, in some segments of society, value is

placed on the desired results and not on the means by which success is achieved (Merton, 1995, p. 216). This pursuit of success, irrespective of the legality of the means used to achieve it, creates the conditions for unlawful processes to become ways to obtain resources, and so deviant behavior becomes a substitute for legitimate means to fulfill goals.

In the face of social pressure to be successful, Merton (1995) believes that, in addition to the various obstacles individuals encounter, deviant manifestations that tend to violate law are the product of a social marginalization process in which public and social institutions have abandoned the most vulnerable groups. This is consistent with transgressors' inability to achieve the goals required by society and social institutions. This set of circumstances of marginalization and adversity is indicative of a situation of social anomie in which crime represents a path to the success that society requires and individuals are unable to achieve legitimately. In this sense, engaging in drug trafficking can be understood as the result of an inability to obtain the resources required by one's social context. This difficulty is associated with a deterioration of the subject's social conditions and, consequently, drug trafficking constitutes a means to overcome these dire circumstances. Factors such as a lack of access to a high level of education, the lack of sufficiently well-paid employment, problems with family relationships, and housing instability are part of this context and represent incentives to consider acts like crime as a means to overcome social anomie.

### *The social control theory of crime*

Travis Hirschi's theory is a position that makes it possible to explain crime and the role of society in transgressive behavior. Hirschi (2003, p. 11) agrees with Durkheim and Merton's reasoning by virtue of the fact that, in the manifestation of criminal activity, there is a rupture between the perpetrator and the society in which he or she acts. Hirschi's proposal echoes Merton's concept of anomie in that a violation of social norms implies a course of action that runs contrary to the wishes and expectations of society with respect to its members. If individuals believe they are excluded from these social expectations, they will not submit to social norms either, which drives them to deviate from these norms.

Hirschi explains how certain social elements that inhibit law-breaking act, but not the factors that contribute to law-breaking. Any member of society may have the freedom or feel the temptation to commit crime, and the author goes as far as to consider law-breaking normal and characteristic of all cultures and societies. However, just as there is the freedom to violate the law, attempts are also made to impose social elements to prevent individuals from reoffending. In this sense, Hirschi reverses the perspective in his approach to law-breaking, as he centers his analysis on the elements that inhibit crime rather than driving factors.

According to Hirschi, the social elements responsible for inhibiting criminal behavior include *social relations*; strong bonds between individuals promote greater conformity with the elements provided by the social system and the likelihood of committing crime is reduced. Moreover, due to the *opportunity structure*, it is the most advantaged members of society who

will be able to satisfy their needs through legitimate means. As for *involvement*, Hirschi believes that heavy involvement in legal activities inhibits people from violating norms. Lastly, *belief* in social norms plays a fundamental role in inhibiting delinquency, as individuals who abide by and foster respect for the moral value systems of the social structure will be less likely to resort to criminal acts as a course of action. By defining the social elements that control delinquency, Hirschi suggests that one's detachment from conventional structures translates into inconformity with the social system and the development of a feeling of frustration. In that state, it becomes difficult to inhibit criminal behavior.

In sum, while Durkheim and Merton believe law-breaking is the result of the social structure's inability to provide individuals with the right conditions to satisfy their needs, Hirschi's social control theory of crime suggests that so long as individuals remain distanced from conventional structures and modes of action, it is difficult to inhibit delinquent behavior and it is possible that they will break the law. The author's notion of social control of crime contributes the idea that when one's interactions remain distanced from social structures like family, work or education, transgression is more likely given that the function of these institutions is to control individual behavior. In this sense, the key questions in this study are "Which factors of social deterioration are associated with engaging in drug trafficking activities?" and "Which aspects of an individual's life trajectory are associated with engaging in drug trafficking activities?"

## PREVIOUS STUDIES ON PARTICIPATION IN DRUG TRAFFICKING

Work on transgressive behavior reveals a significant relationship between contextual aspects and criminal behavior, which includes drug-related crimes. Valenzuela and Larroulet (2010) address the phenomenon from a psychological perspective and highlight the strong association between using drugs and committing crime. Salazar, Torres, Reynaldos, Figueroa, and Valencia (2009) explore the subject's family and economic conditions and identify certain living conditions in adolescents charged with committing drug-related crime and theft. Their work found that most subjects in their study sample lived with both parents and one in three young people had work experience, leading the authors to discuss the hypothesis of family and economic deterioration as a precursor to crime. Reyes Santos (2012), on the other hand, concludes that a lack of interest in education results in young people distancing themselves from the classroom at an ever earlier age, increasing the likelihood of trading education for criminal activity.

The socioeconomic context has been deemed a crucial factor in young people's entry into crime. In this sense, Coubès and Silva (2012) highlight a deterioration in working conditions, and Boville Luca de Tena (2000) develops the idea that drug trafficking is linked to conditions of extreme poverty; as a result, such activities become a worthwhile option to meet communities' economic needs.

In addition, the family nucleus is another key factor in an individual's decision to choose crime as a course of action. In this respect, López Estrada (2012) confirms the hypothesis that

abnormal relationships, involving estrangement or abandonment between parents and children, increase exposure to violent behavior and play a part in young people's decision to respond with criminal acts. Regarding the conjectures on the effect of the residential environment on these actions, studies such as López Estrada (2012) and González Ramírez (2012) suggest that the high demand for space and public services sets the stage for social discontent, which is expressed through conflict and violence between inhabitants. Furthermore, there are spaces where legal activities are precursors to illegal ones (casinos, bars, dance halls, prostitution, etc.) – in other words, there are residential areas that encourage activities associated with crime.

Previous research has also made efforts to isolate and study the effect of various media-related elements on the likelihood of considering drug trafficking as a lifestyle choice. On the one hand, the evolution of drug trafficking is studied as a sociocultural phenomenon, in which traffickers are acknowledged and accepted as an objective entity, well disseminated in society and considered a formal occupation in some sectors (Ovalle, 2010, p. 93). Similarly, Campbell (2007, p. 51) explains that the spread of the drug economy, the cultural exchange on the U.S.-Mexico border, and the stigma attached to traffickers of illegal substances, this figure has gradually become part of everyday life. The presence of drug trafficking has reflected itself in people's lifestyles, clothes, jewelry, luxury cars, and even home design. The author notes that this phenomenon is linked to the perceptions of those who live in poverty, for whom drug trafficking is a way to overcome deficiencies.

Arredondo (2012) studies the background of people involved in these activities and stresses that context limitations may influence individuals' aspirations. Santamaría (2012, p.7), on the other hand, considers gender differences and reports that women are motivated to engage in drug trafficking not just out of a longing for power, but as a result of their critical social condition as single mothers working in the service sector. The author adds that these women were born within a network of family members or friends involved in drug trafficking and see in it an escape route from their diminished social condition.

### *Hypothesis*

In order to develop the hypotheses on contextual factors and participation in drug trafficking, this study took into account the argumentative perspectives described in the first section, revisiting the idea that a deterioration in social conditions and weakening of forms of crime control cause individuals to break the rules by which they were originally bound – anomie – and turn to lifestyles that violate these norms and involve drug trafficking activities.

Two hypotheses are put forward:

H1: When social deterioration is clearly shown by a context in which individuals are unable to find the conditions to integrate and bond socially within the social structure, the likelihood of engaging in drug trafficking activities is increased.

H2: When there is little social control of crime, reflected in individual lifestyles that depart from social norms and are part of a context that facilitates delinquency, the likelihood of engaging in drug trafficking activities is increased.

### METHODOLOGY, SAMPLE, AND VARIABLES

The information is taken from 371 inmate records from Cereso 1 in Hermosillo, Sonora, with which a new database was constructed. The dependent variable for all models was participation in drug trafficking. However, subsamples were used in the models, which test the first hypothesis based on four selection variables that contextualize worsening social situations: state of poverty, educational lag, living in an urban area, and criminality in the place of residence. Sample sizes are included in each model.

Backward logistic models were used in the SPSS 18 statistical package to test the relationship between the independent variables and participation in drug trafficking. This method uses progressive elimination; variables are excluded sequentially and the starting point is a saturated model with all variables believed to contribute to explaining the dependent variable, with the least significant predictor variables progressively eliminated to seek a better fit (Jovell, 1995, p. 65). [Table 1](#) summarizes the characteristics of the total sample.

Table 1. Characteristics of the total sample (N=371)

<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Percentage of the population studied</b>
Sex	Male: 89.9; female: 10.1
Age	Between 20 and 35 years old: 50.6
Type of drug-related crime	Simple possession: 28.8; transportation: 21.6; small-scale drug dealing: 19.1; possession with intent to sell: 17.5; sale: 1.1; aiding and abetting: 1.1; supplying: 0.8; production/preparation: 0.8
Substance involved in the crime	Methamphetamine: 43.1; marijuana: 42.3; heroin: 4.9; cocaine: 2.7; medications/psychotropics: 4; not applicable: 2.2; no data: 0.5
Length of sentence	1 year or less: 40.2; 1 to 3 years: 5.1; 3 to 5 years: 17.3; 5 to 7 years: 3.5; 8 to 10 years: 32.6; 10 years or more: 1.3
Birth	Sonora: 71.7; other states: 28.3
Residence	Sonora: 81.7; other states: 18.3
Level of education	Unschooling: 3; did not complete elementary school: 9.2; completed elementary school: 15.9; did not complete middle school: 12.9; completed middle school: 39.9; did not complete high school: 8.4; completed high school: 7.5; higher education: 3.2



Occupation	Construction: 29.4; day laborer: 22.4; truck driver: 7.3; mechanic: 7; unemployed: 7; trading: 6.5; general employee: 5.7; farming: 3.2; industrial operator: 3; homemaker: 2.4; service sector: 2.2; domestic labor: 1.6; peddling: 0.5; public servant: 0.5; technician: 0.5; education worker: 0.3; professional worker: 0.3
Monthly salary	5,000 pesos or less: 20.8; from 5,001 to 10,000 pesos: 8.1; from 10,001 to 15,000 pesos: 2.7; 15,001 pesos or more: 1.3; no fixed salary: 28; no data: 29.4
Type of area	Urban: 76.5; semi-urban: 7.5; rural: 15.6; no data: 0.3
Crime in the area	Yes: 33.2; no: 46.6; no data: 20.2
Functional family	Yes: 96.3; no: 3.7
Whole family	Yes: 50.9; no: 49.1
History of drug use	Yes: 64.7; no: 29.1; no data: 6.2
Criminal record	Yes: 56.9; no: 43.1

Source: Own work.

Tables 2 and 3 show the set of variables used in the study. A definition is provided for each variable based on specific sources, including the Federal Criminal Code, government offices associated with the prison system and various academic studies.

Table 2. Definition of the dependent variable used in the study

Dependent variable	Definition
Participation in drug trafficking activities	Any person who produces, transports, traffics, trades, supplies whether for payment or otherwise, or prescribes any illegal drug without the corresponding authorization stipulated in the General Health Law. Any person who introduces into or takes out of the country any narcotic included in the General Health Law, even momentarily or when such narcotics are in transit, and any person who provides financial or any other resources for or in any way collaborates in the funding, oversight or aiding and abetting in the commission of any of the aforementioned drug-related crimes.

Source: Federal Criminal Code of the United Mexican States (2009).

Table 3. Definition of the independent variables used in the study

Independent variables	Definition
Residence in Sonora <sup>1</sup>	Persons who, upon entry into trafficking activities, had been living in the state for 12 months or more.

Dysfunctional family <sup>1</sup>	Cases with families of origin in which the roles of parents and children are not well-defined, the hierarchical organization is unclear, there is no authoritative behavior from parents, the boundaries of behavior are blurred and are not respected or upheld, communication is unclear and indirect, and there is no flexibility in behavior management and no engagement to solve internal conflicts.
Broken family <sup>1</sup>	Cases with families of origin in which one member is permanently absent, whether through death, desertion, or absolute estrangement from the family nucleus.
Intrafamily violence <sup>1</sup>	Cases with families of origin in which there were records of physical violence, verbal violence (shouting, insults, humiliation), or neglect (omissions, carelessness, abandonment).
Secondary family	Cases in which the person has started his or her own family.
Urban area <sup>2</sup>	Physical space including a built environment (housing, factories, warehouses, and other buildings), utility infrastructure (drainage system, water pipes, power lines), and a population over 2,500.
Crime in the area of residence <sup>1</sup>	Cases in which there were gangs, brothels, bars, or the perceived sale of arms or drugs in the subject's neighborhood, district or town.
Educational lag <sup>3</sup>	Poor academic performance by persons who have not achieved a level of education considered basic, meaning middle school level in Mexico
Informal employment <sup>4</sup>	Includes the self-employed, workers in informal companies, occasional workers with no steady employment, paid domestic workers, part-time workers, unregistered workers and employers in informal companies.
State of extreme poverty <sup>5</sup>	Individuals from a household with a monthly income equal to or less than 3,355 pesos.
Criminal record <sup>1</sup>	Persons with a record of prosecution, against whom a judgment had been entered, or who had been imprisoned for any crime prior to their detention for drug-related crime.
History of drug use	Cases in which there is a history of use of any illegal drug.
Risk age <sup>6</sup>	Persons aged between 20 and 30 years when detained for drug-related crime.

Source: <sup>1</sup>Directorate of Social Work of the State Prison System of the state of Sonora (n.d.), <sup>2</sup>National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI; n.d.), <sup>3</sup>Narro, Martuscelli, and Bárzana (2012), <sup>4</sup>Cardero, Espinoza, and Straffon (2011), <sup>5</sup>Mexican Association for Human Resources Management (AMEDIRH; 2014), and <sup>6</sup>Resa (2014).

## FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PARTICIPATING IN DRUG-TRAFFICKING ACTIVITIES

This results section presents the multivariate analysis for each hypothesis. [Table 4](#) shows the models and variables for the first hypothesis, which addresses the relationship between social deterioration and participation in drug-trafficking activities. All independent variables proposed in the study were noted in each model, but only those associated with drug trafficking, using the backward method, are given.

Model 1 illustrates the effect of the dependent variables on participation in drug trafficking activities, with living in a state of poverty used as a selection variable on the basis that it is considered an aspect of social deterioration. The findings show a close relationship in three of the independent variables tested. The first indicates that family disintegration is associated with participating in drug-trafficking activities in conditions of poverty. The elucidation of this relationship suggests that the numerous transformations and conflicts within the family structure have a significant effect on law-breaking activity; family disintegration brings about reshuffles within the nucleus that often entail conditions that play a part in opting for a lifestyle of crime (López Estrada, 2012).

The second variable that exhibits a strong association with drug trafficking activities in a context of poverty is intrafamily violence. This association can be discussed intensively as the mechanism explaining this relationship is unclear, but literature has found that intrafamily violence damages personality in a range of different ways, particularly in the case of “child abuse”, as reported by Gidden and Sutton (2013): “studies on prostitutes, young offenders, runaway adolescents, and drug addicts show that a high percentage have a history of childhood abuse” (p. 217). López Estrada (2012) suggests that family nuclei composed of non-family members increase the likelihood of friction in relationships between members. In conditions of economic pressure caused by the poverty experienced by this segment of the sample, this situation escalates interpersonal tensions, which give rise to episodes of intrafamily violence.

A close relationship was also discovered between drug use and participation in drug trafficking-related activities in conditions of poverty. Indeed, this variable is positive and significant in each of the four models used to test the hypothesis in question. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA; 2008, p.1), frequent drug use or addiction directly affects the brain and behavior. Grossman and Murphy (1991) suggest that drug use creates a need in an individual for the substance, and financial pressure to obtain it. This drives users to engage in drug trafficking-related activity, viewing it as a means to continue supplying themselves with and using drugs.

Table 4. H1, social deterioration and participation in drug trafficking

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Dependent variable: *TrafDrog* (participation in drug trafficking)

1= Participation

0= No participation

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<b>Independent variables</b>	<b>Mod 1 (<i>CondPobr</i>) B (ExpB)</b>	<b>Mod 2 (<i>RezagoEdu</i>) B (ExpB)</b>	<b>Mod 3 (<i>ZonUrb</i>) B (ExpB)</b>	<b>Mod 4 (<i>CrimZona</i>) B (ExpB)</b>
<b>Constant</b>	<b>-1.15 (0.314)**</b>	<b>-1.12 (0.324)**</b>	<b>-1.24 (0.287)**</b>	<b>-0.785 (0.456)*</b>
<i>ResSon</i> (residence in Sonora)	N/A	1.07 (2.94)*	1.91 (6.78)**	2.01 (7.47)*
<i>FamNoFun</i> (dysfunctional family)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>FamDesi</i> (broken family)	0.947 (2.57)*	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>ViolFam</i> (intrafamily violence)	2.42 (11.28)**	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>FamSec</i> (secondary family)	N/A	0.993 (2.69)**	N/A	N/A
<i>ZonUrb</i> (living in an urban area)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>CrimZona</i> (crime in the area)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>RezagoEdu</i> (educational lag)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>InfEmpleo</i> (informal employment)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>CondPobr</i> (state of poverty)	N/A	N/A	1.08 (2.95)**	1.58 (4.88)*
<i>AntePenal</i> (criminal record)	N/A	N/A	1.66 (5.27)**	N/A
<i>ConsuDrog</i> (drug use)	2.58 (13.22)**	1.34 (3.83)**	1.63 (5.14)**	2.22 (9.22)*
<i>EdadRiesgo</i> (21 to 30 years old)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
N	74	184	124	48
R <sup>2</sup> Cox/Snell	0.219	0.178	0.33	0.254
R <sup>2</sup> Nagelkerke	0.368	0.238	0.44	0.339

\*Significant at 0.05.

\*\*Significant at 0.01.

Source: Own work.

In model 2, the selection variable used is educational lag as a state of social deterioration. In these conditions, there were three independent variables strongly associated with participation in drug trafficking activities. The first is *residence in Sonora*, which becomes a key factor in our study as living in the state and poor academic performance are closely tied to engaging in drug trafficking activities. This finding runs counter to certain pronouncements by the government of Sonora, particularly during the 2009-2015 term, when it labeled Sonora “the safest border state in Mexico” (SDP noticias, 2013; Uniradio informa, 2011; Uno TV, 2014). Furthermore, educational lag is a public issue that is rarely discussed in the state.

The result of this model is consistent with findings by Resa (2014), which show that the state is one of the fastest growing settings for drug trafficking activity in the country, as one of the top three states with the most crimes in the last 15 years. Furthermore, six of the state's municipalities are among the top ten nationally in terms of density of convicts of drug trafficking-related crime. The association between the *residence in Sonora* variable and participation in drug trafficking activities is also explained by its enabling context as part of Mexico's northern border area, which entails complex migration flows (González, 2012, p. 112), a struggle for employment opportunities (Coubès & Silva, 2012, p. 294), a demand for housing, clashing urban designs (Zavala Mora, 2012, p. 81), and a wider dissemination of cultural components associated with drug trafficking (Astorga, 1995, p. 37; Campbell, 2007, p. 48; Sánchez, 2009, p. 79).

On the other hand, model 2 also shows the relationship between the *secondary family* variable and participation in drug trafficking activities in a context of educational lag. Although there is controversy surrounding the mechanism explaining this relationship, González (2012) notes that a role as a provider increases an individual's vulnerability, leading to a rush to secure resources. These circumstances, combined with a lack of the education required to find a better paid job, come together in a setting where it is ever harder to obtain basic resources, and illegal activity presents itself as a way to provide for a family.

Model 3, which takes living in an urban area as a selection variable, shows a significant positive relationship in four independent variables. *Residence in Sonora* and *drug use* have been discussed in the previous models and, yet again, an association was found between them in this model. The other two independent variables that exhibit a significant positive relationship with participation in drug trafficking activities, when subjects live in a rural area, are *having a criminal record* and *living in a state of poverty*. In this sense, this finding shows that there is a segment of individuals engaged in drug trafficking activities who live in urban areas, but in dire circumstances with life trajectories marked by admission to a correctional center.

In this case, the explanation of an association between participation in drug trafficking activities and having a criminal record when subjects live in an urban area is supported by Foucault (1992), who refutes the hypothesis that prison has been linked to a project to transform individuals: "It is customary to believe that prison was a kind of warehouse for criminals, the disadvantages of which would have manifested themselves, with its use, in such a way that one would say it was necessary to reform prisons and turn them into a tool to transform individuals. This is untrue [...] failure has been immediate" (Foucault, 1992, pp. 97-98).

Other studies that address the Mexican prison system (Azaola & Bergman, 2003, p. 20; Bringas & Roldán, 1998, p. 17; México Evalúa, 2013, p. 49) highlight the social deterioration to which ex-convicts are exposed upon release and which jeopardizes their life trajectory. The first challenge for people reintegrating into society is to reestablish the meaningful social relationships they had before prison, in which they must overcome the economic detriment incurred by their incarceration. It is also acknowledged that the moral stigma associated with a criminal record makes employment reintegration difficult, worsening the subject's social deterioration. These

conditions influence the search for emergency measures to obtain resources, and drug trafficking emerges as a way forward in most cases.

On the other hand, far from enabling access to better living conditions – as occurs in rural communities – living in an urban area may actually be an incentive for crime. An urban context entails a deterioration that increases the likelihood of engaging in drug trafficking activities. Zavala Mora (2012) and Moreno (2017) report a high prevalence of crime-inducing social conflicts in urban communities due to a high demand for resources and services and contrasts in urban design, fostering marginalization and scant monitoring by authorities.

The relationship between the variable *state of poverty* and participation in drug trafficking activities occurs when there is a deterioration in economic conditions and little ability to meet basic needs. In these circumstances, drug trafficking activities represent a way to address individuals' economic deprivation (Boville Luca de Tena, 2000, p. 110; Campbell, 2007, p. 51). Boville Luca de Tena (2000, p. 133) reports that drug trafficking becomes a viable option because it is steeped in an economic system in which legal resources circulate alongside illegal ones, which can be used to perform legal activities that will later prove to be cases of money-laundering.

Lastly, model 4 takes living in a high-crime area as a selection variable, and also draws on a context of social deterioration. A significant positive relationship was found between participation in drug trafficking activities and the variables *residence in Sonora*, *living in a state of poverty*, and *drug use*; these are the same variables that exhibited strong and significant associations in the previous models. Although the mechanism that shapes this relationship is complex, Arteaga and Fuentes (2009, p. 175) explain that the creation of enclaves that make crime more likely is the result of a series of actions taken by the Mexican state to protect the population. According to the authors, these actions have more to do with a crisis in law enforcement as a social right and a breakdown in the ability to provide certainty in controlling crime. As part of this process, in significant portions of urban areas the state has surrendered its monitoring duties to the private security industry, and at the same time has become less able to access more marginalized areas, worsening the conflict and giving rise to differing levels of criminal behavior in different parts of cities.

[Table 5](#) shows the results of the model estimated to verify the second hypothesis in this study, which suggests that poor social control of crime is reflected in individual life trajectories and this influences participation in drug trafficking activities.

The same logistic model was used and the independent variables were tested with the backward method. As no selection variable is considered, the association between dependent variables and participation in drug trafficking activities is estimated.

The first result indicates, yet again, that living in Sonora is part of a context that provides opportunities to engage in drug trafficking. Taking into account the arguments noted in the analysis of the previous model with respect to the *residence in Sonora* variable, there are other kinds of problems and challenges that become risk factors and which have even been observed by authorities through public policies implemented such as *Cruzada por la Seguridad* (2009-2015)

and the current program *Escudo Ciudadano* (2015-2021). These policies warn of individuals' estrangement from social norms, leading to poor social control of crime.

Table 5. H2: Poor social control of crime (life trajectory) and participation in drug trafficking

Dependent variable: *TrafDrog* (participation in drug trafficking)  
 1= Participation, 0= No participation

		Model 5	
Independent variables		B	Exp (B)
Constant		-1.39	0.25**
<i>ResSon</i> (residence in Sonora)		1.37	3.95**
<i>AntePenal</i> (criminal record)		1.37	3.96**
<i>ConsuDrog</i> (drug use)		1.03	2.82**
<i>EdadRiesgo</i> (21 to 30 years old)		0.61	1.83*
Number of observations		210	
R <sup>2</sup> Cox/Snell	0.275		
R <sup>2</sup> Nagelkerke	0.368		

\*Significant at 0.05.

\*\*Significant at 0.01.

Source: Own work.

This ties in with the following two variables, which also exhibit a close association with participation in drug trafficking activities: having a criminal record and drug use. As has been shown, poor social control of crime is associated with individual life trajectories, resulting in poor precedents. In the wake of this association, the *involvement* dimension proposed by Hirschi makes sense, as having a criminal record and drug use portray an absence of lawful activity such as sport, study or work, and therefore individual actions culminate in unlawful activities that remain on the record of an individual's life trajectory.

There is literature (Becker, 1968; Cardona, 2004) pointing to a strategic process prior to entry into illegal activity, in which the individual weighs up the feasibility of this kind of lifestyle compared to lawful ones; there is also a range of views that consider drug trafficking more profitable than other lawful options (Ovalle, 2010). This ties in with the idea that knowledge of negligence in the administration of justice has been observed in subjects' life trajectories, which in most cases downplays the consequences of engaging in unlawful activity such as drug trafficking (Astorga, 2015; Barrón Cruz, 2015; Valdés, 2013).

Lastly, a new variable associated with participation in drug trafficking activities is the risk age. The study proposed an age range of 21 to 30 years, based on the analysis of inmates' records. This finding is consistent with data provided by Resa (2014, p. 4), who found that 45% (n = 65,007) of all convicts for drug crimes in Mexico between 2003 and 2012 (n = 144,787) were between 18 and 30 years old, so this age range is at risk. Giddens and Sutton (2013), on the other hand, assert that "youth" is made up of people aged between 18 and 30 with fairly independent lives. In that sense, one of the arguments supporting the relationship between a young age and participation in drug trafficking comes from "the commonly-held idea that most juvenile crime is drug-related" (Gómez Rodríguez, 2013, p. 43).

Studies on juvenile delinquency are not simple, and it is necessary to expand on those conducted and contrast their results. In Mexico, the topic is a research agenda in need of new findings, and in this vein, this study shows that there is indeed an increased likelihood of engaging in drug trafficking activities in individuals in this age range.

In sum, the evidence shown in this model also falls in line with hypothesis 2, which suggests that with poor social control of crime, which is reflected in individual life trajectories, the likelihood of engaging in drug trafficking is increased, as indicated by the associations presented in this study.

## CONCLUSIONS

Participation in drug trafficking activities is part of social life in Mexico and has ever greater repercussions on individual lives. This phenomenon is one of many problems endured by Sonora by virtue of its status as a border state, and over decades has become an ongoing issue that continues to add to the challenges that beset states in northwestern Mexico and spread nationwide.

The scourge of drug trafficking weakens the rule of law, and its growth puts the state's capacities to test. In this context, and considering that much remains to be analyzed and explored with respect to individuals' motives in engaging in drug trafficking in spite of the penalties provided by the criminal codes, this study offers evidence on some of the variables that influence these motives.

Two working hypotheses were constructed on the basis of two types of theoretical arguments in social theory. The first presents the relationship between social deterioration and participation in drug trafficking activities, and the second relates to the association between poor social control of crime and its reflection in individual life trajectories through participation in drug trafficking activities.

The findings came from a new database constructed from the analysis of 371 inmate records from the Social Reinsertion Center 1 in Hermosillo, Sonora. Although it only relates to contextual factors, the evidence shown in the statistical analysis indicates that living in Sonora increases the likelihood of engaging in drug trafficking; similarly, individuals aged between 20 and 30 years make up a high-risk age group.



By the same token, having a criminal record is another factor closely associated with participation in drug trafficking-related activities. Furthermore, the data presented in this analysis leads to the conclusion that individuals are more likely to engage in such activities when they come from a broken family nucleus that exhibits elements of intrafamily violence.

Lastly, this study offered evidence that the idea of social control of crime is tempered when individuals have a life trajectory with a criminal record and a history of drug use (in other words, when they are removed from conventional social norms), facilitating the transgression of these norms through participation in drug trafficking activities. As noted at the beginning of this section, the findings show that living in Sonora is part of a context that facilitates engagement in these activities, paving the way for a discussion of the positions found in the discourse of the Mexican government, which in recent years has identified Sonora as a safe state offering legal opportunities to get ahead.

Translator: Joshua Parker

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