



SENSE OF COMMUNITY AS A RISK AND/OR PROTECTIVE FACTOR ASSOCIATED WITH CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE SIMÓN BOLÍVAR NEIGHBORHOOD, PAMPLONA MUNICIPALITY

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Abstract

The present study recognizes a sense of community as a quality of people who are part of a human group, in which they perceive themselves in similarity and interdependence with others and are part of a community. Therefore, the objective is to establish a sense of community as a risk or protective factor for delinquent behavior among youth and adolescents in the Simón Bolívar neighborhood of the municipality of Pamplona. This study understands that while its multicausality must be explored in depth to determine the actions to promote or eliminate in order to improve the risk level of a community that may be more vulnerable to the impact of such factors. To this end, a qualitative research approach and phenomenological design were conducted, using a focus group, in-depth interviews, and social mapping with key informants. The triangulation of these factors allowed us to reveal the presence of risk and protective factors. The results showed that elements of belonging, identity, and support networks are key to maintaining protective factors, such as the recognition of recreational and activity spaces, coordination with state programs and policies, and churches as channels for well-being strategies; while their absence, the loss of teamwork, and the prevalence of drug dealing establishments, among others, can increase the risk of criminal behavior in young people.

Keywords: Sense of community, criminal behavior, risk factors, protective factors, adolescents.

Introduction

Delinquency is understood as premeditated behavior in opposition to and violation of the rules and what has already been established; when reference is made to juvenile delinquent behavior, the fact that it can lead to negative consequences in the future that involve them and their environment is added, not to mention the implications before the justice system in the event of being detected (Vázquez, 2003). Inquiring into the etiology of criminal behavior implies not only attributing it to a psychopathology but also delving deeply into its biography, personality, background, social, cultural and of course family environment (Mendoza, et al, 2016), this by virtue of the fact that criminal behavior constitutes a legal category that does not allow establishing generalizations and encompassing all individuals who present it under the same profile due to its multicausality that precedes it and it is on this point that the risk factors for its presence are alluded to.

According to Morales (2020), this conduct has among its characteristics the fact that it is typical, unlawful and punishable that develops in a movement provided for by law regardless of its purpose, but that can also have a purpose governed by the will, these are the two fundamental theories of crime. However, it is recognized that there are still theoretical gaps around the causes, prevention, and management of crime (Cáceres, et al, 2016)

Certainly, the group of young people who participate in criminal acts is very varied both in their profiles and in the type of crime, whether they are against the person, property or the so-called status offenses that comprise that set of offenses that can only be committed by young people, as Sánchez (2012) points out.

In the case of adolescents, the vulnerability of this stage of the life cycle is added to the contextual, family, school, and social conditions in general that act to protect or, on the contrary, unfavorably in the behavior of individuals, giving rise to criminal behavior (Quitian et al, 2020); Certainly, during adolescence, psychosocial risks increase in the face of phenomena such as the consumption of psychoactive substances, problems of social adaptation, risky sexual practices together with others associated with emotional dysregulation, physical and psychological changes, among various challenges typical of going through this stage (Torrado, et al, 2021).

For Morales (2020), there are both sociocultural and socio-normative factors that are closely linked to the behaviors of young people, these macrosocial factors being that must be addressed in the study of the appearance of criminal behavior; In this order of ideas, it is possible to refer to the theory of social learning under the framework of the theory of social learning. or the attitudes and beliefs of their social environment reinforce deviant acts (Akers, 1998 cited by Morales, 2020).

In Colombia, the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF, 2015), highlights the importance of delving into those elements of the community and the context in general, as well as the meso factors such as family and school and the micro factors that are the

individual in order to explain the reason for the immersion of young people in the criminal world. In general, risk factors increase the probability of criminal behavior occurring, as opposed to protective factors, which decrease this probability as mentioned by Quitian et al (2020).

In this order of ideas, the lack of social ties or social roots is shown as a factor that leads to the predisposition to commit crimes as well as the absence of social commitment and participation within a community; another position refers to social disorganization and lack of structure can generate a break between structural capacities and the cultural and social norms and objectives that encourage behavior against them (Colombian Institute of Family Welfare - ICBF, 2015).

From the perspective of social maladaptation, it should be noted that the characteristics of the community environment also become elements of risk and it is on this point that the sense of community is addressed within the range of risk or protective factors. As a protective factor, belonging to a community can serve as a frame of reference and construction of common sense; however, if the conditions of community dynamics do not give rise to full and healthy development but on the contrary exacerbate the vulnerabilities of a person or group, it would be evident as a risk factor. (Junta Nacional de Drogas- Uruguay, 2021)

However, when we talk about a sense of community, we are referring to two key concepts in the psychological sense of community and the empowerment that derives from the demand for community empowerment that are useful when designing and evaluating spaces for social intervention. Certainly, it is a subjective experience that highlights belonging to a community, in which the perception of belonging, interdependence and the feeling of being part of a larger structure that is built with others intervene, being three characteristics that according to Sánchez (2001 cited by Maya, 2007) support this sense: "an important nucleus around the social interaction between the members of a group, the perception of territorial roots and a general feeling of mutuality and interdependence" (p.3). (Maya, 2007)

Methodology

The study was developed under a qualitative approach, which addresses realities in a subjective and intersubjective way, starting from the meanings and symbols that construct the social world (Domínguez, 2000 cited by Salazar, 2020). This approach is ascribed to the interpretive paradigm, focused on the meanings of the behavior and social life of human beings. For the purposes of this study, this approach allows us to delve deeply into the sense of community and its role as a risk factor or protector of criminal behaviors in young people. (Barrantes, 2014)

Within this approach, it is inserted in a phenomenological design which seeks to describe the experience and this is the object of analysis from the internal perception of the subject and even taking an explanatory phase of the phenomena (Oré, et al, 2023).

Population and sample

Taking the Simón Bolívar neighborhood as the unit of analysis, the selection of participants is carried out having as inclusion criteria that they were community leaders who know the neighborhood and at the same time have experience in working with the community, young people and adolescents were also taken referenced by key informants, who had knowledge of the problems of the community.

The application of each of the techniques was developed after signing informed consent by the participants.

Techniques and Instruments

Social Cartography

It is a participatory technique and is a very useful strategy for gathering information from the knowledge of the community itself in the layout of the territory; it is then understood as a diagnostic tool of collective construction that allows approaches from culture, which lead to a reading of their realities and at the same time strengthens the sense of community belonging (Piñero, et al, 2022).

Its characteristics allow working with information in a dynamic and visual way, which clearly explains the relationships between the community and its environment, interactions with the context and generates a global perspective of the territory as a mental representation of the community. In the particular case of this study, cartography was selected as a method through which access to community knowledge and reflection on its present, its dynamics and the changes that can be generated are favored.(Herrera, 2008)

Focus Group

This tool for collecting qualitative information has been implemented by social researchers, in accordance with realism and contextual constructivism, often analyzed in the light of previous categories on which the questions of the group interview or discussion among the participants are based (Rodas & Pacheco, 2020). In the process, the researcher gathers subjective information about the focus of his interest, but from the point of view of the interviewees whose number ranges between 6 and 12 individuals and whose answers are recorded for later analysis, for the present study it was carried out with a total of six people. During the implementation of the focus group, the guiding question of the discussion for this case is raised: "What does it mean to you to be a member of the Simón Bolívar neighborhood?" In the process, the opportunity was provided for each participant to express their opinion within what is being discussed without necessarily establishing an order of these opinions, thus, they share their way of seeing the situation respecting the position and different from the other. In its application during this study, community leaders and community members participated, who contributed their perceptions regarding the topic and guided by the researchers so as not to overpass or leave the central theme of the question.

In-depth interview

Qualitative and dialogic technique that is developed face-to-face between the interviewer and the interviewee that takes place throughout an open dialogue, using a script of questions

that for this study consisted of eight questions, but at the same time gives freedom to the key informant to develop their answers and even formulate other questions from these. all of them around the theme that has been previously established; despite this, they are systematic and rigorous in accordance with the structure and approach of the current study. The interviews were conducted individually, recording and subsequently transcribing the answers given by the participants without altering their content.(Sistema Nacional de Evaluación, Acreditación y Certificación de la Calidad Educativa - Sineace, 2020)

Data Analysis Techniques

The answers provided by the participants in each of the techniques applied were transcribed, then a matrix was designed for the analysis of each of the instruments to then perform the triangulation, understood as a tool that facilitates the articulation of information from one or more sources, facilitating the validation of the data (Charres and Villalaz, 2018). From this triangulation, a reflexive analysis emerges in each of the emerging subcategories within the study, thus identifying risk and protective factors implicit in the participants' discourse.

Results

Below is the transcription of some of the participants' responses to the sense of community, some of them referring to it as a protective factor and others as a risk factor

Board

1.

Interview and focus group responses

Factor to Identification Community Sense Analysis be analyzed		
Factor	Belonging	. "The truth is that I feel very proud, I have lived here in this neighborhood for 18 years and it seems to me a very quiet neighborhood."
protector		"... I think that, although people have, so to speak, the neighborhood underneath, I think that there are many good things in the neighborhood that can be valued and that makes me feel proud to belong to the neighborhood."
		"I'm proud to live here in this neighborhood, I've lived here since I was born"

Identity		"For me it means having a big place, where I can have contact with nature, we can find animals from the countryside too, there are still many good people"
		"The church, I think that is also good, we have a church and well, people attend there and for example sometimes the father does activities where everyone meets and does good activities..."
Support networks		"Of course there is the church, where they prepare children for first communions, there are the Christian centers"
		"There used to be a youth group but since they almost didn't go then they stopped doing that..."
Risk factor	Social problems	"What happens is that this situation that has overflowed a lot and as if one's capacity diminishes, there one already feels defeated and as if one is no longer able to continue facing this situation..."
	Leadership	"There are many what happens is that as you say, they do not want to commit, that for X or Y reason, they have a job or maybe the house or suddenly it is not easy for them to come to a meeting, that, to a talk, that we are going to interact with the boy, the boy's father, why? because they do not want to commit, but there are many leaders and good ones"

Fountain. Own elaboration

From the social cartography, the physical spaces that the neighborhood has and that allow the community to feel identified with the other neighborhoods were highlighted, it has some green areas within its same location as in neighboring sectors for recreation, they also identified some representative physical spaces in the community, such as the different Catholic and Christian churches, the community hall, sports spaces such as coliseum, bio-healthy gym and different open spaces. Now, within the risk, the cartography detected the vending houses or as they are commonly called "vending pots", secluded and dimly lit places with the potential for the presence of criminal acts, the coliseum and a wooded area of a neighboring neighborhood where not even the police enter and are not enough to stop criminal acts.

The role of leaders within the influence they highlight for the inhabitants should not be neglected, being they who promote cohesion in the community, they are felt as part of it and as actors who seek to enhance the development of the neighborhood and in that same sense, perceived from their contribution and recognized by the community. In the particular case

of the neighborhood under study and according to the responses of the participants, they can be taken as a risk factor to the extent that they manage to articulate actions among leaders, undertake common initiatives and strengthen teamwork.

In addition, institutional support networks play a primary role in this sense of community, since the conjunction of Catholic and Christian churches that are not mutually exclusive and that promote principles of well-being common to the inhabitants of the neighborhood undoubtedly strengthen the scenario of projector factors in joint work with social programs and between the control of the State.

Discussion

Criminal behavior refers to a number of factors that refer to it as multi-causal and that at the same time derives in problems of various kinds that impact on the personal, family and social level. Thus, within the study it was possible to make visible this set of factors that can act to the detriment or favor of these behaviors in the population of young people and adolescents in the neighborhood, due to the vulnerability of the stage of the life cycle in which they find themselves, which is of course added to other undeniable elements of their history and reality. However, it should be clarified that, as stated (Zambrano, et al, 2012), it is not possible to point out that a group of young people, even if they are exposed to the same risk conditions, equally account for criminal behaviors, and it is in this that the protective factors have a lot to do with it, for the purposes of this study, of their community and the meaning that they give it.

The feeling of belonging and even identity roots people from a psycho-affective perspective, including a sense of territory that goes beyond geographical aspects and where the set of interactions, spaces, support networks and shared objectives are often protective factors in the recognition of the positive aspects of their community. and the progress they witness over the years, this is referred to by Blanco (1988 cited by Hombrados, 2011) who alludes precisely to the fact that this psychological factor nourishes the sense of community and therefore strengthens it as a protective factor.

Opposite to this appears the indifference, fatigue and resignation in the attitude of the members of the community as a result of the negative elements and the persistence of aspects perceived as negative and little improvable within their context, which consequently is evidenced as a risk factor in the sense of community and to that extent they lose the impulse to continue working for and for the community. on the contrary, they may begin to be favored by the physical and psychosocial spaces that promote criminal behavior and their membership in the community, defined by Sánchez (2007) as affiliation to a special significance for people that allows them to experience attachment to the community, is contrary to what is desirable.

Certainly, it is not possible to generalize the conditions that permeate the context of the Simón Bolívar neighborhood, and point to a single set of elements or their perception by the community as protective or at risk in its entirety; it is important to note the perspective of

its members and in this sense, it is relevant to cite the perspective of Krause (2001) who in explicit terms refers:

In any case, we work daily in this type of non-ideal communities, we must accept that: either we are building communities where there are none, or we require a less demanding definition, in which there is also room for communities that are in an imperfect state. (p.52)

What it is about, according to the author, is not to frame the concept of community in a harmful idealism and in this direction, belonging to it because it does not comply with those predisposed parameters, but to allow oneself to be in tune with the qualities of the neighborhood, to adopt a posture of pride in one's own and interest in improving it so that they do not continue to appear on the social map as a risk factor or predictor of the criminal behavior of their young people and adolescents.

However, it cannot be denied that there is a sense of community within the neighborhood, accounting for elements such as membership, influence, integration, satisfaction of needs, and shared emotional connection, elements referred to by Mc Millan and Chavis (cited by Hombrados, 2011), all of which, from the best perspective, provide a protective factor that will potentially allow the prevention of criminal behavior in adolescents and young people.

Conclusions

The sense of community within the Simón Bolívar neighborhood refers to the approach of a complex construct in which various elements intervene that guide its perception both endogenously and exogenously. This consolidates the importance for this study of the choice of the sense of community as one of the variables involved in the prevention of criminal behavior in young people and adolescents, showing itself to be a protective or risk factor for the development of this type of behavior in a population whose stage of the life cycle shows it to be mostly vulnerable.

According to the findings, it was possible to conclude that there are clearly protective factors that within the sense of community are recognized by different actors of the same, framing in them spatial, leadership, institutional elements and other activities that can generate protection for them from their own perception, favoring the immersion of other beneficial actions for this particular population. maintaining and promoting open spaces for participation designed for prevention.

In the same way, risk factors linked to the indifference or apathy of some inhabitants as a result of recurrent problems and labels already positioned in the perception of some people around insecurity, the sale and consumption of substances and the absence of many articulation actions are less forceful, added to the conformism that arises from the insufficiency of authorities and presence of the state in the face of adverse conditions already detected.

Based on this analysis and from the perspective of social and community psychology, the invitation is extended to generate future research with greater depth on this topic, following up on the proposals and designing strategies that reduce the impact of risk factors. Likewise, studies should have a focus on participation and action in which inhabitants become active actors of change, teamwork is encouraged and people are empowered from a sense of community.

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