

Stressful vital events in the infancy and adolescence of sentenced people in Spain

Acontecimientos vitales estresantes en la infancia y adolescencia de personas sentenciadas en España

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Abstract

It is a qualitative study of autobiographical registers of sentenced interns of a crime in a Spain Penitentiary Center; 23 stories are studied through the analysis of the narratives to investigate the lived experiences of the Stressful Vital Events, recurrent in this population, and how they are interrelated in the development of their lives; these events are considered events that impact life, including the identity of individuals (Sanz Rodríguez *et al.*, 2009). The results allowed the configuration of a map where three big recurrent categories of the Stressful Vital Events of the autobiographies stand out, each integrated by two related elements: presence of school trajectory and educational/relational style, addictions and crime, and finally, intrafamilial violence and couple rupture.

Key words: Delinquency, stressful vital events, autobiographies, infancy and adolescence.

Resumen

Es un estudio cualitativo de registros autobiográficos de internos sentenciados por algún delito en un Centro Penitenciario de España; se estudian 23 historias mediante el análisis de narrativas para indagar las experiencias vividas de los Acontecimientos Vitales Estresantes, recurrentes en esta población, y cómo se van entrelazando en su desarrollo de vida; estos hechos son considerados sucesos que impactan la vida, e incluso, la identidad de los individuos (Sanz Rodríguez *et al.*, 2009). Los resultados permitieron configurar un mapa donde destacan tres grandes categorías recurrentes de AVE en las autobiografías, integradas cada una por dos elementos afines: presencia de adicciones y delito, trayectoria escolar y estilo educativo/relacional, y por último, violencia intrafamiliar y ruptura de pareja.

Palabras clave: Delincuencia, acontecimientos vitales estresantes, autobiografías, infancia y adolescencia.

INTRODUCTION

The causes that lead individuals to commit crimes are being extensively studied at the moment. There is a broad consensus: the mere fact of imprisoning an alleged perpetrator for breaking the law does not solve the underlying problem and at the same time, violates the human rights of people who are deprived of their freedom (Lippert and Hamilton, 2020). It also fails to achieve the reintegration, reincorporation, or re-education of prisoners, which should be the objective of removing the individual from society (Caplan, 2006; Freixa, 1978; Zepeda, 2004).

Against this background, the scientific community uses various theoretical and epistemological approaches to analyze the variables that contribute to causing the problem. The diversity of proposals that have emerged to answer why people commit crimes has spawned a range of typologies and classifications (Alloza, 2001; Vázquez, 2003). Foremost among these is criminology, which considers two general categories: a) traditional criminology, which includes studies based on positivist methodologies, with scientific contributions from the social sciences, the legal sciences and psychology; b) a second category, which focuses on the analysis of macrostructural variables oriented towards the political and economic system and social disadvantage, particularly the theoretical positioning of critical criminology (Aebi, 2004; DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz, 2018). Finally, there are also classifications that observe the elementary units of analysis, such as those that focus on the individual and personality, mental disorders, such as sociopathy, and the innate characteristics of the individual. Others propose larger units, which acknowledge that the person under study is part of a familial and social context (Farrington, 2002; Samanci, 2010; Torío, Peña and Rodríguez, 2008).

Within this accumulation of prior knowledge, it has been recognized that the construction of the human being and crime are not one-dimensional but rather multidimensional and multicausal. Accordingly, a qualitative methodology is used to see the broader context rather than attempting to assess a single event as a variable or predictive factor of criminal behavior, which will enable us to analyze and understand the autobiographies of a sample of 23 inmates at a correctional facility in Spain that recount various stressful life events they experienced before being imprisoned, which affected both their development and their behavior. The documents prepared by the inmates were studied using narrative analysis. For their treatment, it was assumed that the records were in storied form. Some authors

consider them extremely useful, since they provide significant information on the way individuals internalize and give meaning to life events (Goodley, 2001; Crossley, 2002).

THEORETICAL ASPECTS

One of the perspectives that includes a broader context in the analysis of psychosocial health focuses on stressors (Rey-Bruguera, Calonge-Romano and Martínez-Arias, 2017). This perspective has also given rise to the study of Stressful Life Events (SLEs) in the development of the lives of individuals and their physical, psychological, and social impact. The latter provides a framework for evaluating various changes and events from the micro to the macro social level. Its importance lies in the influence these events can have on the identity, psychosocial development, and skills of an individual (Sanz Rodríguez *et al.*, 2009).

SLEs are events that have been classified as part of para-normative events, in other words, those that the population does not usually experience with this magnitude or frequency (Jiménez, Menéndez and Hidalgo, 2008). According to Suárez (2010), defining SLEs is not easy due to the different definitions that exist of them. However, he points out that the fundamental components to be considered in this category are events that are important in everyday life and have negative aspects that will modify the lives of individuals.

A review of this topic showed that there are studies that describe the impact of SLEs on mental health, the low level of psychological adaptation (Lila, Gracia and Murgui, 2013) and behavior, while others point to their indirect effect on the physical integrity of individuals.

Studies that observe the former include the effects of SLEs due to the stress generated in everyday life because of the age or instability of individuals, which begins in the transition period between adolescence and adulthood. Zolog *et al.* (2011) regard age as a significant mediator of anxiety, with those under 18 displaying higher levels, as borne out by a sample of Spanish youth.

There are also SLEs linked to the families of the subjects studied, which, it has been argued, have the greatest impact on psychological well-being (Kulkarni and Patwardhan, 2015). According to Sanz Rodríguez *et al.* (2009), there is a positive correlation between symptomatic behavior and events that occurred in the family of origin. They observed the presence of family discord in some of its members, externalizing personality, and the expression of rebellious, oppositional behavior. Peleg (2014) has also

found that family members who experience SLEs are at risk of experiencing intergenerational triangulation and less differentiation of themselves from other people.

SLEs are defined as conflictive relationships and violence —whether received or observed— in the family (Rey-Bruguera *et al.*, 2017; Sanz Rodríguez *et al.*, 2009). This proposal includes research on child victims of abuse (Kim *et al.*, 2014), which indicates the involvement of childhood abuse and SLEs in the risk of developing moderate or severe craving in adulthood. Likewise, Allwood *et al.* (2012) mention that early exposure to violence leads young people to lose the will to live. This is the case of children living in poor, conflictive communities, where these situations lead them to despair. This state of mind mediates the relationship between adverse life events and crime.

Over a decade ago, (Maschi, 2006) found that the accumulation of certain stressful life events increases the likelihood of juvenile delinquency, based on the theory that minor events cause an accumulation of tension or exposure to violence, and are therefore a factor that warrants exploration. Maschi and Bradley (2008) subsequently presented findings on extreme violence. They observed that young people who reported involvement in violent crimes had also experienced greater exposure to violence, stressful events, anger, and close relationships with criminal peers, with anger being the aspect with the greatest influence on violent crime.

Crime takes on a different dimension when context is included in the analysis. In the past few decades, the following have been considered risk factors: poverty (Berti and Pivetti, 2019), living in areas with unemployment, low parental supervision and SLEs. All these are observed, both as risk factors and as indicators for considering them within prevention proposals (Hoffmann, 2003). The reasons for considering the socioeconomic context, especially that of low-income sectors, is due to greater stressors and more extensive use of internal coping strategies, mainly because upper middle-class families have a greater tendency to use social support as a coping strategy (Cracco and Blanco Larrieux, 2015). Finally, regarding this proposal, it is pertinent to point out that poverty itself cannot be considered as a determinant, but rather as a part of the life stressors linked to social and economic policies.

Another aspect of the context is violence, currently among the most relevant factors, and dating violence, which has also been considered within the analysis of stressful life events (Chen and Foshee, 2015).

As can be seen, previous research refers to SLEs and their relationship with well-being and/or psychosocial discomfort, particularly depression (Fanti, Colins and Andershed, 2019; Jennings *et al.*, 2019), the presence of different types of violence in people's development and their association with problems, including the one explored in this study. It should be noted, however, that there are other studies that do not mention violence directly as an SLE, yet do show its impact on the development of individuals, as we can observe in the Center for Development Research (CIDAC, 2016) proposal that conducted a survey of convicted juvenile offenders, which corroborated that the subjects had experienced some form of mistreatment in their homes: insults, abandonment, neglect, humiliation, excessive punishment, and even sexual abuse. Mcleer and Dehart (2013) found a correlation between instability in adolescence, rootlessness and frequent changes of school, with inconsistency in the caregivers of these youths being reported as a major factor.

There are also studies suggesting that SLEs are linked to physical harm in people (largely caused by self-harm) in suicide attempts. Suicides have been related to the experience of violence and to a lower perception of support according to Guillén *et al.* (2015). Likewise, it has been reported that the lethality of the attempt is proportional to the hopelessness experienced by those attempting to take their own lives (Jaiswal *et al.*, 2016). Grover *et al.* (2009) reported that suicidal thoughts increase with stressful events or exposure to stress in the lives of young students (Sokratous *et al.*, 2013; Phillips, Carroll and Der, 2015). Physical harm related to SLEs includes that derived from harmful substance use and risky activities. Tamers *et al.* (2014) point to the increase in alcohol consumption in individuals during stressful events. At the same time, other studies associated negative SLEs with the adolescent population, noting that their impact predicted anxiety symptoms and involvement in criminal activities and other behavioral problems (Rubens *et al.*, 2013).

The importance of observing the problems of individuals in context lies in being able to provide alternatives for their prevention and intervention in the place where the stress is generated, which can evolve into manifestations that impact both the individual and society. The literature has argued that social ties are important for reducing stressful events. First, it refers to the importance of positive family relationships, both for internal and external adjustment, hence their configuration as protective factors against the negative consequences of stressors in the life development of young people (Oliva *et al.*, 2008). Second, they are required to mediate the

decrease in somatization—an aspect present in the negative life events of the individual—because of which maintaining social ties constitutes a means of social support (Singh and Dubey, 2015) and of promoting the development of problem-solving skills and consequently as a protective factor in individuals (Grover *et al.*, 2009). Greater problem-solving skills are therefore thought to be associated with a lower perception of negative events in life (Eskin *et al.*, 2014). Today's scientific literature confirms that the structure or sequence of SLEs in everyday life is an important part of our adaptation and, therefore, of interest to people.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the life stories of 23 prison inmates at a Therapeutic Unit in Spain to identify, through their narratives, which SLEs they record most frequently in their accounts as part of their experience in childhood and adolescence, and to assess how these are intertwined with negative psychosocial effects in their life course.

An important aspect to consider is that SLE evaluations have mainly been undertaken using quantitative methodology. However, in the past decade, qualitative research has enjoyed greater acceptance in different disciplines (Hoeber and Shaw, 2017). In this vein, one of the proposals for the integration of qualitative research into social research indicates that with the advent of new technologies, the distinctions between the two methodologies will become blurred (Leppink, 2017). Qualitative research is becoming an alternative for the analysis of SLEs since it makes it possible to include the interaction of multiple variables through a comprehensive analysis.

The purpose of this methodology is to make sense of or interpret social problems in terms of the research subject (Meo and Navarro, 2009). It is based on the idea that the stories lend meaning to the actions of individuals while the events experienced give an integral meaning to the course of their lives (Cornejo, Mendoza, and Rojas, 2008). The analysis of SLEs makes it possible to study their impact on both favorable and unfavorable events for the healthy or symptomatic development of individuals.

METHOD

Participants

This is a qualitative, *ex post facto*, cross-sectional study with a sample of 23 male inmates from a Penitentiary Center in Spain, selected through an intentional procedure. These inmates were convicted for aggravated offences against people and property. Those who voluntarily agreed to participate and were serving a sentence in the Therapeutic Unit of the Peniten-

tiary Center during the period between January and December 2014 were considered eligible for the study. A final sample of 23 adult inmates was obtained through saturation points during the initial data collection and analysis phases. The sample has a broad age range, from 18 to 68 (with a mean age of 34.21).

Instrument and procedure

The observation of the composition and sequence of SLEs in the life trajectory of the inmates, as well as their relationship, with both criminal behavior and other moderating factors, was carried out through an autobiographical record. In the present study, this technique made it possible to draw inferences about the presence or absence of the variables under study, as well as the possible relationship between them at critical points in the stories written by the inmates.

The stories were written by the subjects as a condition for reducing their sentences by going to a Therapeutic Unit. To be eligible for participation, they had to undergo a process of therapy and to go from a complainant status to recognition of the crime. Inmates had to provide an autobiographical account of the life events, experiences and personal feelings up to the time they had committed the crime for which they had been convicted. Subjects received timely information regarding the dimensions, limits and purposes of the procedure, so that their participation would be based on clear information about their role as research subjects. Their informed consent was subsequently obtained, and it should be noted that they had the permission of the administrative authorities, as well as the technical and ethical commissions involved in the Therapeutic Unit.

The story writing was controlled by consistency and comparing them with prison records. According to this criterion, the crime committed by the inmates was identified in the Correctional Facility data. A matrix was subsequently constructed to systematically establish the relationship between the crime and the SLEs mentioned in the stories, on the assumption that the autobiographical account would mention the SLEs prior to the commission of the crime for which they had been sentenced.

The inmates used pen and paper to write their autobiographical reports, which were subsequently transcribed into Word for analysis by the MaxQda 18 computer program. In accordance with certain methodological requirements, cases in which text analysis detected that the reports did not provide content in the format of the autobiographical report requested by the Therapeutic Unit authorities were excluded. The analysis of reports

by this program yielded reliable information through the concurrence of indicators between cases and their consistent presence in each one of them.

Analysis technique

The documents prepared by the inmates were studied using narrative analysis. For their treatment, it was assumed that the reports were in a storied form. Some authors consider them very useful, since they provide relevant information on the way individuals internalize and give life events meaning (Goodley, 2001; Crossley, 2002). It is thereby possible to investigate the way subjects connect various events through their lived experiences. In keeping with this perspective, Josselson (2006) states that narrative analysis focuses on the meanings people use to organize and connect their experiences. This enables us to frame the study undertaken within the analysis of the autobiographical reports of the inmates to identify the way they perceive SLEs and their association with their affective states prior to the commission of crimes.

This study is based on the technique known as paradigmatic content analysis, through which similarities and differences in the stories are explored. The contribution of this technique lies in extracting generalizations about the central themes that comprise the accounts of the subjects.

Following Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998), paradigmatic analysis consists of fragmenting the text and subjecting each part of a story to an examination of contents and meanings. There are many variants of this type of analysis depending on the objective of the study and the narrative material. The use of one or the other depends on the most prominent criterion in the procedure. Sometimes the quantitative saturation of the issues contained in the stories predominates and at others, the hermeneutical treatment of the meanings that subjects give to the events mentioned in their stories. However, both procedures can be complemented in successive cycles. In this study, a combination of both paradigmatic analysis techniques was used, in the following phases:

1. Initially, text analysis was applied to the autobiographical report to detect inconsistencies in the structure of the stories and determine their honesty. Twenty-three of them underwent paradigmatic narrative analysis to detect possible associations between the variables under study.
2. Subsequently, open, axial and selective coding was undertaken to categorize SLEs, types of crime and the possible presence of SLE mode-

rating factors, so that possible relationships between the categories of these variables could also be established.

3. A comparative analysis was carried out of the dimensions and common categories of SLEs, types of crimes and the possible absence of common moderating factors in some reports.
4. Cases were classified based on the associations observed between the composition of the predominant categories of SLEs and affective states, prior to the commission of crimes.
5. The meanings of the main themes of the stories were obtained.
6. The consistency of the intra- and inter-case themes was analyzed.
7. The associations between the SLE categories and other variables in the reports analyzed were obtained by induction.

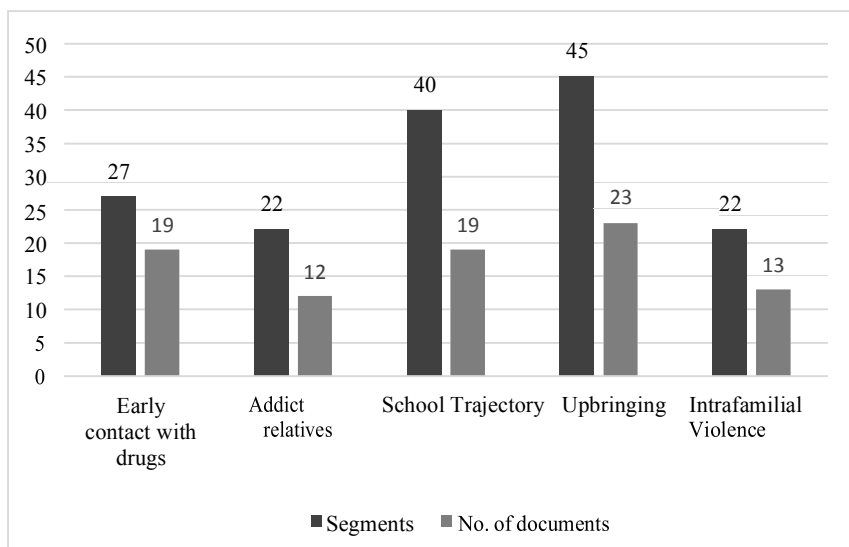
RESULTS

Given that the presence of SLEs in people's lives is as an important part of their adaptation, their structure and sequence in people's lives is also of interest. Accordingly, the life stories were read and reread through coding to obtain codes and categories of stressful life events and subsequently undertake a comparative analysis of the common codes found in the stories. This made it possible to proceed to the conceptual arrangement of major categories to confirm the initial theoretical framework of the SLEs present in the subjects interviewed.

Analysis of the co-occurrence of the codes in these writings enabled us to discard those that do not coincide frequently in the stories and, at the same time, to identify those that converge most frequently. Accordingly, other SLEs present were excluded, such as economic hardship, the death or illness of a direct relative and changes of residence. The following were the main causes of stress in this study: educational style, with 45 segments present in the 23 stories analyzed; events during the subject's School Trajectory, with 40 segments obtained in 19 of the 23 life stories; early contact with drugs, with 27 segments in 19 of the stories; and the presence of addicted relatives close to the subject, with 22 segments in just over half the interviews, as well as violence within families (see Figure 1).

According to the SLE theory, these events in the life of prison inmates are classified as para-normative events. In other words, they are not expected or desirable for their proper development (Jiménez, Menéndez, and Hidalgo, 2008). Due to their frequency, these stressful para-normative or life events in this group of people can be classified into three categories, each consisting of three components (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Found categories of SLEs in life stories and number of documents



Source: compiled by the author.

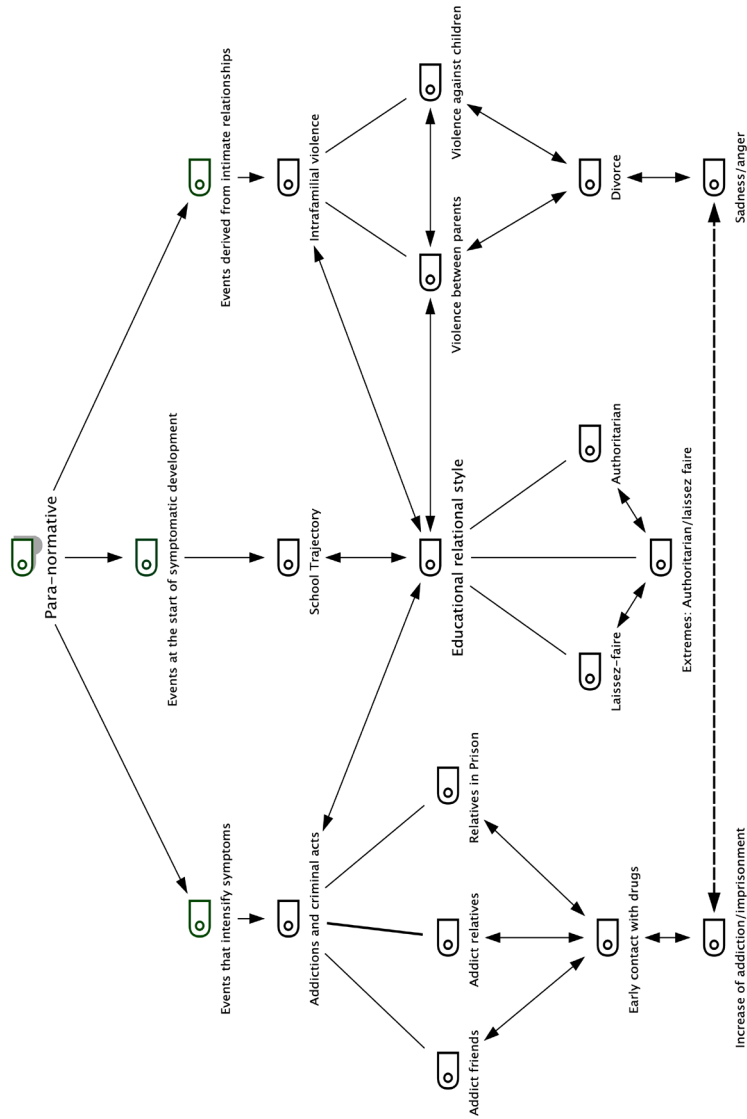
1. Events at the beginning of symptomatic development: Educational/relational style and School Trajectory.
2. Stressful events that maintain the intensification of symptoms: Addictions and crime.
3. Events derived from intimate relationships: Intra-familial violence and the breakup of the couple relationship.

The above data were used to draw a map of the SLEs according to their appearance in the subjects' narratives.

Events at the beginning of symptomatic development: Educational/relational style and School Trajectory

The analysis began with the code that appeared most often in the life stories and was expressed early in the lives of the interviewees, in other words, the reference to stressful events at the beginning, and educational development in the formal education system and upbringing style and, linked to the latter, the relationship style established in the parental system in this process. The results include firstly the "laissez-faire" style (52.2 percent) in the way parental figures relate to children. This was followed by the "authoritarian style" (30.4 percent).

Figure 2: Map of Stressful Life Events



Source: compiled by the author.

No narratives about an authoritative style, as described in the theory, were found (Baumrind, 2005), although there is a third style, which fluctuates between “being authoritarian and laissez-faire” (17.4 percent).

Laissez-faire. This code was found in the narratives of over half the subjects. It refers to the meanings attributed by the inmates to family care, consisting of the non-existent or low control over arrival and departure times from the home, as well as the lack of attention to the orders, rules and actions directed at young children. We exemplify this with extracts from the narrations given below.

(...) As a child, I was already stealing cars and shops, with people who were older than me, at home I had no curfew, I would turn up at three or four in the morning or I would not go home to sleep and nothing happened; until one day, wunce [*sic*] I stole a 124 sport ... (4 CPE¹).

My parents didn't find out because they warked [*sic*] a lot, so we would have everything we needed. The only one who controlled me a little woz [*sic*] my sister, but when I was 14, she got married. So, I was free to do whatever I wanted... I was kikked [*sic*] out several times from thee [*sic*] institute, but I managed to stop my parents finding out. The neighbors began two [*sic*] talk and tell my parents that I was not doing well, of course my parents believed me, when I told them that this woz [*sic*] not true (6 CPE).

...I must say that my father was never strict. He never told me off and he always explained things calmly. My mother used to explain things by yelling at me. My parents never explained things clearly when they were telling me off, so I did not pay [*sic*] them any attention and always did what I wanted to (21 CPA).

Authoritarian. This style was found in 30.4 percent of the autobiographies. The participants' accounts refer to the perception of rigid authority on the part of one of the parents as a means of correcting the children's behavior, and the resulting aggression they experienced in childhood:

(...) I hung around with my classmates, I answered back, in other words, I was a brat, I started to misbehave at home, I escaped when they punished me and in sixth grade, they gave me my first joint and I liked it; at school they did not want me anymore, they expelled me. And when I got home my mother would beat me and she would punish me but I only listined to [*sic*] to my brother (23 CPA).

I was shy and a bad student. I used to hang out with the few friends I hadd [*sic*] to play stupid pranks... the worst one I remember woz [*sic*] throwing a stone on the highway and causing an accident ... When I got home my father beet

¹ Indicates the numbers given to each autobiography comprising the sample and the type of crime of which they were accused Crimes against people (CPE), crimes against property (CPA).

[sic] the daylight out of me with punches, kicks, hair pulling and sow [sic] on...(15 CPA).

(...) Their [sic] were seven of us, we never went hungry, [sic] exept when my father drank, he hit me for no reeson [sic]. Time went by, and I didn't go to school most of the time, since I uset [sic] to play truant a lot (8 CPE).

Authoritarian/laissez-faire. This type of relationship was found in the meanings contained in 17.2 percent of the autobiographies. What characterizes this type of exercising authority by parental figures is on the one hand, exercising violence through blows to attempt to impose their authority or orders yet with a lack of effective follow-up of the indications given to children. At the same time, it was observed that those responsible for looking after the children exercised authority through polarized rather than synchronized actions.

(...) I remember that my father used to tell us off for always being outside playing and not respecting the schedules. He also used to beat us when he found out that we were stealing in bars, although I didn't [sic] pay much attention to him. He told me that it hert [sic] him mor [sic] than mee [sic] when he hit me and aftur [sic] a few days I was back at it. My father told me that the necst [sic] time they told him something I would be grounded. At that age, since I was eight years old, I used to skip class. I fooled my grandmother by lying to her that I was gowing [sic] to class when I stayed out playing with my brother and my friends (10 CPE).

The relationship with my grandparents was quite good, but it is true that there was a lot of respect, especially with my grandfather because as I told you before, he liked discipline a lot. With my grandmother it was different, she spoiled me more (illegible) and sometimes she bought me sweets behind my grandfather's back, because he said that eating that shit rotted your teeth (19 CPA). I also remember [sic] that my mother locked us up becoz [sic] she couldint [sic] handle us. She couldin't [sic] even bathe becoz [sic] my sister and I ran away and wentt [sic] our different ways, so she used to lok [sic] us up and that was that (11 CPE).

Linked to the previous code, we find the meanings that life development has during the school years or, as we have called it, the School Trajectory. It is striking that 72 percent of the subjects have described some type of stressful event in this period: being sent to boarding school because their parents split up, changing schools, playing truant, and fighting with their classmates, among other things.

(...) At that age, we were sent to boarding school ... and that made us feel fear and respect about what we were gowing [*sic*] to find, I woz [*sic*] afraid of being rejected by people for being a gypsy and that they would beat us and treat us badly. During the year we were there, we learned to read and write, and from time to time our parents visited us ... One dey [*sic*], when the teachers weren't looking, we ran away and turned up at our parents' house. Scared that they would send us back to the school again, they decided that we should leeve [*sic*] the city ... (2 CPE).

During my life, I had to change schools several times, the first time was when they kicked us out of the house we were squatting in [*sic*] because I didn't want to go to that school that was next to where we were living on the street and at break-time the children laughed at mee [*sic*] and my parents decided to send me to another school ... I was like that until I was 16 years old, a good for nothing without caring about anything untill [*sic*] because of my age they threw me out of school before I had finished basic studies... (7 CPE).

As I was saying, I cept [*sic*] playing truant, soe [*sic*] won day [*sic*] my older sister was sent by my father to pay for the month of classes, the teacher said, to my sister, Thatt [*sic*] she was not going to charge me since it would not bee [*sic*] ethical on her part since her brother (meaning me) would cum [*sic*] to class for two weeks, and you ar [*sic*] throwing away good money, without it doing you any good. That good woman was one of the few people who did decent things in my life (8 CPE).

At eight years old ... they enrolled me in a school eye [*sic*] didn't want to go to. I remember that I fought with the children because I did not wont [*sic*] to study and then the teacher would punish me. I woz [*sic*] incredibly angry with her because even if it wasn't my fault, she always punished mee [*sic*] anyway (9 CPE).

At school I uset [*sic*] to hang out with my classmates, I didn't like to lose, and I hung out with my friends. I used to play truwant [*sic*] with my brother, I would agree with my brother to steal money from my grandmother so that I could spend it while we missed classes, I found it extremely hard to study (10 CPE).

These descriptions enable us to contrast the perception of the educational or relational style exercised by the parental figures. We consider that the style of upbringing is also a relational style; in other words, a way of organizing and relating to children by parental figures. The narrations show there was a lack of a consistent style, or guidelines to shape the actions of the children, far less an authoritative style, which the literature indicates would support the healthy development of children. It is therefore congruent that this style does not appear in any of the accounts in the sample. Likewise, in the narratives, there is no monitoring of the children's school activities, and instead, recurrent truancy and fighting. It seems that parents

were neither aware of nor participated in the upbringing of their children, to judge from the accounts of the subjects.

Stressful events that continue to intensify symptoms: addictions and crime

The various autobiographies, in the narrative sequence on insertion into the educational system, indicate that parental figures do not seem to pursue a goal regarding the development of their children. In this troubled period of their lives, they mentioned contact with people close to them who used drugs (68 percent) —including relatives of the subjects (48 percent)— and, consequently, the onset of the use of addictive substances and the development of this behavior in the childhood and adolescence of many of them.

(...) (...) And when I ran away, I used to beg or steal from shops to be able to eat. And sometimes I earned a living by playing the guitar sow [*sic*] I could earn money to eat and buy joints so I startid [*sic*] to smoke when I was about eight and to sniff glue since where I livd [*sic*] in the village there werr [*sic*] lots of kids who did that [*sic*], and so to keep up with them, I did sow [*sic*] too. To be honest, when I smoked and sniffed glue, I forgot everything (2CPE).

...I adored my father and his whole world. He woz [*sic*] in a way my idoll [*sic*], he tort [*sic*] me to drive, to ride a horse, use a gun and everything in his whole world including drugs. At the age of thirtin [*sic*] I startid [*sic*] smoking joints. And my father found owt [*sic*] and my father already new [*sic*] he tuk [*sic*] me aside and askd [*sic*] me if I smoked, I told him the trooth [*sic*]. And even though I was [*sic*] afraid of what he might do to me, the only thing [*sic*] he did was make me get so haigh [*sic*] that I got really sik [*sic*]. He did it to mayke [*sic*] me scared or disgusted by it but it didn't work [*sic*] (3 CPE).

My first contacts with drugs were when I woz [*sic*] 12 and I begann [*sic*] to see that my brother smoked joints. I startid [*sic*] to smoke tobacco behind my brother's back because I compared myself to himm [*sic*] and I felt inferior to him [*sic*]. I was envious and so I started [*sic*] to smoke, letting myself be carried away by his friends behind his bak [*sic*], I woz [*sic*] afraid that they would find owt [*sic*] that I smoked tobacco and when they asked me I liyed [*sic*] because I was afraid that they would find out that I smoked (10 CPE).

...At school it woz [*sic*] bad. I ran away when I was ten years old. I started to hang out with kids older than me when I was only eleven years old, I already smoked by the time I was twelve I smoked joints and at that age I stole stuff shirts and so on. When I was thirteen, I already smoked cocain [*sic*] and when I was fifteen, I went up to a friend's house in the neighborhood and stole [*sic*] money and snortid [*sic*] cocaine (27 CPA).

The development of the lives of the subjects is characterized by a lack of guidance, little or no monitoring of the children's performance at school, and even the normalization of the use of legal and illegal substances in the family. It is hardly surprising that this encourages early substance use by the subjects. This is confirmed by their accounts of the use and subsequent abuse of drugs and their involvement in criminal acts to be able to increase their use, until their arrest. This explains a key sector in the early development of our participating population in the category called Intrafamilial Violence and Breakup of the Couple.

Events derived from intimate relationships: domestic violence and breakup of the couple

In the accounts describing the expression of intra-familial violence, the most recurrent one is violence between the parents. Most of the narratives describe violence against the mother by her partner, with 52 percent of subjects either witnessing or experiencing violence. This shows that the subjects experience and suffer a violent relationship between the father and the mother, which creates fear and feelings of helplessness in the children due to the expressions of violence in the parents. The frequency of divorced parents (52 percent) was the same.

(...) I also remember that when my father came [sic] home from work, iffy [sic] didn't like the food, he argued [sic] with my mother, my sister and I felt very bad because we were afraid and we were [sic] very young. He yelled a lot and all the shackz [sic] could hear him (9 CPE).

...It began when I was nine years old because my father started [sic] to drink and mistreat my mother. I heard everything from my room and I felt [sic] incredibly sad and at the same time very powerless and very angry ... (18CPA).

At the age of eight, my mother and father separated because my father was an alcoholic [sic] they used [sic] to argue a lot. It made me feel incredibly angry and [sic] uncomfortable. My mother left us [sic] at my grandmother's house due to the situation (10 CPE).

The violence described was not only inflicted by the father towards the mother. It also took place in the relationships between parental figures and the subject, other members of the sibling system, and children and parents.

(...) When I was small, my father enrolled [sic] me at school ... but he wouldn't let me [sic] go even though I wanted to go, he let my sisters [sic] go to school but not me [sic], this was something that I didn't understand and it made [sic] me feel bad ... I couldn't go [sic] because my father didn't want me to [sic]

and I wantid [sic] to go but I didnt [sic] out of fear my father would beat me and punish me. I remember that while the others wentt [sic] to school. I used to stay at home just playing with the dirt, the dog and the cats that were my only company, I felt very lonely and with no one there to give me love and affection, I only had my dog. When my father came home, he would beat the crap out of the dog and I would start crying because I felt very sad because I loved him a lott [sic], I felt awful, it made me very angry and I would take it out on my father's van and when hee [sic] saw me, he would hit mee [sic] (13 CPE). Things at home were going well until my sister's father began beating my mother because of the alcohol and for mee [sic] seeing hauw [sic] he beat my mother cut me up because I adored my mother, and I could not bear to see her suffer. I cried a lot over my mother, and I felt very helpless becoz [sic] I couldn't do anything to prevent it and eye [sic] was very sad to see how she cried and bled all over the place. I was ten years old at the time (20 CPE).

My father (illegible) beat the crap out of me with punches, kicks, hair pulling and so on. I looked for affection from my uncle José. It was not the first time he had hit me, but he had never done so that violently, my father was a person with problems especially when he drank. At home I saw my father's attitude towards my mother, which made mee [sic] feel hatred, rejection, and fear towards [sic] him. I used to cry behind his bedroom door while he would yel [sic] insults and scream (15 CPE).

The family relationship was not very good given that when I was fourteen years old, they kicked me out of the house becoz [sic] I hit [sic] my father after seeing how he argued with my mother. After what happinid [sic] my father hit me with something and cracked my skull. I will never forgett [sic] that (23 CPE).

In some accounts, it seems that violence is the trigger for separation. Mothers, tired of abuse, choose to seek a different life. These descriptions cannot be corroborated, and we must understand that they are significant constructions that they have elaborated over time. The version offered by our subjects may be influenced by different variables in their childhood. It is significant that they perceived the mother's suffering due to the blows or screams that she received, but they did not want it to continue happening, and they had no way of preventing it. Violence as well as separation from their parents is a painful fact, and in adulthood they continued to recount this with sorrow.

DISCUSSION

SLEs are unexpected, unusual events that significantly modify relationships, routines and the context of the lives of individuals. Their recurrence interferes with the development of individuals, causing stress and uncer-

tainty in life, especially if they appear at an early age. Several studies have measured their presence, impact and correlation with various psychosocial problems, including intimate partner violence (Chen and Foshee, 2015), substance use (Tamers *et al.* 2014), crime (Maschi, 2006) and lack of well-being (Kulkarni and Patwardhan, 2015).

All the previous studies support the correlation of SLEs with the manifestation of one or more problems in the lives of individuals. This study seeks not only to identify SLEs in a group of people who have come into conflict with the law, but also to employ qualitative methodology tools to analyze the autobiographies of inmates in the prison environment and use their narratives to identify the SLEs they have experienced in their childhood and adolescence, and the way they are interlinked in their life course.

Qualitative analysis software tools enabled us to configure the development of various events, which have been classified into categories according to their content and structure. Once the categories had been drawn up, the categories with the greatest presence in the life history were obtained through a code concurrence analysis.

The SLE narrations at the Beginning of Symptomatic Development, where reference is made to the Educational/relational Style and the School Trajectory, have occupied a predominant place in each of the total documents, with a problematic School Trajectory being described in 19 of 23 documents, while 40 segments have been found in which this experience was narrated. The importance of the category of relational style and school development in the autobiographies, and the fact that they are the first events in the lives of the subjects led us to use them to begin developing the map configuration. In accordance with the results of this study, the literature contains evidence of the impact of SLEs in childhood: they accelerate various symptoms and lead to lower adaptation in children (Rey-Bruguera *et al.*, 2017), linked to family relationships and formal education. A significant influence has been attributed to them in studies on disruptive behavior. At the beginning of the century, Hoffmann (2003) considered the impact of low parental supervision on the development of criminal behavior. Allwood *et al.* (2012) subsequently argued that lack of parental guidance should be considered in the study of delinquency.

In this same vein, the narratives of this group of people describing their experience indicate that the way their parents relate to them in the early stages of life fall mainly into two of the three categories in the model proposed by Baumrind (2005): *laissez-faire* and an *authoritarian educational relationship*. In the former, they are described as autonomous children,

without the supervision that Allwood *et al.* (2012) and Hoffmann (2003) cite as a variable that will affect the subsequent development of criminal activities. In *laissez-faire*, participants report that as children, they did not regularly attend school, came home late, and spent a lot of time with harmful substance users or people engaged in illegal activities. In their accounts, there is no indication that their parents were either aware of or took steps to prevent this. At the same time, there are accounts that refer to parental figures who exercise their function in an authoritarian way. In these accounts, subjects express their discomfort at the violent means used by parents as a means of controlling them. Apropos of this, it has been reported in some research that violence does not enhance control and may in fact be a predictor of other symptoms in young people (Maschi, 2006; Kim *et al.*, 2014; Guillén *et al.*, 2015). This situation is also linked to the subjects' rejection of parental authority and rule breaking despite the resulting physical punishment. This ineffective exercise of authority is also evident in the accounts describing a combination between the passivity of *laissez-faire* and the severity of the attempts at correction through blows by members of the parental system, which includes members of the extended family, such as grandparents and uncles and aunts. This parenting style, which takes place at the extremes of soft and hard authority, has also been observed in the life stories of a group of inmates at a detention facility in Mexico (Estrada-Pineda *et al.*, 2015). The findings of Sanz Rodríguez *et al.* (2009) also confirm the presence of disagreements between parental figures regarding the means of exerting discipline, where one of the parents is authoritarian and the other is located at the opposite extreme, and the subsequent expression of rebellion or opposition by a family member.

The accounts of formal education also describe family dynamics. The school trajectory is marked by various SLEs, including constant changes of school, being sent to boarding school and poor school performance with absences and absences —where the loss of control over the children's actions and the sadness and fear are palpable—, together with the difficulty young people experience in their educational process due to the instability of the two systems in which they interact at that age. It is striking that up to that point, the accounts fail to mention any intervention by other formal support systems or their insertion in preventive programs to address the various problems already evident in their development.

Furthermore, at this stage of school life, where young people are already experiencing problems, this is exacerbated by their relationship with other young people with similar problems and the use of any harmful subs-

tance, whether legal or illegal, such as tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana. Through these relationships, they seek filiation and a sense of belonging and hope they will make them feel strong and at the same level of risk as other young people. But there are cases where this need to belong to the same group by using the same substances derives from the family system itself, their siblings, or their father. Subjects describe seeing their relatives use substances and wanting to be like them. All these situations create feelings of helplessness and stress in children.

The concomitant aspect of substance use is criminal acts. It has been pointed out that stress is a factor in increased alcohol consumption (Tammers *et al.*, 2014) and also that stress translates into anxiety, which in turn is linked to involvement in criminal acts (Rubens *et al.*, 2013). Likewise, the group's accounts mention the fact that substance use provides them with affiliation, and criminal acts develop in parallel to this dynamic. It is possible to see a relationship between stealing to use substances and using substances to steal and quell the sadness and anger that other life events, such as domestic violence, produce in them.

As part of the spiral of the sequence of SLEs and poor school performance, involvement with addicted peers, the development of addictions and the onset of criminal activities, there are also conflicts in the parental relationship. The autobiographies describe marital malfunction, intimate partner violence (usually targeting the mother), bidirectional violence, from the parents to one of the children (hostility, attempts at physical aggression, screaming, etc.), and from the subject towards their parents. Among the members of our sample, this creates feelings of impotence, helplessness, fear and so on. Some of the stories describe the separation of their parents as a consequence of the violence, and express great sadness at the fact that their parents have separated. This sadness drives the subject to engage in substance use. In this sequence of events, there is also a striking lack of narratives about the presence of sources of social support, whether formal or informal, that change the course of the lives of individuals through their importance in mitigating the impact of SLEs, as has been proposed in some studies (Lila *et al.*, 2013).

The subjects' narratives show that there is a group of core SLEs that are sequentially intertwined in the life experience. This does not mean that subjects have not experienced other events that have impacted their emotions, such as grief, illness and eviction, to mention just a few, which were found to a lesser extent in the autobiographies in the sample. It is precisely the frequency and co-occurrence of events that have made it possible to

draw up a map of the way they are structured and linked to each other. We cannot say where this spiral of SLEs begins. Parents of the inmates have probably already experienced their own adversities derived from the context in which they were raised. This study did not directly analyze the coping styles or problem-solving skills (Eskin *et al.*, 2014) of parental figures or other family members, both of which are lines which could be developed in future research. What is evident in this group of people is that there is an accumulation of stressful events, as has been found in other research. In the early years of their school life (Herrero *et al.*, 2016), there is a low response or skills on the part of parents for coping with stressful events (Grover *et al.*, 2009), and insufficient social support, both formal and informal. This is because the people the inmates rely on are their peers, who use harmful substances and engage in criminal activities, and therefore, do not constitute a favorable recourse in cases of SLEs as some proposals have indicated (Singh and Dubey, 2015). Accordingly, faced with the turbulence of stressful events, they merely survive without being able to create resources to cope with and overcome them. Finally, it should be noted that the aim is not to generalize, given the nature of the type of research undertaken in this paper, but rather to broaden the focus of the problem-situation and attempt to understand the process of this social phenomenon so that professionals have a benchmark for designing intervention strategies, and proposing social policies aimed at prevention.

LIMITATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The present study has certain limitations that should be highlighted. It was based on the autobiographies of subjects who agreed to participate, but there was no more direct contact with the participants to obtain information and optimize some of the interpretations of the narratives that could contribute to clarifying this proposal. Future research could complement this qualitative work through in-depth interviews that would make it possible to clarify any doubts about the interpretation of the biographies and confirm findings.

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