



## **Rape among Mexican youth and young adults**

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### **Abstract**

Rape disproportionately affects women and men between the ages of 12 and 24. Using data obtained from the National Longitudinal Youth Survey (ENAJUV, 2010), this study aims to present the prevalence and factors associated with rape among these populations. The results indicated that 2.9 percent of sexually initiated youth and young adults between the ages of 12 to 29 reported having been forced to engage in sexual intercourse at least once in their lives. The multivariate analysis indicates that rape among young adults, but particularly among youth is shaped by social inequalities of gender, generation, ethnic-race affiliation (for example) which structure individual-level experiences, cultural representations, rape scripts and state and institutional responses. These findings are discussed within the context of the social construction of accessible gendered bodies and sexuality in the Mexican context, and within the framework of rape supportive culture and normative heterosexuality prevailing in this country.

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## Introduction

Rape is one of the prototypical expressions of gender domination (Saltzman, 2004; Hirigoyen, 2006) and can be conceptualized as one of the main microstrategies of oppression in societies strongly marked by gender inequalities (Marcus, 2002). Rape is defined as the "physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration – even if slight – of the vulva or anus, using a penis, other body parts or an object" (World Health Organization, 2002). It is noteworthy that aspects of coercion and the violation of sexual autonomy are commonly used to define rape. The consequences of rape are multiple and may include physical, mental, sexual, reproductive and other health problems, and may increase the risk of contracting Human Immunodeficiency Virus (Sexual Violence Research Initiative, 2010; Child Trends, 2014).

Rape occurs throughout the world and is one of the most underreported crimes. However, the true magnitude of rape is often hidden because of its sensitive nature and a lack of reporting. As in most countries, in Mexico rape has been a neglected area of research. When studies worldwide have included both men and women in the sample, the prevalence of reported rape has been higher among women than men (World Health Organization, 2002; Child Trends, 2014). Although research suggests that women are more likely than men to be raped during their lifetime (Sexual Violence Research Initiative, 2010; Child Trends, 2014) (revealing the gendered aspect of rape), findings have consistently shown that rape is a relatively common among men, especially in the early stages of life (United Nations Children's Fund, 2012; Sexual Violence Research Initiative, 2010).

For example, in the U.S., empirical data indicates that youth and young adults (both female and male) are two to three times more likely than adults aged 25 and older to be raped (Children Trends, 2012). Thus, more than half (54 percent) of female victims and nearly three quarters (71 percent) of male victims were first raped before their 18th birthdays (National Institute of Justice, 2006; Finkel or, Hotaling, Lewis and Smith, 1990; Whittier, 2016).

In Latin America and the Caribbean rape is also an important, under-studied public health and human rights violation issue (Sexual Violence Research Initiative, 2010:7). The Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) suggest that around 20 percent of rape victims in Latin America are young people of both sexes (especially girls). It has therefore been suggested that one of the risk factors associated with this type of violence is being under 29 years old (SVRI 2010; Jewkes, Sen and García-Moreno, 2002). In Mexico it has been suggested that 44 percent of women have been victims of sexual violence at least once in their lifetime (United Nations, 2010:) and 5.4 percent of women aged 15-49 have been raped (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2006). Furthermore, Mexico had a rate of 12.27 rape cases per 100,000 inhabitants in 2012 (Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal, 2012), yet little is known about the prevalence of rape and risk factors among youth and young adults in the country. Prevalence and estimates are needed to show the magnitude of this problem, and identifying risk factors is crucially important in order to inform the development of policies, programs and interventions to address this problem in Mexico.

The aim of this article is to provide a diagnosis (to determine the prevalence and associated factors) of rape among Mexican youth (12-17 years old) and young adults (18-29 years old), identifying the characteristics of the individuals of this population who have ever been forced to engage in sexual intercourse during their lifetime.

Following previous studies (Yuan et al., 2006; Scully, 1988) the working hypothesis of this analysis considers that socioeconomic status and gender conditioning are key factors in the risk of rape. We assume that rape is socially stratified. Thus, male and female youth and young adults from low income households are revealed to have higher probabilities of suffering rape outside of their home environment (in the workplace, in the streets, etc.).



## Materials and Methods

This analysis is based on data from the National Youth Survey (ENAJUV, 2010). This survey was conducted using a representative sample of 28,005 Mexican youths (12-18 years old) and young adults (18-29 years old), of both sexes. This population was chosen due to the fact that in Mexico 70 percent of the victims of sexual violence (including rape) are under 30 years old (Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas, 2016). The ENAJUV (2010) was a survey carried out by the Mexican Youth Institute and has representativeness on a national and state level, as well as for six metropolitan zones. The survey included questions relating to rape in three different sections: a) rape not exclusively perpetrated by the current boyfriend/girlfriend and/or sexual/romantic partner, b) rape perpetrated exclusively by the current boyfriend/girlfriend, and c) rape perpetrated by the current sexual/romantic partner. The ENAJUV (2010) is one of the few Mexican national surveys with national representativeness that also allows the analysis of rape against young men. Also, this survey is the only one which focuses on the youth population, including respondents under 15 years old in Mexico. Compared with other surveys the ENAJUV survey allows a better construction of the cultural and social context of youth and young adults in Mexico. This article is based on the analysis of rape committed not exclusively by the victims' current boyfriend/girlfriend and/or intimate partner. We considered that youth and young adults were raped if they answered affirmatively to the following questions: Did someone ever force you to engage in sexual intercourse? Who forced you to engage in sexual intercourse? In parallel, we created two indexes as part of our working hypothesis: gender index and socioeconomic index, considering prior research on the subject (Whittier, 2016; Jewkes; Nduna; Jama; Chirwa; et al., 2016; Marcus, 2002). Initially, we carried out univariate and bivariate statistical analysis, using a Pearson's chi-squared test to look for associations between the independent variables and rape. In the analysis we included variables that have been suggested by the literature on this issue to be related to rape and were also included in the survey. However, in this article we only present the variables that were significant in the bivariate analysis. In this article, we present the prevalence of rape among the population aged 12-29 years old, and when possible, we present the analysis differentiating youth (aged 12-17 years old) and young adults (18-29 years old) (when the sample number allowed us to do so).

For the (binary) logistic regression in this article we only present the variables that turned out to be significant in the model, and we include the household's socioeconomic status and the age group as control variables.

The (binary) logistic regression model was carried out using the logistic procedure in SPSS, and the significance levels were tested. In the logistic regression the dependent variable was having suffered rape. The independent variables were defined as follows: to be a speaker of an indigenous language, with two categories, those who spoke and those who did not speak an indigenous language, and gender, with two categories (male and female); the age groups include those respondents aged 12-29 years old, the socioeconomic status, with four categories (very low, low, medium, and high); rape victim's age at the time of the first sexual intercourse, with four categories (5-11, 12-16, 17-21, 23-29 years old); age of the first sexual partner, with five categories (10-15; 16-21, 22-27, 28-34, 35 and older); ever having worked (yes or no); ever having lived alone (yes or no); consumption of alcohol in the last year (yes or no); consumption of drugs in the last year (yes or no); use of a contraceptive method during the first sexual intercourse (yes or no); ever having been in love with someone of the same sex (yes or no); and, finally, the number of sexual partners in the last year, with four categories (0, 1, 2, and 3 or more sexual partners). The calculations were carried out with a confidence level of 95 percent.

## Results and Discussion: Rape Among Mexican Youth and Young Adults

Mexico is characterized by a high level of socioeconomic heterogeneity among youth and young adults. The survey indicates that 47.1 percent of respondents were men and 50.9 percent were women aged 12-29 years old; 4.7 percent spoke an indigenous language, 14.9 percent inhabited households had a very low socioeconomic status, 33.1 percent had a low status, 27.9 percent had a medium status and finally 24.2 percent had a high status. The age groupings can be broken down as follows: 23.8 percent, 12-15 years old;



33.9 percent, 16-20 years old; 24.9 percent, 21-25 years old; and 17.4 percent, 26-29 years old. Of the respondents, 52.1 percent have consumed alcohol and 4.4 percent drugs in the last month. Finally, 2.1 percent of the population surveyed have previously been in love with someone of the same sex. 51.4 percent of the 12-29-year olds who participated in this National Youth Survey (ENAJUV, 2010) have had sexual intercourse at least once in their lifetime (sexually initiated); 54 percent of those sexually initiated are male and 49 percent are female.

### **Prevalence of Rape Among Mexican Youth and Young Adults by Different Sociodemographic Characteristics**

2.9 percent (n=426) of all the sexually initiated in the study population reported having been forced at least once in their lives to engage in sexual intercourse (rape). The mean age for the first sexual intercourse of the study population who reported having been raped is 16.1 years, while the mean age of the first sexual partner is 20 years of age. The mean age for the first sexual relationship of the study population who were not raped is 17.1 years (median 17) while the mean age of the first sexual partner is 18.8 years of age (median 18). According to these results, the mean age for the first sexual intercourse of the study population who have been forced to engage in sexual intercourse (raped) is significantly lower (by almost a year) than among those who did not report having been forced to engage in sexual intercourse. In the same way, the median age of those who reported being raped is lower by one year than those who were not raped. In parallel, the median age of the first sexual partner in that group is significantly higher (by more than a year) than in the group of those who did not report being forced to engage in sexual intercourse, while the median age of the partner of the first sexual relation is one year older among those who were raped.

### **Age of the victims when raped, and victim–offender relationship in rape**

The analysis reveals that 80.3 percent of rapes occurred when the victims were under 21 years of age and 24.4 percent took place when the victim was anywhere between 11 and 15 years of age (table 1). Regarding the offenders (rapists), 45.5 percent of rapes were committed by the victim's current intimate sexual or romantic partner, 27 percent by a close family member (father, father-in-law, brother, or uncle), 16 percent by an acquaintance (neighbor, friend) and 8.4 percent by a stranger. This means that nearly 90 percent of rape victims knew their offenders (table 1).

Furthermore, among the study population, when the victim is under 10 years old at the time of the rape, the primary offenders (rapists) are family members (relatives) in more than 85 percent of the cases. This pattern is very similar between male and female victims. When the age of the rape victim increases (when the victim is anywhere between 11 and 15 years of age at the time of the rape) it is noteworthy that the offenders (rapists) from the family environment decrease to 31.5 percent while there is an increase for those belonging to the intimate partner/boyfriend group (30.6 percent) as well as acquaintances (friend, neighbor) (15.6 percent). This shows that, when the victim is over 15, the primary rape offenders are boyfriends or intimate sexual/romantic partners.

It is also noteworthy that only 34.5 percent of the study population who were raped shared this information or told someone about it (23 percent of men and 39 percent of women who were raped). The majority of these rape victims communicated what happened to a family member and only one in ten victims of rape communicated this to competent authorities.



**TABLE 1**

<b>Percentage distribution of age of rape victims and victim-offender relationship</b>	
<b>Characteristics</b>	
<b>Age of the rape victims</b>	
2-10 years	17.4
11-15 years	24.4
16-20 years	38.5
21-25 years	15.2
26-29 years	4.5
<b>Victim-offender relationship in rape</b>	
Boyfriend or partner	45.50%
Family relation	27.00%
Other figure of authority	2.80%
Known	16.00%
Unknown	8.40%

Source: Own construction based on data of the ENAJUV (2010)

**Prevalence of rape among youth and young adults by age, and by the age of youth and young adults and their sexual partners at the time of their first sexual intercourse.**

In this regard, the risk of rape seems to decrease as the age of the first sexual intercourse increases. The analysis shows that 23.5 percent of the study population who had their first sexual intercourse when they were 5 to 11 years old reported that they were forced to have intercourse (raped), which makes it feasible to draw the conclusion that for an important part of this population the first sexual intercourse coincides with rape. This percentage is 2.3 among the study population who had their first sexual intercourse between the ages of 22 and 29. These percentages suggest that power imbalances related to important age disparities among sexual partners can increase vulnerability to the prevalence of rape for most young sexual partners.

The prevalence of rape is closely related to the age of the first sexual partner. Thus, 9.7 percent of the study population who were sexually initiated with a partner who was 35 years old or older reported having been raped, compared to 2.1 percent of those who had their first sexual intercourse with a partner aged 10 to 15 years old (table 2).



**TABLE 2**

<b>Prevalence of rape among the studied population by age at first sexual intercourse and by current age</b>	
<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Prevalence of rape</b>
<b>Current age</b>	
12-15 years	5.60%
16-20 years	2.60%
21-25 years	2.90%
26-29 years	3.00%
<b>Age at the time of the first sexual intercourse</b>	
5-11 years	23.5
12-16 years	3.3
17-21 years	2.1
22-29 years	2.3
<b>Age of the first sexual partner</b>	
10-15 years	2.1
16-21 years	2.6
22-27 years	3.9
28-34 years	6.1
35 and older	9.7

Source: Own construction based on data of the ENAJUV (2010)

### **Prevalence of rape among Mexican youth and young adults by different characteristics**

The bivariate analysis (table 3) reveals that a major, statistically significant percentage of women between 12-29 years old reported having been victims of rape (4.2 percent) compared to men (1.7 percent) of the same ages. In the case of youth (12-17 years old) 5.6 percent of women and 1.8 percent of men reported having been raped. In the case of young adults (18-29 years old), 4.1 of women and 1.7 of men reported having been raped. Likewise, 4.2 percent of the youth and young adults who speak at least one indigenous language reported having been raped as opposed to 2.8 percent who did not speak any indigenous language.

The prevalence of rape among those who have worked at least once in their lives is 3.2 percent and 1.8 percent among those who have never worked (12-29 years old). For young adults (18-29 years old) this



percentage is 3.3 and 1.3, respectively, and for youth (12-17 years old) the differences were not statistically significant.

The prevalence of rape among the study population who have lived alone at least once in their lifetime is double that of those who have never lived alone, 4.6 percent and 2.3 percent, respectively. In this regard, the prevalence of rape among the youngest is 7.6 percent for those who had lived alone.

Rape is also related in a statistically significant way with alcohol and drug consumption among the study population. However, this analysis does not allow us to affirm precisely the direction of this association (if those who reported rape are more likely to use drugs and alcohol as a result of the rape, or if the use of these substances precedes the rape itself). The prevalence of rape among youth is significantly higher among those who have consumed alcohol at least once in their lifetime (3.2 percent), but above all, among those who have consumed drugs (6.9 percent). For young adults, the prevalence is 3.2 percent among those who have consumed alcohol, compared to 2 percent among those who never have consumed alcohol, while it is 6.9 percent among those who have consumed drugs and 2.3 percent among those who have not. In the case of youth, the prevalence of rape among those who have consumed drugs is 6.9% and 2.3% among those who have not, while the differences among youth were not statistically significant in terms of alcohol consumption.

Similarly, it is particularly relevant that 10.9 percent of the study population (12-29 years old) who reported ever having been in love with someone of the same sex were raped, while the same was true for only 2.7 percent for those who have never been in love with someone of the same sex (table 3).

**TABLE 3**

Source: Own construction based on data of the ENAJUV

<b>Prevalence of rape among youth and young adults by different characteristics</b>			
<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Youth and young adults who have been raped</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>12-17 years</b>	<b>18-29 years</b>	
<b>Sex</b>			
Women	5.6%	4.1%	4.2%
Men	1.8%	1.7%	1.7%
p=	***	***	***
<b>Speak an indigenous language</b>			
Yes	7.7%	4.2%	4.5%
No	3.3%	2.8%	2.8%
p=	*	***	***
<b>Has ever worked</b>			



Yes	2.9%	3.3%	3.2%
No	4.1%	1.3%	1.8%
p=	*	***	***
<b>Has lived alone</b>			
Yes	7.6%	4.5%	4.6%
No	2.9%	2.2%	2.3%
p=	***	***	***
<b>Alcohol consumption</b>			
Yes	2.8%	3.2%	3.2%
No	4.9%	2.0%	2.3%
p=	*	***	***
<b>Drug consumption</b>			
Yes	6.5%	6.9%	6.9%
No	3.1%	2.3%	2.4%
p=	***	***	***
<b>Has ever been in love with someone of the same sex</b>			
Yes	8.7%	11.2%	10.9%
No	3.4%	2.7%	2.7%
p=	**	***	***

\*\*\* Significant at the 99% probability level

\*\*Significant at the 95% probability level

\* Non-significant

### Factors Associated with Rape Among Mexican Youth and Young Adults

In figure 1, we can see the statistically significant factors associated with prevalence of rape among male and female youth and young adults: gender, to speak any indigenous language, having worked at least once in their lives, having used contraceptives during their first sexual intercourse, age at first sexual intercourse, age of the first sexual partner, the number of sexual partners they have had in the last twelve months, having lived alone at least once in their lives, alcohol and drug consumption (at least once in their lifetime), and reporting having been in love with someone of the same sex (at least once in their lifetime).





Despite having initially considered socioeconomic status and the gender index as central factors in our analysis (and in our working hypothesis), in the logistic regression model, we disregarded the importance of their role in the explanation of this phenomenon (occurrence of rape), because they did not turn out to be statistically significant when other characteristics of youth and young adults were introduced. However, we did include socioeconomic status and age group in the model as control variables (to ensure that the results of the regression model are not due to the effects of these two variables). The age groups we used to control the model are divided into four groups: 12-14, 15-17, 18-21 and 22-29.

Figure 1 shows the results of the logistic regression, revealing that with a decrease in the age at the time of the first sexual intercourse (in regards to the reference group of 22-29 year olds), the probability (risk) of being forced to engage in sexual intercourse (rape) increases significantly: youth and young adults who had their first sexual intercourse when they were 5 to 11 years old are 14.6 times more likely to be raped than those who initially had this experience between the ages of 22 and 29 (we will discuss this point later). Those youth and young adults who had their first sexual intercourse when they were 12 to 16 years old had a 2.99 higher probability of being raped than those of the reference group (22 to 29 years old).

Furthermore, concerning the age of the first sexual partner, those who had their first sexual intercourse with a sexual partner who was 16 to 21 years old had a 52 percent higher probability of having been raped than someone who had their first sexual intercourse with a sexual partner aged 10 to 15 years old. Thus, those who had their first sexual intercourse with a sexual partner aged 22 to 27 had a 99 percent higher probability of being raped than those whose first sexual partner was aged 10 to 15 years old. Similarly, those who had their first sexual intercourse with a partner aged 28 to 34 were 2.96 times more likely to be raped than those who were sexually initiated with a sexual partner aged 10 to 15 years old. Furthermore, those whose first sexual partner was aged 35 years old or older were 4.17 times more likely to be raped than those who had their first sexual intercourse with a sexual partner aged 10 to 15 years old. This suggests that among the study population those who had a substantially older first sexual partner are much more likely to have suffered rape. Thus, the results suggest that engaging in sexual intercourse for the first time at an early age with a significantly older sexual partner increases in a significant way the probability of being raped. Therefore, this finding can reflect that rape results from two different contexts of "sexual initiation": a) one in which the youth and young adult victims of rape chose an older first sexual partner, and b) one in which respondents seem to be reporting that their first sexual intercourse at an early age was in fact rape perpetrated by an older family member or acquaintance. In regard to the sex variable, women are 3.5 times more likely to be forced to engage in sexual intercourse (raped) than men, as prior research has suggested.

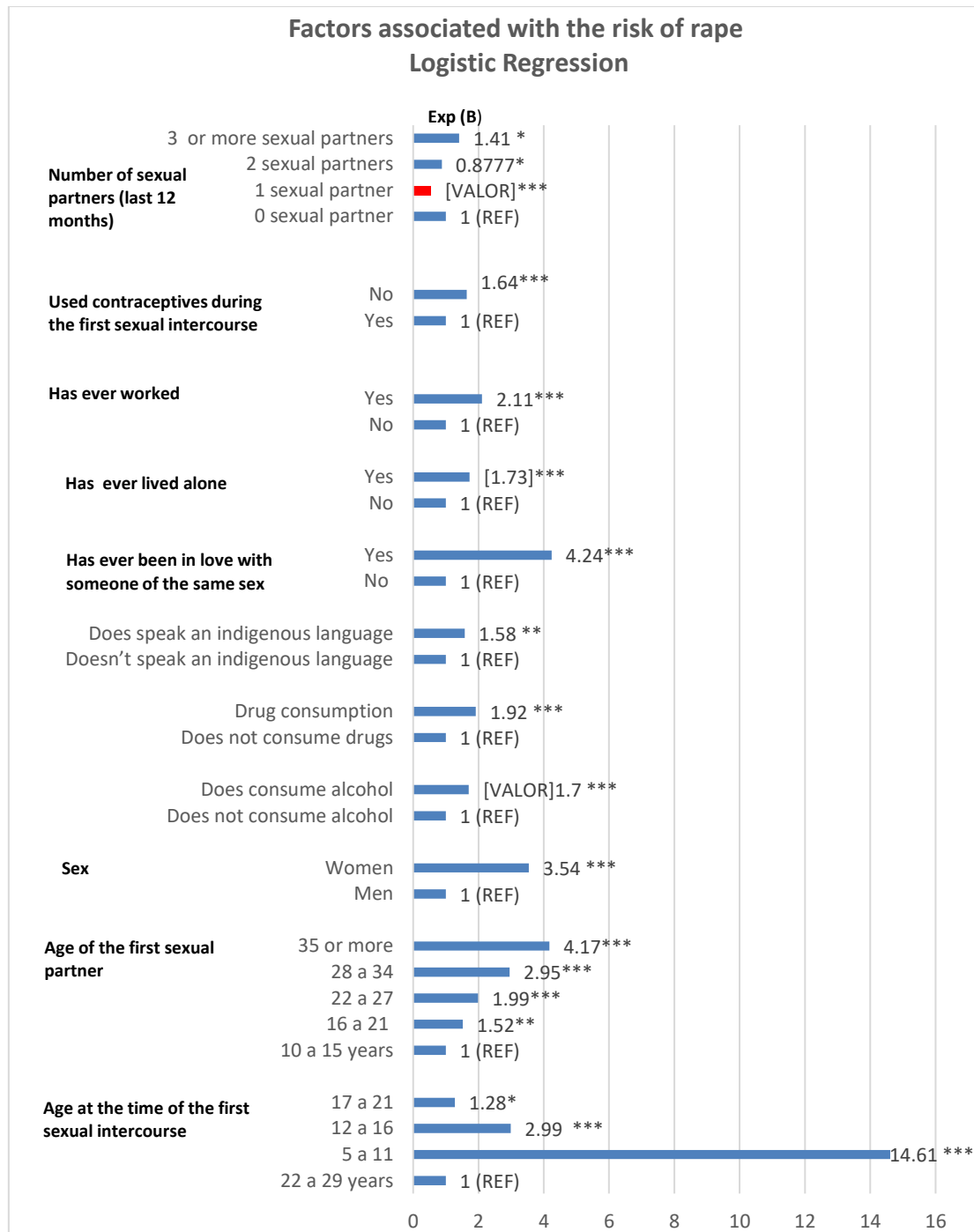
Likewise, youth and young adults who have ever consumed alcohol and drugs have a 70 percent and a 92 percent higher probability of being raped than those who have not ever consumed alcohol or drugs, respectively.

Additionally, youth and young adults who speak an indigenous language have a 58 percent higher probability of being raped than people who do not speak any indigenous language.

Remarkably, people who reported having ever been in love with someone of the same sex are 4.24 times more likely to be raped than those who reported never having been in love with someone of the same sex. Moreover, the youth and young adults who have lived alone once in their lives have a 73 percent higher probability of being raped than those who reported having never lived alone. In addition, youth and young adults who have worked at least once are 2.11 times more likely to be raped than those who have never worked. Those who did not use any contraceptives during their first sexual intercourse have a 64 percent higher probability of being raped than those who used a contraceptive during their first sexual intercourse. Finally, although some categories regarding the number of sexual partners in the last twelve months are statistically significant in the model, we cannot observe any clear tendency concerning this variable.



**Figure 1. Factors associated with the risk of rape Logistic Regression**



Source: Own construction based on data of the ENAJUV (2010)

\*\*\* Significant at the 99% probability level

\*\*Significant at the 95% probability level

\* Non-significant



## **Discussion**

Despite the limitations (we will discuss this point later) of studying this sensitive subject (rape) using a quantitative approach with a limited sample (N=426), we consider that it is important to document the prevalence and factors associated with this form of violence among youth and young adults in Mexico. There are few statistically representative studies involving rape among youth and young adult victims (female and male) in Mexico and even fewer attempts to study rape perpetrated by persons other than the intimate sexual and/or romantic partner.

Notwithstanding the results of prior research (Omari, Ondichu and Kungu, 2014; Peterson and Bailey, 1992), according to the statistical model used (figure 1) socioeconomic status was not statistically associated in a significant way with rape among this population. This rejects the initial working hypothesis that assumed a relation between rape and socioeconomic status, corroborating prior research indicating that rape crosses socioeconomic lines (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2012; Acierno et al., 1999). However, we consider it important that future studies continue to test this relation using other surveys and statistical models. Although other studies have suggested (Yuan et al., 2006; Abbey, Thomson and McDuffie, 1994; Child Trends, 2014) that the consumption of drugs and alcohol are linked in a statistically significant manner with the risk of rape, this does not necessarily prove that alcohol and drug consumption provokes rape (following the logic of a rape supportive culture), but that the habits of drug/alcohol consumption can be the consequence of rape given the negative mental and emotional outcomes this kind of violence generates. However, more studies are needed to clarify the meaning of this relation (rape and the use of alcohol and drugs) (Abbey McAuslan, and Thompson, 1998). Long-term prospective studies that follow the same group of people for several years would be useful to determine whether alcohol consumption precedes rape or vice versa (Wilsnack et al., 1997). Even though the gender index constructed during the analysis was not statistically significant in the model, this does not rule out the fundamental role of gender conditionings and inequalities in the prevalence of rape. Thus, different variables related to gender dimensions and conditionings were highly significant in the model: gender, the use of contraceptives during the first sexual intercourse, and the age of the first sexual partner. This variable show, as prior research has pointed out, how rape and sexual abuse of children, youth and young adults are shaped by gender and power (Whittier, 2016:96). The model also suggests that not only gender inequalities but also generational inequalities (the significant differences in age between sexual partners, especially at the time of the first sexual intercourse) have a strong influence on the prevalence of rape. Nevertheless, this does not mean to conflate the probability of rape in dating relationships between a youth-young adult and an older sexual partner, and the probability of rape of children by their older family members.

In parallel, the model indicates that having worked is related to the risk of rape. As prior studies have shown, this can be related to sexual violence and harassment, power imbalances and gender inequalities in workplace contexts (Potter and Banyard, 2011; National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2012). It is well known that rape crosses socioeconomic frontiers, however empirical evidence suggests that traditionally marginalized groups working in specific areas (in service and food industries, for example) are at increased risk of sexual victimization in some contexts including in the workplace (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2012; Jewkes, Sen and Garcia-Moreno, 2002). Further research on this topic is needed, since the links between sexual violence and rape and the workplace are under-studied (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2012; Davis, 1996). In connection to this, the model suggests that to speak an indigenous language increases the risk of rape among the study population, indicating that traditionally marginalized groups (in this case ethnic minorities) face a greater risk of being raped. This finding also unveils an ethnic and race dimension of rape among the study population.

These results may also suggest that sexualization of violence (sexualized violence) contributes to the reproduction of the unequal relations of power (permeated by ideas about race and class) that are expressed



in the scope of sexuality (and beyond it) that legitimize violent practices (including rape) (Whittier, 2002) against (but not exclusively) those considered to have transgressed social norms (living alone, having more sexual partners, having been in love with someone of the same sex, etc.) as a way of maintaining gender, power, heterosexuality structures and normativities in the Mexican context. Hence, rape can be seen as a mechanism for actualizing power, gender, generational inequalities as well as heterosexual dominance (Hirigoyen, 2006). Furthermore, following Gordon and Riger (1989), rape can be conceptualized as a form of social punishment. This is especially remarkable when talking about the fact that youth and young adults who have been in love with a person of the same sex are more likely to have suffered rape. Among this population the disclosure of rape during the survey can also be due to the fact that the majority (almost 50 percent) of these respondents are highly educated and 80 percent of them are 21 years old and older. However, further research into this area is needed to confirm or refute this relation.

Additionally, from an intersectional point of view, we consider that the social construction of sexually available (and rapeable) bodies (starting from the social hierarchy of subjects and their bodies) especially of women, but also those of girls and boys (Sosa-Sánchez, Erviti and Menkes, 2012), and of individuals belonging to political or ethnic/racial minorities (for example, those who spoke an indigenous language) combined with gender dynamics and heteronormativity imperatives contribute to reproduce and trivialize rape, revealing not only the engendered but classed and raced nature of rape banalization (Whittier, 2002).

## **Conclusions**

The results of this study show that the prevalence of rape is an important problem among Mexican young adults and youth. Of those surveyed, 2.9 percent of the study population aged 12 to 29 years old who were sexually initiated reported having been raped at least once in their lifetime, despite the reluctance of the victims to report and disclose this violence, especially during a survey. In this regard, as we mentioned before, only one in three youths and young adults who reported being raped disclosed this violence to someone else: six in ten disclosed the rape to a relative, and one in ten youths and young adults who were victims of rape reported the crime to the proper authorities. This shows not only the stigma and the taboo surrounding this violence, but also the lack of trust in the official institutions of the Mexican justice system. Besides, this also unveils, in the case of victims who have been raped by those in their inner circle (a family member, an acquaintance etc.), that the non-reporting of rape could be related to fear, a reluctance to upset their family/group of friends, or because the victims do not want to get their offender in trouble; victims of rape by a stranger are more likely to report it than those raped by an acquaintance (SVRI, 2011). This combines to suggest the persistence of a rape supportive culture in the Mexican context (Gavey, 2005), one that is pervasive and structurally integrated into all societal levels (macrosocial, communitarian, relational, individual) and which contributes to legitimize hegemonic social discourses (about gender, heterosexuality and sexual relations) that are fundamental for the reproduction of the socio-cultural preconditions (norms and practices) of rape. In addition, a rape supportive culture contributes to eroticize rape and promotes the perception of sexual violence and even rape as romantic, obstructing the reporting of rape and its social recognition as a crime. This helps to trivialize and even normalize sexually violent practices and rape (Lisak 1991).

The analysis presented also indicates that rape among young adults, but particularly among youth is shaped by intersectional inequalities of gender, generation, ethnic-race affiliation (for example) which structure individual-level experiences, cultural representations, prevalence, rape scripts (including gendered grammar of violence) and state and institutional responses to face it (Whittier, 2002; Marcus, 2002).

Furthermore, despite the construction of different gender indexes, none were associated in a statistically significant way with the risk of rape. First, this can be due to the difficulties involved with quantitatively measuring gender inequalities. Secondly, the lack of association of the constructed gender indexes with rape risk can be due to the fact that the recent changes in gender roles in everyday life in Mexico have not still permeated certain aspects related to norms and traditional values. However, the results presented suggest that gender and rape are strongly related: women are more likely to be raped than men, young women who



had their first sexual intercourse with an older man have a higher probability of being raped; and men and women who have ever been in love with a person of the same sex are more likely to be raped. Thus, the data suggest that not only gender inequalities, but also generation inequalities (significant age disparities between intimate sexual partners), ethnicity and race have a significant statistical association with the prevalence of rape. This is combined with the social acceptance of violence as an acceptable way to resolve conflicts and the normalization and trivialization of rape, especially of women, in contexts where different kinds of violence (particularly but not exclusively) against women are highly tolerated, contribute to ensuring the continuity and social reproduction of rape in the Mexican context (Jewkes et al., 2002).

From a feminist perspective (Gavey 2005; Marcus 2002), rape is the result of a much broader pattern of gender and power domination that accompanies other forms of social and economic control. Changing this situation necessitates the dismantling of social structures and mechanisms that contribute to its reproduction and normalization. Moreover, rape can be seen a part of a larger continuum of violence (with varying degrees of severity), engendered rape scripts and dynamics and forms of coercive heterosexuality that have tended to be normalized (Gavey 2005). In this way, rape scripts imply that social structures are inscribed in social actors' embodied selves and psyches, in the gender inequalities that enable rape to happen, and that rape itself is one of the techniques which continually actualize these scripts (Marcus, 2002). It is important to highlight how gender norms and stereotypes operate in sexual coercion and rape scenarios. As other studies suggest (Gavey, 2005; Child Trends, 2014) the data presented in this article shows that rape myths and discourses are false, given that rape offenders are frequently acquaintances of the victims and are not mainly disreputable strangers who threaten women and children. This questions the social construction regarding the risk of rape, revealing that this construction is linked to rape myths and scripts reflecting an engendered moral and sexual order that is also highly ethnicized, racialized, and marked by significant age disparities between intimate sexual partners. Concerning the limitations of this study we recognize with Jewkes et al. (2002) that sexual violence and rape are taboo subjects which are hard to study through surveys, which are quite inefficient in capturing the real magnitude of the prevalence of rape (Fisher, 2004; SVRI, 2010) and obtaining an accurate measurement of rape is a major challenge in survey research, not only because of the highly sensitive nature of the subject but also because of the important under-reporting and its heterogeneity (for example, the more highly educated tend to report more episodes of sexual violence and rape than less-educated respondents). In addition, the lack of consensus about how to define and measure rape (non-standardized measurements and definitions) (SVRI, 2010) complicates not only comparative research, but also the ascertaining of the prevalence, patterns and factors associated with rape as well as its consequences internationally (Jewkes et al., 2002). In the case of the ENAJUV (2010) survey in question, the use of the concept of force to measure rape, as some studies have suggested (Fisher, 2004; Jewkes et al., 2002), is an important limitation. Not only because the wording of the item and the lack of explicit behaviorally specific questions to measure rape (Fisher, 2004; Bachman, 2012), but also because of possible miscommunications when using this word. Another limitation is that this survey did not include variables for other kinds of violence nor allow the further analysis of the sexual violence and rape history of those who have been forced to engage in sexual intercourse. Another limitation of the study concerns the sample, because this is restricted to those who reported having been sexually initiated even when many rape victims do not consider that rape constitutes a sexual act. Unfortunately, the question regarding forced sexual intercourse was asked only to sexually initiated respondents in this survey. This could signify an additional source of under-representation of rape victims among the survey being analyzed, further reducing the sample of those reporting having been forced to engage in sexual intercourse. Another important limitation is related to data collection: the lack of privacy and the lack of interviewer training when asking about sensitive subjects can increase under-reporting during the survey. We highly recommend the construction of surveys which utilize a self-administered mode of collection which provides respondents with less motivation to misreport when answering sensitive questions and which protects the privacy of the respondents.

Finally, despite the fact that some national surveys in the last two decades in Mexico allow for a better analysis of the prevalence of rape (especially in the case of women victims), it is necessary to underline the provisional and limited character of the data regarding this subject in this country. In this way, in general terms, the



surveys continue to offer unreliable information about the true extent of the problem. This represents an important limitation for the development of interventions that can respond in a more appropriate manner to the needs of the victims of this violence and even to prevent it. Valid and reliable statistical data on violence against women in general and rape against women and men in particular are essential for many reasons. The first step in preventing rape and sexual violence is to define its prevalence both conceptually and numerically. In addition, evidence in the form of reliable data is central to exposing the hidden nature of rape and to begin to erode its social tolerance.

### **Data Availability (excluding Review articles)**

All may access the data underlying the findings of the study using the ENAJUV 2010 data bases.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors of this article state, that this article does not have any interest conflict to declare.

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