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Violence Committed Against Migrants in Transit: Experiences on the Northern Mexican Border

César Infante · Alvaro J. Idrovo · Mario S. Sánchez-Domínguez · Stéphane Vinhas · Tonatiuh González-Vázquez

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Abstract Thousands of Mexican and Central American migrants converge at the Mexico-United States border. Undocumented migrants in transit to the United States are vulnerable due to their lack of access to health care and legal assistance. This study attempts to provide evidence on the violent-related consequences that migration has on migrants. A mixed-method study was conducted between April 2006-May 2007 in shelters in Baja California, Mexicali and Tijuana, Mexico. 22 in depth interviews were performed and fifteen hundred and twelve migrants responded a questionnaire. Results from both in-depth interviews and the analysis of the quantitative data shows the different types of violence experiences by migrants which include threats, verbal abuse, and arbitrary detention based on ethnicity, as well as assaults, beatings and sexual violence. It is crucial to stress the importance and the need to evidence the condition in which migrants' transit to the US and to effectively respond to the violence they experience.

Keywords Undocumented migrants · Violence · Vulnerability · Human rights · Border areas

Introduction

Mexico is a country of origin, transit of migrants to the United States (US), and also a destination country for Central and South American migrants. Mexico's geographic location turns it into a migration corridor for the largest number of migrants in the world. It is estimated that during 2005, the Mexico-US corridor was the largest migration corridor in the world, accounting for 10.3 millions migrants [1]. In 2005, the number of Mexicans going to the US was calculated around 708,927 persons [2] and 12.7 million Mexicans were estimated to be living in the US in the year 2008. In second and third place were migrants from southern and eastern Asia and from Latin America (Caribbean peoples, Central Americans and South Americans), with approximately nine million and eight point five million persons, respectively [3]. Most of the 11,600,000 undocumented migrants living in the US in 2008 were Mexican (61%) and Central American, primarily from El Salvador (5%), Guatemala (4%) and Honduras (3%) [4]. According to data collected by the National Institute of Statistics in Mexico, between June 2005 and June 2010 a total of 1,112,273 Mexicans migrate to another country. Of this number, 75% were men and 25% women [5]. In 2008, the National Immigration Institute in Mexico secured a total of 94,863 undocumented migrants from Central America. Of this number, 81% were men, 43% from Guatemala, 35% from Honduras and 15% from El Salvador [6]. According to these studies the majority of migrants in transit to the US through Mexico are men.

Migration is a phenomenon related to the economic conditions in both countries of origin and destination. Those who migrate generally do so because they expect better living conditions in their place of destination. DeLuca et al. [7] recognizes that the economic opportunities

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available in the US are a powerful incentive for migrants to face substantial risks to seek work in the US.

Thus, migration cannot be considered a social problem, a priori, but there is sufficient evidence as to its economic, social, cultural and health consequences. Therefore, it is important to stress the social vulnerability of mobile population groups and its harmful impact on health and the violation of human rights. In many border towns and those with a high Mexican migratory flow, resident populations and different mobile groups converge—'polleros' (migrant smuggler), gangs, armed forces, local police, and immigration agents. It has been observed that this complex interaction occurs in situations that are socially disadvantageous to migrants, especially to undocumented migrants in transit, and this is reflected in occurrences of abuse, violence and discrimination [8].

The National Registry of Aggression against Migrants in Mexico (NRAM) documented a total of 1,682 aggressions against migrants from January 1 to April 30, 2009 [9]. This registry is maintained by the Mexican National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) in conjunction with *casas de migrantes* (migrant shelters) located in strategic points of the transit of migrants through Mexico.

Bustamante [10] has identified a pattern of human rights violations against migrants related to the flow volume and distance from the destination country. This pattern shows that the further north the country of destination for migrants, the more intense the violations of human rights. Thus, since the principal destination country for migrants worldwide is the US, since Mexico is its neighbor, its northern border would be one of the places on the continent with a greater amount of human rights violations of migrants. Recently, in August 2010, 72 migrants (58 males and 14 females) from Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala were found dead at the municipality of San Fernando in Tamaulipas. This massive murder of migrants was related to the organize crime that operates at the Mexico-US border [11].

Along the Mexico-US border, the crossing of undocumented migrants has traditionally occurred mostly between North Baja California, Mexico and California, US. However, the toughening of migratory policies through strengthened monitoring in the principal crossing zones resulted in a change in migratory routes. This has obliged migrants to look for places with less monitoring but where they encounter more dangers and risks, such as the Sasabe Desert on the border between Sonora and Arizona [12]. In 1996, the number of crossings was greatest in Sonora, followed by North Baja California. In 2003, 70% of the crossings occurred in the two states combined [13]. According to De Luca et al. ([7], p 114) "undocumented immigrants are at risk from environmental conditions, traumatic injury and encounters with wild animals. Since

2001, at least 100 undocumented immigrants have died every year in Southern Arizona due to heat stroke alone. Most of these deaths have occurred in remote wilderness areas where the crossing is inherently dangerous".

The current scenario, therefore, is one in which migrants are less protected and more vulnerable to injuries, environmental conditions that threaten their life, racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance and discrimination, including abuse and violence committed by local populations, authorities, and organized crime. These factors combine and intertwine based on a migrant's ethnic origin, nationality, gender, sexuality, marginalization, means used to migrate and documented or undocumented situation [14].

Several studies have explored the issue of violence in Mexico and the US in an attempt to demonstrate the magnitude of the violence against migrants [15–18]. Spener [19], in explaining the cause of violence against migrants committed by US national security department agents, mentions a number of factors. These include the conflictive environment of their encounters with migrants, cultural differences between the two groups, nationalistic and racist attitudes towards migrants by the agents. Also, agents apprehend more migrants in isolated areas where they can commit abuses without being detected by their colleagues. In spite of these pioneering studies on the subject, the phenomenon is not well known, documentation is still emerging, and more is needed, particularly with respect to violence committed against migrants within the Mexican territory.

A strategy to document and reduce the vulnerability of migrants and protect their human rights on the northern Mexican border was undertaken by *Medecines du Monde* in the state of North Baja California between 2005 and 2008. This organization provided free medical care at the *casas de migrantes* in Tijuana and Mexicali and in deportation guard booths in San Ysidro, Tijuana. The organization also conducted information sessions about health, provided access to HIV rapid tests, and advocated for access to health for migrants.

The research described herein was conducted using secondary qualitative and quantitative analyses of the study conducted by *Medecines du Monde*. We focused on occurrences as well as experiences and on the report of violence suffered by migrants in transit, on both sides of the Mexico-US border.

Methods

A mixed study was conducted in which survey data is first described, then some of the interviews are described in-depth, and finally, certain findings that were common to

both of the previous stages of the study are explored quantitatively. The combination of methods and different techniques for the collection of data enabled the triangulation of information and, thus, the corroboration of the authenticity and reliability of the results presented.

The survey analyzed was conducted by *Medecines du Monde* between April 2006 and May 2007 and included individual migrants traveling to and returning from the US. Participants for this study were receiving care at the shelters in Baja California: *Casa Scalabrini* and *Casa Madre Asunta* (for women) in Tijuana and *Casa Betania* and *Casa Maná* in Mexicali. During this period, medical consultations were given to 3,014 migrants, of which 1,512 participated in the study. Since the information was collected by treating physicians, the selection of participants depended on the amount of time the physicians had available.

To characterize participants, information was collected through a questionnaire with 99 questions that included the following topics: sociodemographic characteristics; migratory situation—repatriated,¹ deported,² leaving voluntarily, in transit, transmigrant³ or failed attempt at crossing; modality of the last migration (alone, with a friend, or with a 'pollero'); health status, access to health services, consumption of drugs (currently, sometimes, never); antecedent of having been in jails in Mexico or the US; types of violence suffered during the journey—destruction of property, robbery, physical, verbal and psychological violence. The original questionnaire was specifically designed by *Medecines du Monde* as a tool to explore some of the characteristics of mobile populations at the Mexican-US Border. However, it needs to be adapted to capture the specific characteristics of migrants in other contexts.

Additionally, 22 in-depth interviews were conducted of 11 Mexican migrants (eight men and three women) and 11 Central American migrants (ten men and one woman). In the interviews, which lasted approximately 1 h, the interviewer actively sought out critical incidents and life experiences that might shed light on the nature of violence and migration. Stress was placed on engaging with interviewees' concerns, albeit within the context of the foreshadowed interest in understanding the relationship between individual experiences and broader structural factors. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed in Spanish (all the informants were native Spanish speakers).

¹ Migrants expelled without prior notification from a migration judge.

² Migrants expelled who received a deportation order from a US migration judge.

³ Non-Mexican migrants who traveled across Mexico with the objective of crossing into the US.

The research team then translated what it was judged to be the most important elements of the interviews into English.

The number of interviews was determined according to convenience criteria. Interviewees were migrants who received care in the shelters and who suffered some type of violence while they were in transit or during their deportation. The interviews were conducted by medical personnel in non-clinical contexts and they were audio recorded for later transcription for the purpose of analysis. The effect of this way to obtain information was that women were less prone to participate. However, the ratio between men and women was 4:18 higher than women participation in quantitative component of the study.

It was anticipated at the start of the work that mistrust might limit how much informants told us about their experiences because of fear of being identified and deported by the migration authorities. In order to deal with these problems, the research team became engaged in the everyday life activities at the *casas del migrante*. In that way, norms of reciprocity and trust were established. In the *casas del migrante*, the medical team provided basic medical care to migrants and they also conducted interviews. With the use of this strategy, the interviewers were able break the ice with migrants and establish basic levels of trust and establish sufficient rapport to conduct in-depth interviews. Each person interviewed was made aware of the objectives of the study and the importance of his or her collaboration. Informed consent was obtained from each participant and it was made clear to interviewees that they had the right to stop the interview at any time. Subsequent to data collection, respondents were allocated false names to respect confidentiality. A code was assigned to each interview and a list of false identities was kept separate from transcripts and the tapes.

Data Analysis for Qualitative Data

For the analysis of in depth interviews, an interpretive approach was adopted in which emphasis was placed on individuals' understanding and interpretation of the social and physical world in which they live. Using a broadly inductive approach, the research team sought to understand individual interpretations and conceptions of the migration experience, violence and its consequences. Other issues focused on included language, culture and interaction, and their role in the construction of social reality.

As indicated earlier, by listening and re-listening to tape recordings, transcribing and making notes, the research team was able to identify a number of preliminary themes and categories. Later in the data analysis process, it was explored the relationship between informants' experiences and context. It was also examined commonalities and contradictions between different types of data collected,

and between different types of informants. By searching for contradictions, we hoped, to have a richer and more nuanced account of participants' perspectives and experiences.

The topical categories and descriptors employed by respondents were systematically analyzed. Of special interest to us was whether themes and categories emerging in the early stages of analysis remained consistent with later interviews. We remained open to finding new and/or different themes and categories that might even contradict previous ones. In order to enhance reliability, the coding scheme, the development of themes and categories, and the interpretation of the data were continuously discussed by members of the research team. ATLAS.ti (2009) software was used to systematize and analyze observation and interview data.

In order to enhance rigor in analysis, principles of verification were used to test provisional conclusions for their authenticity and trustworthiness with a focus on credibility, dependability and confirmability [20].

For the qualitative analysis of the in-depth interviews, we coded as violence any event of aggression categorized as physical, verbal or psychological. Other categories analyzed were the severity of the violence experienced and the place of origin and other sociodemographic characteristics of the informant.

The verbatim quotes included in this paper are the most representative ones of the different themes and issues presented. There are not just extracts of interviews, but rather examples that shed light on the reflections made along this study.

After obtaining the exploratory quantitative results and contrasting them with the findings from the interviews, it was decided to explore the hypothesis that emerged with respect to differences among the Mexican border municipalities where the information was collected. Specifically, the frequency was described and the effect of the types of violence reported was explored using prevalence ratios (PR) with the respective 95% confidence intervals (95% CI). The small sample sizes prevented performing multiple statistical tests.

Results

The characteristics of the participating population are summarized in Table 1. Note that there is a marked predominance of single males at working and reproductive age, with basic formal education (elementary, secondary or high school), of Mexican nationality, Spanish speakers, and more than half, their migratory situation was returning

from the US. One-fifth of the total reported having suffered some type of violence in Mexico or the US (20.37%, 95% CI: 18.37–22.49; see Tables 2 and 3). Differences in sample sizes used to describe each type of violence were consequence of missing data or that some migrants reported more than one type of violence.

In the interviews, migrants mentioned differences in types of violence experienced and the personnel who committed the violence. In the US, during deportation or repatriation, verbal and psychological violence was identified. In Mexico, migrants mentioned having suffered verbal and psychological violence perpetuated by physicians, judges, and local police. Other forms of physical violence, extortion, unjustified detention and destruction of personal documents were also attributed to the local police. Other reported having witnessed sexual violence committed by organized crime gangs and the military:

The train stopped at a military post near Mexicali. Two soldiers got on and when they saw the two girls they took them off the train and yelled at us to shut up or they would hit us. After a little while the girls returned and one was crying. She said they forced them to perform oral sex on them (Honduran man, 28 years old).

The migrants surveyed reported having experienced more violence in Mexico than in the US for all types of violent acts registered: (a) robbery with physical violence: 5.41% vs. 0.53% ($P < 0.001$, Fisher's exact test); (b) robbery of goods only: 5.70% vs. 0.07% ($P < 0.001$, Fisher's exact test); (c) physical violence only: 5.63% vs. 1.46% ($P < 0.001$, χ^2 test); (d) verbal violence only: 1.75% vs. 0.79% ($P = 0.02$, χ^2 test), and (e) psychological violence: 0.66% vs. 0.13% ($P = 0.03$, Fisher's exact test; see Tables 2 and 3). Migrants mentioned cases of physical violence and aggression committed by the organized crime.

Central American migrants indicated having experienced this type of violence both when crossing the southern Mexican border as well as while traveling through Mexico:

I went through Tabasco and there several people from my country got together. We walked a long while. When we stopped to rest, other young guys came towards us who we thought were migrants until they took out guns. Some of us managed to run and avoided being robbed, but they shot and they hit one of the young guys who was in our group. I saw the bullet go through one side of his chest and I saw him fall to the ground. But I couldn't stop; I kept running like everyone else (Honduran man, 49 years old).

Table 1 Principal characteristics of the population participating in the study ($n = 1,512$)

Variables	Categories	<i>n</i>	%
Sex	Male	1,381	89.97
	Female	154	10.03
Age (years)	15–24	265	17.53
	25–44	1,018	67.33
	45–60	218	14.42
	60–77	11	0.73
Migratory situation	Repatriated	345	22.82
	Deported	508	33.60
	Leaving voluntarily	16	1.06
	In transit	380	25.13
	Transmigrant	244	16.14
	Attempted crossing	19	1.26
Married status	Married	327	21.63
	Common marriage	304	20.11
	Single	881	58.27
Schooling level	Illiterate	77	5.09
	Elementary	716	47.35
	Secondary and/or high school	687	45.44
	University	32	2.12
Languages	Spanish	1,062	70.24
	English	3	0.20
	Both	447	29.56
Region of origin	Traditional region ^a	470	31.08
	Northern region	216	14.29
	Central-south-southeast region	562	37.17
	Central America	250	16.53
	Caribbean	5	0.33
	South America	9	0.60
Alcohol dependency	Yes	584	38.62
	No	928	61.38
Tobacco dependency	Yes	808	53.44
	No	704	46.56
Drug dependency	Yes, currently	74	4.89
	Yes, previously	712	47.09
	No	726	48.02
Migration modality	Alone	874	57.80
	With friends and/or family	381	25.20
	With “pollero”	257	17.00

Baja California, Mexico, 2005–2007

^a Refers to the zone that has historically had the principal flow of migrants to the US and includes the following states: Aguascalientes, Colima, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, San Luis Potosí and Zacatecas

In terms of who were the actual perpetrators of the violence, the interviewees identified US migration agents and Mexican local police and even judges:

When I got to Mexicali I looked for food in a trash can. All of the sudden a police officer came. She stomped on my foot and put me in a van. The judge told me it was a crime to look for food in the garbage and that, besides; I didn't have

identification on me. I answered that *it is the right of every Mexican to go anywhere in the country with or without papers. Ayyy!* She got very mad and said that I was a fool and that she knew more about laws than I did. And she put me in jail for twenty four hours. In addition, when I got out, they marked my arms as if I was a cow (Mexican migrant, fifty years old).



Being a migrant is not the only condition for their vulnerability to violence, but also, the marginalization and social exclusion in which they find themselves. According to the above testimony, being 'migrant' results in the loss of all rights when facing different authorities in Mexico, even for those from this same country, while the use of 'marks' on the body of the migrants is a sign of stigmatization and discrimination against this group.

Violence committed against migrants can be classified as physical, verbal or psychological and the severity of the violence ranges from insults, injuries and secondary stress to psychological violence and even death. At least 41% of migrants who were victims of violence in the US required medical assistance as a result. The severity varied a great deal within each type of violence; according to the stories obtained in the US the most common violence is psychological and verbal:

I was walking down a street and a white '*migra*' (migration agent) asked me for my papers. I answered that I didn't have them and he told me to get into the van, so that he could take me to my house to see my documents. I saw he was very determined and I said that, actually, I didn't have documents. Then he got real angry and yelled at me, 'Damn Indian. You are a piece of shit! You're just here to stink up this country!' Then he sped up to the line. He stopped there and told me to get out. He put the pistol to my forehead and said, 'Run or you die. Get out of Mexico!' And of course, I ran and I jumped over the fence to this side (Mexican woman, 36 years old).

Of the migrants interviewed, 67% (1,008) referred to having been in the US at some time. When analyzing the conditions under which these migrants were returning to Mexico, it was found that the majority returned through Tijuana (58.04%) or Mexicali (18.15%). Twenty-five percent of migrants who entered the country through Tijuana

reported violence, while only 11% of those who entered through Mexicali reported violence ($P = 0.000$, χ^2 test). When comparing these two municipalities, it was observed that those surveyed in Mexicali had less likelihood of having suffered violence (PR: 0.38, 95% CI: 0.23–0.62); that is, there was a 61% greater probability of being victimized in Tijuana than in Mexicali. When comparing the rest of the municipalities with Tijuana, the results also show decreased violence, but the difference is less pronounced (PR: 0.59, 95% CI: 0.40–0.86), equivalent to 1.69 times less probability. Later, all types of violence were explored in both countries without finding significant differences among the municipalities.

When analyzing the reports of physical violence, the same relation was found. In Mexicali, the likelihood of being a victim of violence was roughly 4.17 times less (PR: 0.24, 95% CI: 0.09–0.66). In the case of the other municipalities as compared to Tijuana, the likelihood of violence was also less (PR 0.47, 95% CI: 0.23–0.94), although not as pronounced as in the case of Mexicali, with roughly 2.13 times less violence than in Tijuana. These analyses suggest that in Mexicali and the surrounding area, there is less physical violence in particular, while the other types of violence have a similar prevalence in all of the border municipalities in Baja California.

I finally got to Mexicali and I didn't know where to go. I arrived at night and slept under a tree and when I least expected it, the police showed up. But it's a good thing the police in Mexicali are not like the police in Tijuana. They asked my name and where I was going. I told them that I wanted to cross over to 'the other side' but that I didn't have anywhere to sleep. They asked if I wanted to go to a shelter and, well, of course, I got in the patrol car and they took me to the Betania shelter. I stayed there three days, I got work and I recovered somewhat (Honduras man, 28 years old).

Discussion

According to the data presented in this study, migrants are subject to frequent human rights violations. The results show that migrants are submitted to physical, verbal, psychological and even sexual violence. These situations are apparently not being dealt with by the authorities responsible for migration, for human rights or for municipal, state and federal security. On the contrary, on more than one occasion it was found that representatives of these authorities are the ones committing the transgressions. When adding to the above a lack of registering violent acts—occurrences not recorded by shelters, migrant houses

Table 2 Characteristics of migrants participating in the study according type of violence occurred in Mexico

Variables	Physical and robbery of goods		Robbery of goods only		Physical only		Verbal only		Psychological only	
	No (n = 1,294)	Yes (n = 74)	No (n = 1,290)	Yes (n = 78)	No (n = 1,291)	Yes (n = 77)	No (n = 1,344)	Yes (n = 24)	No (n = 1,359)	Yes (n = 9)
Sex										
Men	94.59	5.41	94.3	5.7	94.37	5.63	98.25	1.75	99.34	0.66
Migratory situation										
Repatriated	20.17	21.62	19.84	26.92	19.67	29.87	20.39	12.5	20.38	0
Deported	36.24	28.38	36.51	24.36	35.79	36.36	35.71	41.67	35.84	33.33
Leaving voluntarily	1.24	0	1.24	0	1.08	2.6	1.19	0	1.1	11.11
In transit	24.88	27.03	25.74	12.82	25.1	23.38	25	25	24.94	33.33
Transmigrant	16.77	21.62	16.12	32.05	17.58	7.79	16.96	20.83	17	22.22
Attempted crossing	0.7	1.35	0.54	3.85	0.77	0	0.74	0	0.74	0
Has health passport	0.7	0	0.62	1.28	0.7	0	0.67	0	0.66	0
Married status										
Married	20.87	21.62	21.01	19.23	20.91	20.78	20.91	20.83	20.97	11.11
Common marriage	19.94	12.16	19.22	24.36	20.14	9.09	19.42	25	19.57	11.11
Single	59.2	66.22	59.77	56.41	58.95	70.13	59.67	54.17	59.46	77.78
Schooling										
None	4.87	4.05	4.88	3.85	4.88	3.9	4.76	8.33	4.86	0
Up to elementary	48.3	40.54	48.29	41.03	48.18	42.86	47.99	41.67	47.83	55.56
Up to secondary	44.67	52.7	44.88	48.72	44.77	50.65	45.09	45.83	45.18	33.33
University	2.16	2.7	1.94	6.41	2.17	2.6	2.16	4.17	2.13	11.11
Languages										
Spanish only	69.01	58.11	68.22	71.79	68.63	64.94	68.53	62.5	68.58	44.44
English only	0.15	0	0.16	0	0.15	0	0.07	4.17	0.15	0
Both	30.83	41.89	31.63	28.21	31.22	35.06	31.4	33.33	31.27	55.56
Origin of migration										
Traditional region	30.83	35.14	31.16	29.49	30.75	36.36	31.1	29.17	31.05	33.33
Northern region	15.07	10.81	15.5	3.85	14.33	23.38	14.73	20.83	14.79	22.22
Central region	36.4	29.73	36.28	32.05	36.25	32.47	36.16	29.17	36.13	22.22
Central America	16.85	21.62	16.12	33.33	17.82	5.19	17.04	20.83	17.07	22.22
Caribbean	0.31	1.35	0.39	0	0.31	1.3	0.37	0	0.37	0
South America	0.54	1.35	0.54	1.28	0.54	1.3	0.6	0	0.59	0
Abuse/dependency on										
Alcohol	42.35	43.24	43.18	29.49	42.45	41.56	42.93	12.5	42.46	33.33
Tobacco	57.81	54.05	58.06	50	57.86	53.25	57.66	54.17	57.54	66.67

Table 2 continued

Variables	Physical and robbery of goods		Robbery of goods only		Physical only		Verbal only		Psychological only	
	No (n = 1,294)	Yes (n = 74)	No (n = 1,290)	Yes (n = 78)	No (n = 1,291)	Yes (n = 77)	No (n = 1,344)	Yes (n = 24)	No (n = 1,359)	Yes (n = 9)
Drug consumption										
Yes, currently	4.95	10.81	5.35	3.85	5.11	7.79	5.13	12.5	5.22	11.11
Yes, previously	51.31	52.7	51.78	44.87	50.89	59.74	51.64	37.5	51.36	55.56
No, never	43.74	36.49	42.87	51.28	44	32.47	43.23	50	43.41	33.33
Exchange sex for money	9.66	5.41	9.53	7.69	9.22	12.99	9.52	4.17	9.42	11.11
Access to public health services	8.81	12.16	8.99	8.97	9.14	6.49	8.85	16.67	8.98	11.11
Last migration modality										
Alone	61.44	62.16	62.4	46.15	60.81	72.73	61.68	50	61.52	55.56
With friend	23.49	20.27	22.79	32.05	23.55	19.48	23.44	16.67	23.33	22.22
With "pollero"	15.07	17.57	14.81	21.79	15.65	7.79	14.88	33.33	15.16	22.22
Jailed in the US	39.49	39.19	40	30.77	38.88	49.35	39.21	54.17	39.44	44.44
Jailed in Mexico	8.73	13.51	8.68	14.1	8.75	12.99	9.08	4.17	9.05	0

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the questionnaire elaborated and conducted by *Médecins du Monde* in Baja California, Tijuana and Mexicali, Mexico

and other civil organizations—we can argue that the risks that migrants in transit to the US face are greater than what can be verified.

The different types of violence documented include threats, verbal abuse, and arbitrary detention based on ethnicity, as well as assaults, beatings and sexual violations that have even caused the death of migrants. According to the data presented and the migrants' testimonies, most of the physical and verbal aggressions were accompanied by robbery of money from migrants in transit. The results of this work are in keeping with those presented by the RNAM, both of which make clear that not even Mexicans are exempt from suffering aggression and violence while traveling through Mexico to the US or at the time of being deported or repatriated.

Nevertheless, care needs to be taken when interpreting these findings since the limitations of the study design should be considered. First, the selection of participants was based on convenience, thus the results may not be representative of the population of migrants that cross the border in the state of Baja California. With respect to the way in which violence was categorized, it is important to take into account the relative difficulty of differentiating between one type of violence and another, as a result of the complexity of aggressions and the form in which they were reported (self-reporting). This study shows that there is a wide diversity of social groups that commit violence against migrants on the border, from delinquent groups specializing in assaults on and harming migrants to different armed forces such as police and military and even migratory authorities and judges.

On many occasions violence and abuse by police or migratory authorities occurs based on ethnicity and marginalization. Different government sectors, civil society and health systems need to understand the complexity of studying and analyzing the conditions of vulnerability and the violation of the human rights of migrants, as well as the migratory profile. In addition, said sectors should, in a differentiated manner, understand each one of the components of Mexico's migratory process and formulate a response.

Worldwide, the number of migrants is growing, the dynamics of population mobility are becoming more complex, and the dangers confronted by migrant groups are increasing. The Mexico-US border is no exception in this respect, a place where human rights violations are routinely enacted against undocumented migrants. As a result of the violent context at the Mexican-US border there is increasing public attention on the conditions faced by migrants on the border.

Globally, there is an urgent need for action to address the vulnerability of mobile populations, as well as the violence they suffer. We argue that migrants must have access to mechanisms that secure their human rights,

Table 3 Characteristics of migrants participating in the study according type of violence occurred in the United States

Variables	Physical and robbery of goods		Robbery of goods only		Physical only		Verbal only		Psychological only	
	No (n = 1,504)	Yes (n = 8)	No (n = 1,511)	Yes (n = 1)	No (n = 1,490)	Yes (n = 22)	No (n = 1,500)	Yes (n = 12)	No (n = 1,510)	Yes (n = 2)
Sex										
Men	99.42	0.58	99.93	0.07	98.9	1.1	99.42	0.58	100	0
Migratory situation										
Repatriated	20.29	12.5	20.26	0	20.18	26.67	20.22	25	20.25	0
Deported	35.81	37.5	35.77	100	35.48	66.67	35.59	75	35.82	0
Leaving voluntarily	1.18	0	1.17	0	1.18	0	1.18	0	1.17	0
In transit	25	25	25.02	0	25.2	6.67	25.15	0	25	0
Transmigrant	17.06	12.5	17.04	0	17.22	0	17.13	0	17.03	0
Attempted	0.66	12.5	0.73	0	0.74	0	0.74	0	0.73	0
Has health passport	0.66	0	0.66	0	0.67	0	0.66	0	0.66	0
Married status										
Married	20.96	12.5	20.92	0	20.84	26.67	20.74	50	20.91	0
Common marriage	19.56	12.5	19.53	0	19.59	13.33	19.49	25	19.52	0
Single	59.49	75	59.55	100	59.57	60	59.78	25	59.58	0
Schooling										
None	4.71	25	4.83	0	4.8	6.67	4.85	0	4.82	0
Up to elementary	48.09	12.5	47.92	0	47.89	46.67	47.87	50	47.88	0
Up to secondary	45	62.5	45.06	100	45.08	46.67	45.07	50	45.1	0
University	2.21	0	2.19	0	2.22	0	2.21	0	2.19	0
Languages										
Spanish only	68.53	50	68.4	100	68.51	60	68.6	37.5	68.42	0
English only	0.15	0	0.15	0	0.15	0	0.15	0	0.15	0
Both	31.32	50	31.46	0	31.34	40	31.25	62.5	31.43	0
Origin of migration										
Traditional region	31.18	12.5	31.02	100	30.97	40	30.88	62.5	31.07	0
Northern region	14.78	25	14.85	0	14.78	20	14.93	0	14.84	0
Central region	35.96	50	36.06	0	35.99	40	36.03	37.5	36.04	0
Central America	17.13	12.5	17.12	0	17.29	0	17.21	0	17.11	0
Caribbean	0.37	0	0.37	0	0.37	0	0.37	0	0.37	0
South America	0.59	0	0.59	0	0.59	0	0.59	0	0.58	0
Abuse/dependency on										
Alcohol	42.35	50	42.36	100	42.35	46.67	42.57	12.5	42.4	0
Tobacco	57.87	12.5	57.57	100	57.43	73.33	57.57	62.5	57.6	0

Table 3 continued

Variables	Physical and robbery of goods		Robbery of goods only		Physical only		Verbal only		Psychological only	
	No (n = 1,504)	Yes (n = 8)	No (n = 1,511)	Yes (n = 1)	No (n = 1,490)	Yes (n = 22)	No (n = 1,500)	Yes (n = 12)	No (n = 1,510)	Yes (n = 2)
Drug consumption										
Yes, currently	5.15	25	5.27	0	5.25	6.67	5.29	0	5.26	0
Yes, previously	51.62	12.5	51.43	0	51.22	66.67	51.47	37.5	51.39	0
No, never	43.24	62.5	43.31	100	43.53	26.67	43.24	62.5	43.35	0
Exchange sex for money	9.49	0	9.44	0	9.46	6.67	9.49	0	9.43	0
Access to public health services	8.82	37.5	9	0	9.02	6.67	9.04	0	8.99	0
Last migration modality										
Alone	61.54	50	61.52	0	61.42	66.67	61.54	50	61.48	0
With friend	23.38	12.5	23.34	0	23.43	13.33	23.24	37.5	23.32	0
With "pollero"	15.07	37.5	15.14	100	15.15	20	15.22	12.5	15.2	0
Jailed in the US	39.49	37.5	39.5	0	39.25	60	39.19	87.5	39.47	0
Jailed in Mexico	9.04	0	9	0	8.94	13.33	9.04	0	8.99	0

treatment and care when needed, and support throughout their transit to their final destination, and in communities and countries where they stay. These responses must address social issues such as discrimination and human rights violations and should be based on the social and contextual realities faced by migrants and be part of a more general process of empowerment that seeks to improve their legal, social, economic, and health status.

This discussion should therefore include the issue of vulnerability of migrants in transit stemming from their being at a social disadvantage when faced with other social groups, and it should stress factors related to their vulnerability and considering issues such as differences based on nationality, ethnicity, social class, marginalization and gender.

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