Protocol of the Multicenter Study: Cultural Norms and Attitudes Toward Violence in Selected Cities in Latin America and Spain

Alfred McAlister, Luis Fernando Vélez, Rebecca de los Ríos, Marco Fournier, Leandro Piquet Cameiro
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These technical papers are conceived as a way of disseminating in an expeditious and timely manner the results of investigations, and are not publications scientifically evaluated or professionally edited.

The ACTIVA project is the outcome of a multicenter study to evaluate violence and related cultural norms and attitudes in selected cities of Latin America and Spain. The study represents a collaborative effort between research centers and institutions of recognized excellence in the subject, under the auspices and technical cooperation of the Pan American Health Organization.

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<td>Regional Advisor in Research in Public Health</td>
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<th>City</th>
<th>Local financing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Salvador de Bahía</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cali</td>
<td>Ministerio de Salud de Colombia y la Alcaldía de Cali</td>
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<td>Caracas</td>
<td>Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Tecnológicas, CONICIT</td>
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<td>Madrid</td>
<td>Consejería de Educación y Cultura de la Comunidad de Madrid</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Instituto de Estudos da Religião (ISER), Secretaria Municipal de Saúde y Fundação Ford-AMPOCS</td>
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<td>San José</td>
<td>Universidad de Costa Rica</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Salvador</td>
<td>Comisión Europea, Célula de Derechos Humanos y Democratización en América Latina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Santiago</td>
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Protocol of the Multicenter Study: Cultural Norms and Attitudes Toward Violence in selected cities in Latin America and Spain

Project ACTIVA

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BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Violence is clearly recognized as one of the most urgent threats to public health and safety in the Americas (e.g., OPS, 1993a, 1993b; Franco, 1990; Yunes, 1993). The Pan American Health Organization has begun to develop programs to address the problem of aggression and intentional injury (OPS, 1993a, 1993b; Restrepo, 1993). However, the lack of information and knowledge has been one of the most significant limitations in addressing this problem from a public health perspective in the Region.

1 This final version includes the contributions made by the principal investigators and consultants at the consensus meeting, sponsored by the Pan American Health Organization, held in Houston, Texas, from 15 to 19 April 1996.

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Scholarship in this field lies at the intersection of diverse scientific disciplines, traditionally attracting different types of psychologists, sociologists, criminologists and various experts in policy and urban studies (e.g., de Roux, 1994; Espitia, et al., 1994; NRC, 1993; Bandura, 1973; Bandura, 1986; Berkowitz, 1968; Baron, 1977; Blumenthal, Kahn, Andrews and Head, 1972; Anderson, 1976; Fagan, Piper and Moore, 1986; Daly and Wilson, 1988; Homer-Dixon, 1993; Straus, 1974; Smith, 1986; Yunes, 1993; Zaluar, Velho and Sa, 1993). In the past, this confluence of specialties yielded numerous empirical studies documenting individual and cultural risk factors and a moderate number of studies on prevention, mostly involving secondary prevention at the individual level (e.g., Gladue, 1991; Lothstein and Jones, 1978). However, the scope of inquiry into the causes and control of violence is being significantly broadened now that another branch of science has joined the effort.

Because the costs of violence are largely medical in nature, including mental health problems, it is natural that the problem has come to the attention of specialists in preventive medicine and public health (e.g., Guerrero, 1993; Zylke, 1988; Franco, 1990). Epidemiological research applications have documented the extent of the problem and have begun to identify cultural and environmental factors (e.g., unauthorized handgun possession) that are now legitimate concerns for public health policy advocacy (Guerrero, et al., 1995; Rosenberg, O’Carroll, Powell, 1992; Koop & Lundberg, 1992).

Concha, Carrion and Cobo (1994) have recently edited an important publication examining violence in Latin America from an interdisciplinary perspective emphasizing a public health approach to this problem. Various sociological and anthropological studies have provided a clear perspective into different manifestations. But there has been little direct linkage between social science and epidemiological research approaches and almost no formal comparative studies of cultural and social variables in different regions or nations. When sociological and psychological studies of the suspected causes of violence are viewed from a public health perspective, they can be interpreted as a form of behavioral epidemiology and a source of hypotheses about causes of risk factors, just as studies of the causes of adolescent smoking increase understanding of the origins and prevention of lung cancer (McAllister, Krosnick and Milbum, 1984).

To understand the origin of a disease, it has often been helpful to conduct comparative studies of culture in different national populations with diverse rates of that disease. The "seven country studies" (Keys, 1970) of cardiovascular diseases provide an excellent example of this type of research; surveys of diet and serum cholesterol levels were combined with data on national rates of heart disease. This rapidly elucidated the role of dietary culture (unsaturated fats) and the value of the "Mediterranean" diet for prevention of cardiovascular disease (Blackbum, 1983).

Epidemiologists and social scientists have also begun to investigate international differences and trends in mortality due to violence (e.g., Jeaneret and Sand 1993; Anzola and Bangdiwala, 1993; Yunes, 1993), finding marked differences in rates of violent mortality among and within the nations of the Americas (see Table 1). The situation in Colombia has been thoroughly analyzed, revealing large differences between different cities, as shown by Gaitan and Diaz (1994). The table shows that in the United States of America rates also vary by region. Studies conducted within that country (e.g., Cohen and Nisbett, 1994) have shown that specific norms and attitudes connected with herding cultures are involved in
the etiology of violent mortality (e.g., cowboy gunfighters and Latin vendettas) (Nisbett, 1993). Different cultural norms and skills for conflict resolution among different groups involved in drug trafficking may underlie regional variations in homicide rates within Colombia. Differences in cultural attitudes may also be at the root of variations in other forms of violence (e.g., domestic, political, etc.) in the different nations of the Americas.

**Table 1. Homicide Rates in Selected Cities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries and Areas</th>
<th>Rate/100,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A. White, selected cities in New England</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A. White, selected cities in the South</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartagena, Colombia</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A., Hispanics in Dallas</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogota, Colombia</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A., African-Americans in Dallas</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cali, Colombia</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All cities in Colombia</td>
<td>110.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medellin, Colombia</td>
<td>435.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To help understand the factors that lead to differences in rates of violence, further studies are needed to describe and analyze aptitudes, attitudes, cultural beliefs between and within different countries, and conflict resolution skills. Through this type of research, it may be possible to identify the specific beliefs and other factors that are most important in the social etiology of violence.

As public health leaders have begun to envision a public health approach to violence control for the Region of the Americas (Restrepo, 1993; Guerrero, 1993), a general research objective for the social sciences is being considered: measurement, analysis and comparison of cultural attitudes and norms associated with levels of violence in different countries.

To address this problem, the Pan American Health Organization is promoting and coordinating a multi-national, cooperative research program to evaluate behavior and identify attitudes in American populations that are associated with different public and private acts of violence. The participating investigators will carry out a comparative analysis between cities and establish similar or dissimilar cultural norms, which may be related to indexes of violence in different urban areas.

To carry out a common social research protocol, investigators have agreed on standardized survey items to evaluate the attitudes, norms and skills of the population as opposed to public and private violence that are central to all efforts to stem violence by influencing how people react and respond to potentially provocative situations and events. Although different attitudes, norms and skills may be linked with different types of violence, they are all measurable objects of study that may be addressed together in a comprehensive program of international research. This must include assessment of the evaluation and acceptance of violent behaviors in specific situations, as well as attitudes and skills in regard to nonviolent alternatives for conflict resolution. Prejudicial stereotyping, combined with perceived injustices and hostile dehumanization, may also influence risk by introducing bias and error in information processing. For maximum scientific usefulness, the social evaluation of factors related to violence in different countries must include self-reported behaviors and personal experiences, by both perpetrators and victims, for different types of violence. It must also measure potential contributing factors such as substance abuse, stress, dissatisfaction, relative value placed on human rights and other social attitudes and values. Data about demographic and cultural features will also be needed.

The first step has been to develop and test an evaluation instrument. Population surveys in the U.S. (e.g., Blumenthal, Kahn and Andrews, 1972; Cohen and Nisbett, 1994) and Latin America (e.g., Del Mastro and Sanchez, 1994; Oviedo, 1993; McAlister and Velez, 1995) have studied different opinions and cultural attitudes related to violence. To examine how attitudes influence the different forms of violence reviewed here, standard methods need to be developed. Despite the useful information already provided by various public opinion polls and mental health surveys, it is necessary in most countries to collect additional information regarding specific attitudes and beliefs directly related to different forms of violence. To design an international multi-site study of cultural norms and
attitudes related to diverse forms of violence, it is useful to organize concepts to be measured according to a common theoretical model.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THEORETICAL MODEL**

**Forms of Violence**

Violence was recently defined as "the use of physical force—or the credible threat of such force—intended to physically harm a person or group" (National Television Violence Study, 1996). It can be seen as a problem with different levels and dimensions (Carson, 1994), ranging from peaceful or violent means to resolve domestic conflicts to the systematic use of professional killers and warfare. Within this spectrum, attitudes and beliefs that support the use of violence constitute its cultural substrate. Comprehensive prevention programs for the prevention of violence must include, in addition to better law enforcement, environmental facilitation and economic development, the promotion of non-violent attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, i.e., a "culture of peace and harmony" (Guerrero, et al., 1994). The voluminous literature on different forms of aggression, including research on causal factors and their evaluation, is briefly reviewed in the following sections. As the review will show, preliminary research and theorization is sufficient for the development of an approach to international evaluation of significant attitudes and other cultural factors across the entire spectrum of violence. Despite the differences in manifestations and degrees of complexity, all forms of violence can probably be understood to result from measurable concepts which operate according to basic theoretical social learning processes (e.g., Bandura, 1973; 1986).

**Domestic Violence**

The most widespread type of violence is that which occurs within families and intimate relationships, between spouses, parents and children, where women are often disproportionately affected, especially if the violence involves sexuality (UN, 1989). The best general concept for organizing sub-categories of this type of violence is the life cycle (e.g., Kashani, Daniel, Dandoy & Holcomb, 1992), where four distinct forms of violence are evident: (1) child abuse, (2) sexual abuse, (3) domestic partner abuse and (4) elder abuse.

The abuse and neglect of children, which itself seems to engender other forms of violence (Widom, 1989; Goldson, 1991), has been widely studied in the Americas (e.g., OPS 1993; Yunes and Rajas, 1993; Donnelly, 1991; Gelles and Harrop, 1991). As with most other forms of violence, economic frustration and substance abuse (especially alcohol) are highly correlated with dysfunctional parenting. Parenting practices, including the use of punishment, is found to be influenced by cultural and group norms, evaluative attitudes and, of course, skills and self-efficacy for positive parenting and use of positive incentives to manage child behaviors (e.g., Daro, 1988). Numerous studies have measured these
variables and documented their interrelationships (e.g., Weinman, Schreiber & Robinson, 1992; Herrerias, 1988).

Virtually all domestic and sexual violence against women is committed by men and there is extensive literature on these topics (e.g., ONU, 1989). Once again, substance abuse (especially alcohol) and relative economic deprivation are substantial risk factors (Koss & Dinero, 1985; Berenson, Miguel & Wilkinson, 1992a; Berenson, Miguel & Wilkinson, 1992b; Bergman, 1992; Abbey, 1991; Roehrich & Kinder, 1991). For men, risk is related to subjective norms and evaluations of specific behaviors and their rationale, as well as general attitudes toward gender roles (e.g., Jaffe, et al., 1992; Comett & Shuntich, 1991). Much of the violence between domestic partners is sexual in nature, with the bond of family often serving to extend the range of maltreatment that is tolerated (Schwartz, 1991). Substance abuse and economic factors are related, as are norms and beliefs about gender roles and exercise of dominance in social institutions (e.g., marriage) (Kantor & Straus, 1987; Saunders, Lynch, Grayson & Linz, 1987; Campbell, 1992; Baron, 1989). Baron, Straus and Jaffee (1988) present convincing evidence that levels of rape are related to "cultural spill-over" from other cultural attitudes and norms regarding legitimate forms of violence.

The fourth form of "intimate" violence reverses the roles of the first in which the parent becomes the "child" through infirmity and dependence. As women live longer, this form of abuse also affects them disproportionately. Types of elder abuse include physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, neglect, financial/material exploitation, and violation of rights. Financial and material abuse refers to the illegal exploitation of monetary or material assets (Stein, 1992). In interview studies, Wolf and Godkin (1986) identified dependency, learned helplessness, individual pathologies, decreased financial resources, increased life expectancy, resentment of dependency, and internal family situations as risk factors for abuse.

The research reviewed here shows that the extent to which violence is used to handle family problems may be measured in populations in order to examine regional or cultural variations. Standard methods for assessing domestic conflict resolution and related skills and attitudes have been well-developed. For attitudes and beliefs about relationships, including both domination and the use of violence, standardized measures are available for adaptation (e.g., Straus and Gelles, 1995). Although there have been many surveys, few international comparisons have been made and these have usually focused on students (e.g., Hinshaw and Forbes, 1994).

Youth Violence

By any measure of significance to public health, violence among adolescents is one of the most important public health problems facing the Americas (Yunes and Rajas, 1993) and many other parts of the world (Jeaneret and Saud, 1993). Adolescents have the highest risk of being the perpetrators as well as the victims of violence. In Latin American countries such as Brazil, abandoned children have become both major victims and sources of urban violence (Pinheiro, 1993; Gutierrez, 1978). In the United States, adolescents are victims of crime at twice the rate for adults over 25 years of age (U.S. Department of Justice, 1992). Violence and injuries account for nearly three-fourths of the almost 20,000 adolescent
deaths each year (Gans et al., 1990). Homicide is the fourth leading cause of death among children ages 1 to 14 and the second highest cause of death in the 15 to 24 year-old age group. In the United States, among Blacks 15 to 34 years of age, homicide is the leading cause of death for both males and females (Hammett, et al., 1992; Baker et al., 1992). Males, when compared to females, are more frequently the perpetrators as well as the victims of aggression (Hammett et al., 1992; CDC, 1991; CDC, 1992; Hyde, 1984). Students who drop out of school, skip classes, or have a poor self-image regarding their academic performance are more likely to turn to violence and health-jeopardizing behaviors (Pinie, Murray and Leupker, 1988; Chavez, Edwards, and Oetting, 1989; Valois et al., 1993; Orpinas, et al., 1994).

In recent decades, research has focused on identifying and describing the factors that predict violence among children and adolescents (e.g., Whelan, 1954; Sende and Blomgren, 1975). Factors consistently described as predictors of future aggression are family violence and child abuse (Widom, 1989; Lewis, et al., 1987), inadequate parental monitoring (Farrington, 1989; Perry, Perry and Bodizar, 1990), being a male (Hammet et al., 1992; Hyde, 1984), poverty (Baker, et al., 1989; Bastian, 1992), low academic achievement (Loeber and Dishion, 1983; Orpinas, 1993) and easy access to weapons (Webster, Gainer and Champion, 1992; Saltzman, et al., 1992). Personal and attitudinal factors include inadequate conflict resolution skills and beliefs that support aggression (Slaby and Guerra, 1988), use of alcohol and drugs (Kingery, Pruitt and Hurley, 1992; Drugs and Crime Facts, 1992), watching acts of violence on television (Wood, et al., 1991; Huesmann and Eron, 1984). Another variable predictor of violence is attributed aggressive bias (Dodge, 1980; Fondaraco and Heller, 1990), which causes a young person to mistakenly infer harmful intent to inoffensive or defense actions. As is noted in a later section, in the mass media there are many roles which express attitudes favoring aggression and which provide skills-training models for life-styles of violent criminality among urban youth (Castillo, 1993). Urban youth gangs and associated criminal cultures have been extensively studied in the United States. (Goldstein and Huff, 1993) and in Latin American cities in countries such as Ecuador (Argudo, 1991; Villavicencio, 1993). In Chile, several specific subcultures have been differentiated in urban and rural groups of families and criminal youth (Cooper, 1986; 1989; 1992).

As is illustrated in the many studies cited here, evaluation of attitudes and behavior among young people can often be conveniently accomplished in schools, although school populations begin to diverge from the out-of-school populations as children reach early adolescence. Although a very large number of dissimilar items have been used to measure the cultural norms, attitudes and skills that may be related to violence among youth, some standard measures have been adopted in multi-site research on school-based violence prevention supported by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (e.g., Orpinas, 1993). Standardized regional and international comparisons of important factors have not been performed.
Adult Violence

Although serious violence is increasingly being committed by younger people, young adult males perpetrate the majority of the violence in the United States and Colombia (Flanagan and Jamieson, 1988; Gaitan and Diaz, 1994). In the United States, murders by relatives or acquaintances have been the most common until recently, but now the number of homicides in the United States attributed to strangers unknown to the victim has surpassed murders committed by acquaintances. Another sizable portion of all homicides, approximately 20%, involve robbery or crimes involving property in which a victim sees or resists the criminal. Another 20% of the total homicides in the United States involve drug-related felonies occurring in so-called "gang warfare" and other conflicts between criminals at different organizational levels (U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1993).

Although it is true that most research concerns victimization and its effects, there are also studies of the causes of these violent behaviors. The factors associated with serious adult violence are similar to those associated with aggression among youth, as outlined in the preceding section. Early aggression is a predictor of future aggression (Eron, 1987). Abuse of alcohol and other drugs is also involved in a large part of all forms of adult violence (Fagan, 1990; Zaluar, Velho and Sa, 1993). Alcohol is also related to domestic violence and, if national leaders are under the influence of alcohol, it may also have an effect on collective violence. Although heavy use of alcohol is related to individual, temporal-location variations in violence within populations, it does not explain the very marked international differences noted previously. Some drug use, (e.g., crack cocaine) probably predisposes individuals to violence, but the selective association of different forms of drug use with criminality may also explain this phenomenon. The effects of illicit drug economics will be discussed in a later section.

Because of their potential for change, as contrasted with more change-resistant environmental or personal factors, attitudes and beliefs about violence and other forms of conflict resolution or settlement of disputes are of special interest. Baron and Straus (1988) have found a relationship between homicide and an index of legitimate violence that reflects different cultural norms in different states of the United States. Nisbett (1993) and colleagues (e.g., Cohen and Nisbett, 1994) studied specific attitudes about violence for protection of family or self and about fighting or killing someone in response to an insult or injury. The support for violence that has been observed was markedly higher among white men in rural areas of the southern United States with high rates of white-on-white homicide, compared to white men from matched northern areas with low rates of white-on-white homicide. The groups only differed with regard to support for provoked aggression. This suggests that, for southern men, social cognitive processes involving cultural expectations may determine the "meaning" of potential provocations and the degree to which violent retaliation is justified or even necessary. Southerners from violent areas are also more likely to use firearms for self-protection, (Cohen and Nisbett, 1994).

Normal self-protective behaviors, e.g., holding up a hand to deflect a blow or pulling on something we want to keep when someone is taking it away, may be construed as provocative when prior hostilities are presumed to exist. In racial/ethnic and social class conflicts, the social cognitive processes of stereotyping and dehumanization distort the processing of attributed information and encourage punitive responses (Bandura, 1990).
"Name-calling" and attribution of blame to victims is a normal concomitant of both passionate and dispassionate murders, at least partly as a legal or psychological defense for the perpetrator. But the "scripts" for disinhibition, even their availability, depend upon social learning experiences that may vary considerably from one culture to another and within cultures. Attitudes toward victims and perceived peer support for violence in specific situations may influence the degree and type of aggression. In areas of Colombia with extremely high occurrences of violence, e.g., near Medellin, groups of young people and their families have developed new subcultures with well-defined norms and roles for killers, enforcers and other members of criminal organizations (Salazar, 1991).

When some kind of reaction is deemed necessary because of a dispute or grievance, the selection of a response is influenced by attitudes toward alternative approaches to conflict resolution (e.g., Deutsch, 1993; Hammock and Richardson, 1992; Burton and Sandole, 1987). When people can resort to a legal justice system, they may not consider it to be an acceptable means for settling disputes. Cohen and Nisbett (1994) found that persons from violent southern cultures were more likely to malign the "manhood" of individuals who would not respond with illegal violence to certain insults or serious injury (e.g., rape of a daughter). Even when a person considers a nonviolent alternative to be socially acceptable in such a case as this, e.g., reporting it to the police, the person may seek personal revenge rather than legal prosecution if he does not trust or have confidence in the police or legal system. In Colombia, where drug traffickers are popularly believed to illicitly control some police and justice officials, the resultant lack of confidence in the legal system may partly explain the ever-growing extralegal violence practiced in order to resolve business or personal conflicts that would have previously been remedied legally. Trust and confidence ultimately depend upon the availability and quality of justice and mediation systems (Ayres, 1984). When legal or political systems fail to resolve conflicts or correct wrongs, the forms of protest (e.g., violent versus peaceful) may come to mirror the forms of reaction to that protest (e.g., violently oppressive versus conciliatory). On both sides of this exchange, the degree of pronounced violence depends upon the attitudes and skills of the participants.

Cultural attitudes and opinions about conflict resolution can be evaluated in entire populations through sampling surveys, as shown in the different studies reviewed here (e.g., Cohen and Nisbett, 1994). Although standardized instruments have not emerged, some specific items from the opinion and attitude surveys have been used in different studies (e.g., Ramirez, 1992). In Colombia, attitudinal scales for measuring community approval for extralegal violence have been developed, along with measures of intention and perceived ability to use the law to redress grievances (McAlister and Velez, 1995). For measurement of cultural hostility, racism and xenophobia, standardized methods have been used in repeated follow-up surveys in Europe to assess trends and differences between countries (Jackson, 1995). Although many uncertainties will persist, a common method of evaluation to compare national and regional populations can be derived from the research which has already taken place.
Collective Violence

From a historical perspective, sponsored collective violence is the major contributor to international murders and injury (e.g., Keegan, 1993; Michaud, 1989; Dietrich, 1981). There are several levels and dimensions to be considered, e.g., Snyder (1978). The first is aggressive injurious police action at the local level, where justification or judicial processing may vary widely. Even where some safeguards are in place to reduce mistakes and avoid overly harsh punishment of enemies or prisoners, their actual treatment depends largely on the attitudes and skills of the persons charged with enforcing them. In some cases the distinction between private and governmental, or even between the criminal and the political, is lost. In places where democracy effectively imposes checks and balances on executive authority, covert use of violent tactics, whether by police, militia or private security forces, ultimately depends upon the support of citizens or interested parties. Even highly tacit support may be encouraging for some. All too often, dehumanization and distorted attributions provide sufficient justification to support violent acts (Bandura, 1990). Many see capital punishment (applied disproportionately to low-income individuals or minority groups) as an illustration of unwarranted violence (Bandura, 1986).

Preventing sponsored violence depends upon the opinions of the electorate, which provides the political and economic base for the systems of justice and conflict resolution, as well as the individual attitudes and skills of the persons who administer them. Political violence has been a feature of U.S. and Latin American culture for many years (Anderson, 1976; Gomez, 1981; Michaud, 1989; Martinez, Tironi and Weinstein, 1990). The breakdown in attitudes and collective self-regulation may be the cause of tragedies such as those in Bosnia or Rwanda. The greatest threat to public health is large-scale war between nations. The relaxation of East-West tensions (Slotkin, 1992) is currently at a point where the peoples of both the United States and Russia favor limiting it (McAlister and Kopina, 1995). But other rivalries may emerge or opinions may change and any society which maintains a military force must also maintain proper public attitudes and collective self-regulatory skills in order to prevent its misuse.

Social action to prevent the extensive use of governmental and other organized violence by legal entities includes almost all aspects of the legal and constitutional structures of society, such as the checks and balances between branches of government. Although we may extol the relative lack of imperfection in one system or another, a certain level of violence seems inevitable in the large-scale application of any governmental code, mainly because of variations in the attitudes and competencies of the agents who must enforce it. Similarly, the effectiveness of international mediation and diplomacy, while greatly aided by formal structures such as the U.N., is dependent upon the "grass-roots" attitudes and skills of the people who are experiencing and helping to resolve the conflict (Deutsch, 1962; Devine, 1989). Within a given country, the propensity to build military capability, which may be justified at one point in history but not at another, also depends upon public attitudes and the political skills of citizens (McAlister and Kopina, 1995), as measured in opinion polls such as the General Social Survey (1994). Recently, these and other surveys have been used to develop scales for measurement of attitude which may be used to compare populations and predict military belligerence (Masse and McAlister, 1995).
Environmental Influences

All forms of violence are determined both by social-cognitive and environmental factors. The most important is probably the availability of weapons. Numerous studies show an obvious relationship between the private possession of guns and the number of deaths from firearms (e.g., Kleck and Patterson, 1993; Guerrero, et al., 1995). This has led to hotly contested efforts to limit the number and type of weapons that are available in the United States. With respect to sponsored violence, the availability of military weapons must also be seen from the same perspective. Although every country desires to protect itself and some insist on maintaining forces deadly enough to deter almost any attack, the proliferation of ever more powerful mass or individual weapons is probably the greatest threat to world health. Governmental policies regarding production and sale of weapons, either for individual or mass destruction, depend upon political processes and public opinion which may be changed through public education. Private companies are influenced by the attitudes and choices of consumers. Opinions and attitudes about weapons and their use have been shown to vary considerably between cultures (e.g., Cohen and Nisbett, 1994). Good methods have been developed to measure public opinion and consumer perception in the commercial-political sector.

Another factor which may be considered to relate to environment is urbanization and the structures that increase or limit the exposure of individuals to potentially violent situations. Oceans, walls and other security devices offer protection to some, but are not available to everyone. A related factor is the incarceration of persons who have been convicted of violent crimes. As seen in the countries with the highest incarceration rates (United States and Russia), the effects of this policy are not entirely satisfactory. Where power or resources are unevenly distributed, incarceration of poor people may be itself seen as a form of sponsored violence (like the death penalty). In racially divided societies, attempts to control the reproduction of genetic populations which are supposedly predisposed to aggression can also be considered as sponsored violence. Although pharmaceutical or other treatments for specific hereditary disorders may be found useful, their overall impact on homicide rates will only be noticeable where cultural constraints are already in place, i.e., in countries like Finland where homicide rates are very low (Eronen, Hakola and Tiihonen, 1995).

Economic circumstances also influence rates of violence in several ways. In Latin America, economic development and urbanization have brought affluence to some sectors of society, but conditions among marginal groups have become increasingly dangerous (e.g., Blanco, 1992). Youth from urban areas, abandoned and unable to find work, are the most obvious manifestation of this problem (Gutierrez, 1978). In a study of states in the United States by Baron and Straus' (1988), poverty and economic inequality are shown to be directly related to both homicide rates and an index of legitimate violence.

Another major factor may be the presence of underground economies ("black markets") for products in wide demand such as alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, etc. This certainly explains, at least in part, the extraordinary levels of violence seen in
Colombia (Gaitan and Diaz, 1994). When there are no primary public institutions to protect property and resolve conflicts in the marketplace, (e.g., the police and courts), private means aimed at providing security and justice may be arbitrary and unduly harsh or punitive. The origin of the herding culture and the concept of honorable violence is clearly associated with very rural and nomadic populations where people lack confidence in government institutions because their officials are far away or inaccessible. Among very large and highly organized groups that have learned to profit by mutual acceptance, it may also be possible for adaptation to a legal business culture, protection and a division of marketing to proceed with a minimum of bloodshed. When businesses are small and disorganized, violence is more likely. Although legalization of dangerous products may cause more problems than it prevents, some ways of decriminalizing the market are probably worth considering. The attractiveness of illegal means for obtaining resources is dependent upon the availability and perceived desirability of alternative occupations.

Efforts to prevent violence must address basic problems of economic development, particularly the uneven distribution of wealth and the degree of legitimate economic opportunity for disadvantaged groups (e.g., Blau and Blau, 1982). Because opinions about these issues may determine the type of economic development that takes place, their variation among countries is currently being studied by the European Union (Jackson, 1995). This methodology might also be applied to help understand national differences in the nature of economic development the Americas which may in tum influence long-term tendencies toward conflict between social class.

**Influence of Mass Media**

For a herd animal, quickly heeding a warning of danger from other animals in the herd is of undeniable value for its survival. This is probably the reason for the tendency for acts of violence publicized in the press or recreated in dramas (or comedies) to attract audiences. Film and television producers competing for audiences may be harmfully distorting a healthy instinct by taking advantage of the fascination with violence to attract viewers. There is no doubt that displays of violence, even when intended to instruct avoidance by potential victims, also provide models to imitate and skills for potential perpetrators (Bandura, 1973). This influence contributes to violence across the entire spectrum. The use of firearms, in situations ranging from individual to mass conflict, has been extensively recreated in many genres of television and film. In the popular western films, both behavior and codes are explicitly portrayed and are similar to those that Nisbett (1993) and colleagues find in southerners from areas with high rates of violence (Cohen and Nisbett, 1994). Some of the highest homicide rates for white-on-white are found in small Texas towns where the cowboy lifestyle originated (it was originally appropriated from the Mexican vaquero culture, which was derived in turn from Latin herding culture). Because the cowboy/gunfighter scenario or code is often transposed into modern settings, with racial elements deliberately reversed (Slotkin, 1992), it can transmit its values to urban minorities (e.g., Anderson, 1994). Given that mass media from the United States and the forms for transmitting that media are distributed to other countries, the gunfighter role may be transferred to other settings where it provides roles and outlines for resolution of many criminal and civic conflicts and disputes with acts of violence. Slotkin provides evidence
that the gunfighter "myth" may also remove inhibitions towards the collective violence of war (Keen, 1986; Bandura, 1990). Its treatment of the theme of capture/recapture and the need for extra-legal domination of inferior (dehumanized) cultures by whites actually provided bases for political justification of foreign aggression in the wars the United States has waged in the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam and elsewhere. As pointed out in a history of warfare (Keegan, 1993), the extent of killing and brutality is determined by ideological attitudes and cultural customs. One might say that the United States needs to create new myths to replace the armed settler as the dominant model for engaging in conflict with foreign countries (Slotkin, 1992).

The content of the mass media, as well as the beliefs that it may engender, has been systematically evaluated by social scientists (e.g., Comstock, et al., 1991; Dominick, 1984; UCLA, 1995; Milgram and Shotland, 1973). In studies of media content, types of violence and displays of attitudes toward and consequences of violence have been codified and quantified (e.g., Gerbner, et al., 1994) and some international comparisons have shown marked differences between countries (Huesmann, et al., 1984). It has been shown that the consumption of violence is related to individual propensities for violence that are based on the social learning processes that have been discussed here (Huesmann and Eron, 1986; Bandura, 1973; Berkowitz, 1964; Wood, et al., 1991; Berkowitz, et al., 1974). The countries of the Americas are heavy consumers of entertainment products from the United States, but there has been little or no study of how this varies between countries. In the United States, differences between the states in the consumption of specific media products (certain magazines with articles on firearms and crime) were found to be related in part to an overall index of legitimate violence and to homicide rates (Baron and Straus, 1988). The similar differences in some types of mass media consumption may also help explain national differences with regard to violence and related factors between Latin American nations.

**Theoretical Model: Psychosocial Processes that Determine Violence**

A well-established theoretical model is available to guide the choice of concepts to be applied in the form of quantitative variables evaluated with social science interview methodologies. The role of cognition and social learning in the development and manifestation of aggression has been presented in depth by Professor Albert Bandura of Stanford University (1973; 1986; 1991), whose theorization provides a framework for understanding all forms of human behavior. This theory has been shown to be widely applicable to the diverse behavioral problems of public health (McAlister, et al., 1991). By using concepts within that framework, one can see that common structures and social-cognitive processes are functioning in all the levels and types of violence reviewed here. The enclosed diagram provides a model for understanding the processes that lead, or do not lead, to violence using concepts from Bandura's theory of human behavior. A similar
model to explain patterns of youth violence has been presented by Huesmann and Eron (1984).

On the left appears the environment, which influences people in three basic ways. First, it determines the responses that are available in reality (top line). Second, it produces situations and events that are perceived and which lead to cognitive and affective or emotional processes that produce behavioral responses which have consequences. Third, the environment provides a social model, i.e., information about the behavior of others and its consequences. The consequences experienced (bottom right) as well as observed (bottom left) lead to learning processes which produce attitudes and skills that influence the cognitive processes and future responses to situations and events. One learning process is indirect, since the person obtains new attitudes and skills simply by observing other people.

The other learning process is active as the person learns from his or her own experience. Learning is an active process which allows the learner to seek responses that will produce positive consequences. One consequence may be a modification of the environment itself, since a person purposefully seeks to produce more situations and positive events which require a response (line at bottom).

This diagram can be used to understand the role of attitudes and skills in all forms of violent or peaceful behavior. In every case, the environment has produced a circumstance, situation or event to which the perpetrator (and victim) respond. The reaction to such event depends upon the attitudes of both persons as to what the situation means and how a person should and can react. If the event or situation stirs up an angry or frustrated emotional reaction and/or a strong need to respond, the choice of specific behavioral responses is guided by evaluative attitudes about those responses and their social or moral acceptability or desirability, as well as by expectations of personal mastery (ability) regarding their performance. Alcohol, emotional upheaval, stress and other factors alter the processing of information and attitudinal evaluation processes, i.e., by lowering thresholds, limiting review of options, impeding reasoning, etc. Environmental factors such as the availability of weapons and economic deprivation may also shape the types of behaviors that are chosen for justice or self-protection.

Although the relevant attitudes and skills are different in each form of violence, the theoretical process is the same. It can be seen in all interactions between young people and adults, when the struggle for advantages leads to conflict and when the outcomes of that conflict lead to grievances and hostility between groups. The theoretical concepts in the diagram also help explain collective and organized violence, since nations or entire groups respond to events according to their attitudes toward one another and their national and international skills for resolving the conflict. The basic notion is that attitudes and skills can determine whether violence results from particular situations or events.
Diagram 1. Social Psychological Processes Governing Violence

1. The interpretation of a conflict depends upon beliefs, and values, which influence attribution, e.g., when provocative intent is inferred selectively to groups.

2. Information coding, attribution and other cognitive skills determine how accurately the conflict situation or event is interpreted, i.e., whether its causes are understood.

3. Depending upon attitudes about emotion and its expression, some interpretations may lead to anger and aggrievement.

4. Cognitive and emotional self-control skills may inhibit or heighten the intensity of reaction and the likelihood of response.

5. Preferences among responses are determined by the perceived norms and attitudes about their usefulness, appropriateness, etc.

6. Selections are done according to actual skills and perceived self-efficacy for performen them effectively and correctly.
It is recognized that this model, which focuses on the cognition and learning sphere, does not fully explain the causes of violence in the societies of the Region in that it presents only an outline of the normative, psychosocial, and behavioral sphere. In order to improve the model by the inclusion of certain structural factors associated with violence, approximations will be introduced that will make it possible to analyze topics relating to poverty, the family, credibility of the system of justice, and anomie, among others. The scope of the study consequently does not cover all the dimensions of the problem, but seeks to address those that may eventually serve as targets for public health interventions.

**Definitions of the Components of the Model**

Definitions of the theory are presented below:

**Conflict.** Conflict is defined as situations and events which may precipitate violence because of problems in the relationships between individuals and groups. Some conflicts may involve resource allocation, as when a poor person uses force to rob a wealthy person or when individuals or organizations disagree on boundaries, terms of payment for loans, political power, etc. Conflicts also have to do with injuries or threats to items of value. Conflict may also occur if a person believes she or he has been or will be harmed personally, indirectly (e.g., through harming a family member) or psychologically (e.g., through insults) by another person or group.

**Interpretation.** Interpretation is the process by which events are understood by a person experiencing conflict. This includes attributions for disparities in resource allocation and for injuries or threats experienced or perceived. This process determines whether conflict is perceived and to what end actions or feelings are directed, i.e., it determines who is to be blamed or seen as the cause of a perceived injury or resource disparity. As the theoretical model shows, this process is influenced by attitudes about certain events, situations, persons and groups, and by skills for processing information about them. Thus, a person who has hostile attitudes toward members of a certain group may think there is a conflict of interest and threats or injuries, dangerous predisposition, or enmity in actions that are not intended in any way to harm him.

**Reaction.** Reaction is the emotional consequence of an interpretation of conflict. It may consist of physiological reactions and/or verbal or mental expression of feelings. Specific reactions include fear, anger, embarrassment, complaining, etc. This process is also influenced by attitudes and skills, as shown in the theoretical model. When conflicts lead to violence, it often stems from emotional arousal and feelings of anger and frustration toward a person or group.

**Response.** Response is defined as the actual behavior that is elicited by the conflict. It may be a violent behavior or a nonviolent behavior. It may be intended to resolve a conflict or simply to harm the person or group that is blamed for a conflict. If it is a violent behavior, it may be verbal or physical. If physical, it may be mildly injurious or life-threatening, as in the use different kinds of weapons. If a response is seen as necessary or useful, preferences among different possible response alternatives determine whether
conflicts or provocations lead to violent or peaceful solutions. These preferences depend upon attitudes toward them and the person's perception of his or her skill or ability to carry out the selected response effectively. As the theoretical model shows, the environment may determine what responses are available, e.g., the types of weapons or means of defense that can be chosen.

**Norms.** Norms are defined in several ways. Firstly, the term cultural norm may simply refer to the behaviors that are commonly or normally practiced in a population or subgroup. Secondly, the term social norm refers to the behavioral expectations and recommendations that are expressed by the members of a culture, as when parents tell children what to do or when friends or leaders state their approval or disapproval of thoughts, emotions, or actions. Finally, perceived norms are defined as a person's belief about what other people usually do in certain situations (normative beliefs) or about what they expect he or she to do in those situations (normative expectations).

**Attitudes.** Attitudes are defined as evaluative beliefs that are expressed verbally in the form of descriptive statements about persons, group conflicts, interpretations, reactions, and responses, etc. Thus, a person may say something is good or bad, safer or dangerous, wise or foolish, pleasant or unpleasant, clean or dirty, weak or strong. These statements of evaluative belief represent attitudes which are learned through observation or experience. Cultural and social norms are connected with attitudes, when parents, peers, leaders, media role models, etc. show or tell people how to classify and value things. Predominant or expected practices are motivated by attitudes, which express values as incentives for different behavioral outcomes. Violent behavior may also be justified by attitudes, as when perpetrators perceive their victims to be evil, dangerous, etc.

**Skill (ability).** Skill is defined as the ability to do something. This may involve internal cognitive operations, e.g., interpretation of situations and control of emotions. Skill also refers to behavioral abilities related to communication, use of nonviolent conflict resolution, etc. Skills are acquired through observation of role models and feedback.

**Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy is defined as belief in one's ability to perform in a certain way or respond with cognitive acts requiring skill. It may also refer to beliefs about ability to interpret complex situations or control emotional reactions. It is demonstrated by verbal statements referring to knowing how to do something and being able to do it. Like attitudes, beliefs relative to self-efficacy are connected to cultural norms, i.e., when parents, peers, etc., establish expectations for skills relative to behavior by verbalizing what one should or must be able to do. Self-efficacy is also learned through observation of what others are able to do and personal experiences in attempting to duplicate the behavior. Violent responses are often selected because a person is lacking in effectiveness to resolve conflicts nonviolently, as is the case when people do not know how to negotiate, reason, communicate, or utilize conventional or unconventional systems for mediating disputes.

**Intention.** Intention consists theoretically of knowing whether one is going to behave in a particular manner or carry out a specific cognitive operation (interpretation) or whether he will experience or express a particular emotion. Intentions are expressed in
terms of situations (which can vary in many aspects), behaviors (also variable), and likelihood of that behavior (e.g., probability of occurrence).

As illustrated in the theoretical model, intentions are a combined function of (1) normative beliefs and expectations, (2) evaluative attitudes, and (3) expectations of self-efficacy. Through evaluation of intentions, a researcher may obtain an indicator of all theoretical processes influencing interpretations, reactions, and responses to conflicts.

**OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSES OF THE STUDY:**

Based on the foregoing considerations, the study seeks to fulfill the following objectives and purposes:

**General Objective.** To analyze and compare the role of social learning processes between cities in the differentiated forms taken by physically violent intentions and reactions in different environments, and to identify the environmental, socioeconomic, and domestic factors associated with such violent intentions and reactions.

**Specific Objectives:**

- To compare, between cities, the associations established between the population's cultural attitudes, norms, and skills in resolving conflicts, with violent intentions and reactions (behaviors) within the family, the community, and society at large.
- To establish comparative associations between violent intentions and reactions within the family, the community, and society at large, and environmental factors such as exposure to the mass media and previous experiences with violence and carrying weapons.
- To identify the differences in violent behaviors, cultural attitudes and norms, and the conflict-resolution skills of the population according to socioeconomic class and other factors such as family structure, employment status, migration, and ethnic origin, among others.

**purposes of the study.** This is applied research, and it will serve as a basis to:

- Formulate and evaluate policies and plans for preventing violence in cities and to provide decision-making criteria.
- Design programs and interventions using a public health approach aimed at developing alternative attitudes, skills and practices among the citizenry for conflict resolution and the prevention of violence in different areas.
- Establish a baseline for the evaluation of policies and programs to prevent violence.
METHODOLOGY

Measurement of Study Variables and Operationalization:

The design and selection of evaluations was based on the theoretical model described above. Starting with that model and a preliminary item pool from previous studies, the research team identified, adapted, or developed new interview questions.

In addition to the variables taken directly from the theoretical model, as illustrated in the table, the investigators also selected items to evaluate environmental variables such as mass media consumption, access to weapons, confidence in governmental institutions for justice and law enforcement, and opinions that might influence conflicts related to economic or political factors. With regard to structural variables, consideration was given to items connected with a particular socioeconomic level, type of family, and occupation. In addition, sociodemographic aspects such as age, sex, immigration status, religion, ethnic origin, marital status, and number of children were also taken into account.

Measures were found for variables across the entire spectrum of violence and conflict, e.g., for domestic, community, institutional, and national aspects. This led to a concrete functional definition of the model's underlying concepts, as illustrated in tables 2, 3, and 4 below.

The information-gathering instrument establishes a balance between all the dimensions of violence and emphasizes behavior and violent responses. Norms, attitudes, and skills with regard to domestic, group, and societal relations are evaluated in greater detail. Regarding personal and civil conflict, attention is focused on attitudes and intentions, evaluating in addition the tendencies toward aggressive interpretations or reactions to conflict.

Accordingly, the variables are operationalized in psychometric scales with response categories based on frequency scales or Likert scales. Others are operationalized in questions not included in scales, which are part of so-called correlates and factors related to violent or nonviolent intentions and reactions.
## Table 2. Central Constructs of the ACTIVA Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agression of parents and caregivers toward children</td>
<td>3 questions (N111-N113)</td>
<td>Strauss (1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agression toward partner</td>
<td>3 questions (PA4, PA6, PA8)</td>
<td>Strauss (1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization by partner</td>
<td>3 questions (PA5, PA7, PA)</td>
<td>Strauss (1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agression toward non-family members</td>
<td>4 questions (OC1-OC3)</td>
<td>Strauss (1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family norms: acceptance of violence toward children and partner</td>
<td>6 questions (NO7-NO12)</td>
<td>Gallup Surveys, U.S. General Social Survey (1994), ACTIVA/PAHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social norms: acceptance of violence and illegality by the society</td>
<td>6 questions (NO7-NO12)</td>
<td>Cohen and Nisbett (1994), ACTIVA/PAHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto-efficacy for conflict-resolution</td>
<td>5 questions (HA1-HA5)</td>
<td>ACTIVA/PAHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes approving violence</td>
<td>11 questions (AC1-AC11)</td>
<td>Cohen and Nisbett (1994), ACTIVA/PAHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergroup relations: social intolerance</td>
<td>5 items</td>
<td>Eurobarometer (1995), ACTIVA/PAHO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Table 3. Correlates: Other Dimensions Not Constructed as Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Activa III</th>
<th>Sources utilized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Attitudes: Confidence in institutions</td>
<td>7 questions</td>
<td>U.S. General Social Survey (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IN1-IN7</td>
<td>ACTIVA/PAHO (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family norms</td>
<td>2 questions</td>
<td>ACTIVA/PAHO (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(RN1-RN4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying of weapons</td>
<td>4 questions</td>
<td>U.S. General Social Survey (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(DE20-DE23)</td>
<td>ACTIVA/PAHO (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media consumption</td>
<td>3 questions</td>
<td>ACTIVA/PAHO (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(D17-D19)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Attitudes: Anomie and other attitudes toward the system</td>
<td>4 questions</td>
<td>Eurobarometer (1995), ACTIVA/PAHO (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(V11-VI13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences of violence in the behaviors of the population</td>
<td>9 questions</td>
<td>Vélez, L.F. Center of Health and Violence Studies Cali, Colombia (1996)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Sociodemographic Variables used in the Project ACTIVA Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociodemographic Variables</th>
<th>Activa III</th>
<th>Sources Consulted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of persons in the home, their relationship, sex, age, schooling, and identification as wage earners</td>
<td>5 questions per family member (F1a a F15e)</td>
<td>Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS, 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee: their relationship with head of household, sex, age, schooling, and wage earners</td>
<td>5 questions (DE2a a DE2e)</td>
<td>Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS, 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcrowding: number of people, number of rooms</td>
<td>2 questions (DE1, DE3)</td>
<td>Population Censuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School attendance of persons in the household under 12 years of age</td>
<td>1 question (DE4)</td>
<td>Population Censuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity level</td>
<td>2 questions (DE7, DE8)</td>
<td>Surveys of Multiple Purpose Households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>2 question</td>
<td>Idem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational category</td>
<td>1 question</td>
<td>Population Censuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration status</td>
<td>3 questions (DE12a, DE122b, DE13)</td>
<td>Population Censuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion: denomination and church attendance</td>
<td>2 questions (DE14, DE15)</td>
<td>ACTIVA/PAHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>1 question (DE16)</td>
<td>ACTIVA/PAHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children (one's own and those cared for)</td>
<td>9 questions (N11-N19)</td>
<td>ACTIVA/PAHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status/Nuptiality</td>
<td>4 questions (DE6, PA1, PA3)</td>
<td>ACTIVA/PAHO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Study Design**

This study is a cross-sectional and cross-cultural survey that covers a representative sample of the population above 14 years of age in selected cities of the United States, Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The proposed studies will develop, pilot test, and implement a standardized survey methodology to assess cultural norms, attitudes, skills and experiences relating to violence. It will have as its unit of analysis the population from 18 to 70 years of age living in homes in the metropolitan areas of selected cities in the Region.
Data Collection Techniques

The main tool for data collection is a standardized written questionnaire with closed questions, which offers two options or a list of options that are exhaustive and mutually exclusive. Structured interviews will be used to obtain codifiable and quantifiable data from each survey respondent interviewed by telephone (Canada and the United States) or in his home (the rest of the cities). Each interviewer should complete 15-20 hours of training and practice before being allowed to complete a "real" interview. Ten hours of training in the classroom should be devoted to explaining how to ask and evaluate the questions, probes and clarifications, procedures for selection of respondents, the system for recording responses and reviewing the actual questionnaire. Another 3 to 5 hours of training is necessary to review the objectives of each question and practice the interview person to person and as group. During a final two-hour interview practice session, each person should be monitored and the supervisors should determine when each person is prepared to begin. The interview supervisors should receive an additional 10 hours of training on how to monitor the interviewers, solve problems related to recruitment of respondents, etc. The supervisors should verify at least 10% of the cases through home visits or calls to the telephone number to ask whether the interview was carried out. A performance record should be kept for each interviewer. This information should include productivity (interviews per hour), refusals, and number of consents after initial refusals, etc.

The quality assurance of the data depends on the intensive training of the interviewer under the strict supervision of the company conducting the survey and a trained member of the research team. If the work is carried out through a subcontract, the company selected for the survey must accept the protocol as presented here. The research team and the company contracted to carry out the survey should meet to evaluate periodic reports on the work carried out in order to guarantee the quality of the data and document any modification or adjustment of the procedure for selection of participants.

Personal Interviews in the Home

This technique will be used in most of the cities in Latin American countries. In the surveys conducted by an interviewer, some standard instructions will serve as a guide for interaction with each respondent. The instructions have the following elements: 1) greeting and introduction of the study, and obtaining subject consent, 2) presentation of the elements, 3) explanation and reaffirmation of confidentiality, etc. In the presentation of the elements, the interview consists of mentioning the element (in some cases) followed by a phrase or sentence with the content of the element. The respondent is then presented, verbally or on a card, precoded options for responses or reactions related to the content of the element. A trained interviewer presents each option neutrally and records the responses without any comment or reaction.
Telephone Interview Survey

This technique will be used in the cities in the United States and Canada. The procedures will follow well established protocols. In Texas, the Office of Research by Surveys will use a system of telephone interviews with the assistance of computers to conduct the survey.

Sampling and Selection of Subjects for Home Interviews

Size of the Sample

Assuming a maximum variance of 0.5, a confidence level of 95%, and a maximum error of 2.8, the size of the sample is defined as 1,200 people between 18 and 70 years of age living in homes in the metropolitan areas of the cities included in the study. As a selected individual will not be replaced, a 25% rejection rate should be anticipated in the lower and middle classes and 50% in the upper class. Accordingly, the number of contacts will be greater than 1,200. Independently of the foregoing, proper handling of possible rejections, reducing them to a minimum, should be guaranteed through training the interviewers.

Selection of Units for Sampling and Observation

First Phase: Selection of the Smallest Units of the Politico-Administrative Division of the City.

➢ The number of units of the politico-administrative division of the metropolitan region that should be included in the sample will be defined administratively. It is established that the number of units cannot be less than 50% of the total units.

➢ The two units with the highest population will always be assigned a selection probability equal to 1. The others will be selected randomly.

Important prior step: Prior to the second phase, a minimum of three socioeconomic classes (lower, middle and upper) should be created with the census segments of the units selected. To this end, the criteria established by the Bureaus of Statistics and Censuses to determine the classification of the segments by classes should be followed.7

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7 The criteria utilized for each country will be previously evaluated, in order to carry out the recommendations regarding the classification of segments in each of the classes.
Second Phase: Random Selection of the Census Segments, Weighted in Proportion to the Population (Proportional Population Selection-PPS) in each class.

Third Phase: Selection of Households:

- Based on the total number of dwellings in the segment, 10% will be calculated and that will be the number of dwellings to be selected.

- Based on the cartographic description of Statistics and Censuses, the dwellings will be selected randomly by a simple or systematic procedure, preferably, the second method. Each home selected should be contacted.

Fourth Phase: Selection of People in the Household

- Preselection on the blank questionnaires:

  In each questionnaire a systematic line sampling from the table of members of the household (A2) will be carried out. In order to guarantee perusal of the entire table, a starting point between 1 and the average number of adults (18 years and more) estimated for the city will be randomly selected based on the household survey data or more recent censuses.

  The average number of adults per household will be utilized as a reason to peruse the table. An asterisk will be placed on each line selected in this manner.

- Selection of Respondents in the Household

  The interviewer will fill in the table with the members of the home (A2) according to the following criteria:
  - Head
  - Spouse
  - Children, in descending order of age
  - Other family members in descending order of age.
  - Others non-family members in descending order of age.

Important: This order cannot be altered; otherwise, the entire selection will be affected and the sample will be invalidated.

The interviewer should interview all the people corresponding to a line with an asterisk. If a person is under 18 years of age or older than 70, he will not be interviewed.

This method implies the possibility that more than one person can be interviewed in the same household, or on the contrary, no one.
PROCEDURES TO PROTECT SUBJECTS

At each location, basic procedures will be established to protect subjects. These will include obtaining informed consent from each respondent and ensuring confidentiality of data, etc. These aspects will be an important part of the training of interviewers and for quality control.

PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The principal investigator at each site will assume direct responsibility for quality control during all the phases of the process, from interviewer training and supervision to data entry. The accuracy of data entry will be checked at each site for double entries in a sample of 100 interviews from the first batch at each site, including at least 10 from each data entry clerk. Individuals with a significant number of incorrect entries will be retrained or reassigned.

Coded data will be entered into a SPSS statistical program file with variable and value labels and delivered to the coordinating center on disks for merging and processing of the selected data. In addition to doing counts of the frequency of a variable, one by one, it is necessary to combine the information on two or more variable to describe the problem or identify relationships or obtain possible explanations for it. Three different kinds of cross-entry tabulations may be required:

1. Descriptive cross-tabulations: (to describe the problem under study).
2. Analytical cross-tabulations, in which groups are compared to determine differences.
3. Analytical cross-tabulations, that focus on exploring relationships between variables.

One major set of analyses will examine differences between the cities in distributions of responses to questions about experiences, norms, attitudes, self-efficacy, and skills related to different forms of violence. This will make it possible to rank each country on the level of these variables and to test the significance of different ranks. This will include comparisons of entire populations and the four age/gender groups sampled in each city.

Another major set of analyses will compare levels of theoretical variables between gender and age groups within a city and across the participating cities. Similar analyses will compare levels in demographic groups (e.g., higher or lower socioeconomic groups, employed or unemployed groups, etc). These analyses will enable the research team to identify the social groups that have the highest and lowest levels for the different variables of interest.
A third set of analyses will examine the relationships between variables in the theoretical model. For domestic, personal and inter-group conflict, variables relative to behaviors and theoretical process are evaluated. With regard to violence in the home, behavior will be related to norms, attitudes, and skills. For personal violence, interpretation and reactive tendencies, norms, attitudes, and intentions will be related to behavior. Although the number of items is small, each element of the theoretical process will be related to the reports on inter-group violence. In the case of international violence, only norms, attitudes, and skills are evaluated. The relationship between these variables will be assessed in additional analyses.

One of the focuses of these analyses will include non-parametric tests of the differences in the ratios. These will consist of descriptive tabulations and comparative cross-tabulations. The Chi-Square Test and Fisher's Exact Test will be used to determine the significance. These analyses will be carried out through the standard procedures of the SPSS statistical program. Dummy tables will be prepared from the analyses of the pilot survey for the analyses outlined above.

Following analysis of the pilot data, it will be possible to determine whether the responses to the different questions related to a particular variable may be combined to form a scale. For variables with good scalar characteristics (interval consistency, near-normal distribution) it will be appropriate to use the parametric statistics for the group comparisons (with t and F tests) and studies of relationships (with correlations and linear regression models) that are outlined in this section. The final analytical plans will be prepared from the analyses of the pilot survey.

**PILOT STUDY**

After the adjustment of items and adaptation to fit demographic and other item variations (if necessary), a set of 60 question booklets and answer sheets was prepared (in Spanish) for each site to use in pilot testing. The pilot test can be conducted with three uniform samples of ten men and ten women. These three samples are to be taken from the following groups: (1) university medical students or other students available for the study, (2) patients of a public clinic over 30 years of age or other generally representative adult groups, (3) residents or passersby in a poor neighborhood or from an area where attitudes may favor violence. Investigators are urged to use good judgement to ensure selection of diverse groups for pilot testing. In some sites focus groups and interviews may also be conducted.

The pilot analysis will identify item characteristics such as mean, distribution, variation, non-response and intercorrelation that will help determine how useful each item has been. For attitude and some other items, scalar and factor analyses will be used to judge the psychometric value of each item.

The research team at each site will also be asked to discuss items with some of the pilot test groups and to be prepared to offer their group or personal impressions or opinions and judgements about each item (whether it should be revised or deleted). Based upon this judgement, research teams will be asked to give a priority score to each item and make specific editorial revisions in a question booklet to be returned to the research
center. Based upon the data analysis and feedback from sites a final question booklet will be prepared for use in both household interviews and self-administered surveys at each site.

**Administrative Organization**

**Coordination and Responsibilities**

At the regional level, the study is conducted and coordinated by Pan American Health Organization through the Research Coordination Unit and the Violence and Health Regional Program.

The Organization will be responsible for the coordination and technical consulting for the research, from the planning stage to the publication and dissemination of the results. To this end, it will provide financial support for the application of the pilot questionnaire and the preparation of the general design of the study in each city. Responsibility for conducting the research and obtaining financial resources for the studies themselves will rest with the participating cities.

Technical cooperation will be provided by PAHO with the collaboration of the WHO Center for Health Promotion Research and Development of the School of Public Health of the University of Texas Houston, and the Psychological Research Institute of the University of Costa Rica, which has been designated as a center for the processing and analysis of the results of the pilot studies of the questionnaire, as well as of the final results.

The active participation of the Latin American research centers and institutions participating in the research project will be encouraged. For that purpose, a technical committee made up by the Center for Violence Studies at Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia, the Psychological Research Institute of the University of Costa Rica; the Laboratory of Social Sciences of Universidad Central of Venezuela; and the Institute of Religion Studies of the State University of Rio de Janeiro has been organized. The Center for Health Promotion of the University of Texas, headed by Prof. Alfred McAlister, and the Psychological Research Institute of the University of Costa Rica, headed by Prof. Marco Fournier, will be working as principal advisers to the committee and PAHO.


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Organización Panamericana de la Salud. Salud y violencia: Plan de Acción Regional, (documento PAHO/HPP/CIPS/).


Research Coordination
Health and Human Development Division
Research in Public Health

TECHNICAL PAPERS

1. Protocol of the Multicenter Study: Cultural Norms and Attitudes Toward Violence in Selected Cities of Latin America and Spain, Project ACTIVA

To obtain information or order copies of the technical papers, please contact the following address:

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