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Parental Perceptions of Neighborhood Effects in Latino *Comunas*

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Abstract

Objectives—To obtain rich information about how adult Latinos living in high-poverty/high-drug use neighborhoods perceive and negotiate their environment.

Methods—In 2008, thirteen adult caregivers in Santiago, Chile were interviewed with open-ended questions to ascertain beliefs about neighborhood effects and drug use.

Analysis—Inductive analysis was used to develop the codebook/identify trends.

Discussion—Residents externalized their understanding of drug use and misuse by invoking the concept of delinquent youth. A typology of their perceptions is offered. Learning more about residents' circumstances may help focus on needs-based interventions. More research with Latino neighborhoods is needed for culturally-competent models of interventions.

INTRODUCTION

In the past 10–15 years there has been a stable or rising trend in substance use and drug trafficking in Latin America though with considerable variation in patterns between countries (The Threat of Narco-trafficking in the Americas, October 2008). In the recent study of drug use among secondary school student populations in nine Latin American countries Chile ranked highest in lifetime use of tobacco, marijuana, and coca paste (Drugs, 2008). The lifetime prevalence of cocaine use in Chile and Argentina were similar and the highest among the nine countries.

While considerable research exists on individual and familial factors associated with drug use (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992), research on the potential effect of neighborhoods on substance use is generally limited to examinations of how neighborhood characteristics may be related to whether or not individuals in those communities initiate substance use or certain patterns of use occur (Delva, et al., 2006; Galea, et al., 2003; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). Several researchers have noted that drug use in neighborhoods may be a question of access (Delva, et al., 1999; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002; Storr, Chen, & Anthony, 2004; Wagner & Anthony, 2002) with individuals from different neighborhoods potentially migrating to neighborhoods where drugs are more easily available.

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Perhaps one of the most problematic aspects of neighborhood studies has been the issue of selection bias (Galster & Santiago, 2006; Mayer & Jencks, 1989). More concretely, when correlations between aggregated neighborhood measures and individuals' behaviors are found, do these relationships indicate that neighborhoods are having an effect on families and children, or do these relationships suggest that families with different levels of socio-economic resources are selected into different kinds of neighborhoods? This is a particularly important issue in Chile as there have been several relocation projects that directed poor and working-poor to less centralized living such as outer municipalities away from the central city (Rodríguez & Icaza, 1998). Prior research has shown that neighborhoods lacking good role models (Wilson, 1987), having reduced social control and increased disorganization (Sampson & Wilson, 1995; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999), and greater isolation (Wilson, 1987; Cutler, Glaeser, & Vigdor, 1999) create environments more prone to delinquency, crime, and drug use.

Even as research has shown that there is some effect of neighborhoods on drug use, little is known about how residents of high-risk areas make sense of that danger and make choices regarding their own and family's safety. Even less is known about how to improve neighborhood quality for the benefit of residents. This is a vital area for researchers to attend to before policy makers and community workers can address neighborhood disintegration. To further contribute to the substance abuse field's understanding of the association between neighborhood characteristics and drug use, we conducted a qualitative study in Santiago, Chile, to illuminate how adults living in high-poverty/high-drug use neighborhoods perceive and negotiate their environments. Santiago was chosen because this study builds on a National Institute on Drug Abuse-funded project that is underway, the Santiago Longitudinal Study (SLS). As such, the infrastructure and contacts were thus already in place and made contacting interviewees a simple process. Also, Santiago is a unique site not only for the current study that is underway, but that Chileans are reporting the highest use of marijuana use in all of Latin America making this research compelling and important. Information from the present qualitative study will also serve to generate hypotheses that will be tested by the larger grant.

For this study we elected a qualitative approach because it would generate in-depth information concerning the interplay of neighborhoods and drug use outcomes (Nichter, Quintero, Mock, & Shakib, 2004). We look at individual responses to drug use in the neighborhood through the perceptions of the adult caregivers of youth living in Chile. Social ties, or the effects of associations with individuals has proven to be a substantive way to measure the effects of neighborhoods on individuals (Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). The premise of this study is that it is important to understand how residents themselves understand and interpret drug use and misuse in their neighborhoods.

METHODS

Sample

The present study was conducted in Santiago, Chile, in 2008. As previously discussed, it builds upon the work of the Santiago Longitudinal Study (SLS), funded by the United States National Institutes of Health. The SLS consists of two large longitudinal studies of 1200 adolescents ages 13–17 years old and their families presently underway in Santiago, Chile. The collaborating Institutions on these projects are the “Instituto de Nutrición y Tecnología de los Alimentos” (INTA) at the University of Chile and the University of Michigan.

The SLS is being implemented in several ‘comunas’ or municipalities in the city of Santiago. Each ‘comuna’ has its own governing system, including a mayor. The 13 interviewees came from two ‘comunas’, both with a population of approximately 100,000

residents. [Note, for confidentiality purposes, we do not name the ‘comunas’.] In one ‘comuna’ most of the residents are working class and have high poverty and crime rates. Residents in the second ‘comuna’ tend to be manufacturing workers and also have high poverty and crime rates. Residents in both ‘comunas’ are of similar socioeconomic status; the average annual household income is under \$15,000 a year. Main streets lead to metro (subway) stops, but many residents use the more inexpensive bus system. Buses run up and down the main streets throughout the day, occasionally taxis also appear though they tend to stay stationed near the metro taxi stands. In the early morning, before 10am, most of the movement consists of individuals going to work or students going to school. However, around noon the areas begin to liven up. Young men start to congregate in areas around the neighborhood, and more women appear with their shopping bags.

Passageways can have less or no traffic at all depending on whether there is a street for cars to pass through, or if it is gated off at one end. Three residents lived in a part of the comuna that was labyrinth-like. It was easy to get lost and confused in finding the residents’ homes. This was evidenced when asking for directions. Usually most individuals could name the street they lived on and the one down the street, but had little knowledge of streets a few blocks over. The comunas can be lively places, with children playing soccer or hanging out. During the winter months, there is less outdoor activity due to the cold and rain.

From the SLS parent study, 13 adults were randomly selected to participate in this study. The selection of these participants was determined based on the findings of a mixed-methods pilot study conducted a year earlier, in 2007, with 31 families. The purpose of that study was to pilot test the feasibility of conducting a Systematic Neighborhood Assessment with the families participating in the SLS. Findings from that study suggested that there were differences in adult drug use, experiences of victimization, and perceptions of neighborhood quality based on whether these families lived in ‘pasajes’ (passageways) or ‘calle’ (main street). A ‘calle’ is defined as a street where there is a two lane, or more, street and can tolerate heavy traffic. Oftentimes these streets will have access to public transportation such as taxis, metro, or bus routes. ‘Pasajes’ are smaller streets, sometimes with or without a street for cars, and sometimes only one car can fit at a time. A ‘pasaje’ may have one or both of its entrances closed by a locked gate. In these cases only residents have key access.

The thirteen individuals that were interviewed displayed a wide range of both personalities and energy levels. Most of these individuals were working class and face many environmental and political obstacles; living in poverty, crime-ridden neighborhoods which lack both financial and social supports. Yet all of the respondents displayed a warmth and courtesy by opening their homes for the interviews, and all offered tea, cake, or some other food for the interview (a traditional Chilean custom). All respondents had complex routines to manage their daily activities. The female caregivers had various scenarios, for example, of how to acquire food depending on the day of the week, the time of day, and the location and availability of local *ferias* or open-air markets. Responses varied as to how the individuals understood their environments and their emotional responses to barriers and opportunities. This will be discussed later in the paper. Table 1 shows characteristics of the caregivers including: whether they lived on a main street or a passageway, their sex, their occupation/activities, the average age for the caregiver, their educational status, their marriage status, how many family members lived in the home, how many children lived in the home under the age of 18, the type of house they lived in, amenities, internet access, whether their economic status was better, the same, or worse since the last time they were interviewed (at least one year ago), their religious affiliation, whether there are community groups in their neighborhood, and whether they participate in any community groups.

Although initially the present qualitative study was designed to probe further into the nature of the differences between ‘pasajes’ and ‘calles’ for the purpose of generating hypotheses that could be tested subsequently by the larger study, new, and potentially novel information emerged from the interviews. In this study we discuss these findings as well. Of the 31 families who participated in that earlier study (Horner, Sanchez, Castillo, & Delva, 2008), 13 caregivers were randomly selected for the in-depth interviews about their neighborhoods. About half were recruited from families living in ‘pasajes’ and the remaining from those living in ‘calles’.

Phone calls were made to the families and interview times in their homes were arranged. Individuals were told that this was a study looking at neighborhood characteristics. Although all individuals contacted were willing to participate they did so with the condition that the interview not be too long due to their busy schedules. All agreed to an interview that would last no more than 60 minutes. Participants were also willing to participate because of the trust they had for the professionals and the work affiliated with INTA. It turns out that INTA is the organization whose research and policy work is credited with the elimination of malnutrition in Chile and in helping other Latin American countries do the same. Thirteen caregivers, including two fathers, were interviewed. Interviews were conducted over a one week period in the Chilean winter of 2008. Because nearly all caregivers participating in the SLS are biological mothers or grandmothers, initial interviews were set up only with female caregivers. However, on the day of the interview two fathers showed up during the interview. As a result, two males were able to be interviewed for this study. In addition to the interviews, each participant was asked to draw an answer to the question “what is your neighborhood?” This produced 12 drawings of the neighborhoods which were reviewed for common themes and pictorial replication, i.e. a certain neighborhood element would appear repeatedly. One of the respondents elected not to do this task because she indicated she was a bad artist. Finally, though no mention of payment was mentioned when the interviews were set up, a small gift of pastries was given to each family as gratitude for their time.

Measures

Interviews consisted of 10–20 open ended questions regarding participants’ neighborhoods. The questions were devised to tap into how they felt about general safety, access to resources, neighbor relationships, drug and alcohol use, and self-efficacy to effect change in their environment. Drawing from the neighborhood literature, certain questions were geared to understanding neighborhood effects (Sampson et al., 2002) such as social ties, norms and collective efficacy, institutional resources, and routine activities.

Interviews were conducted in Spanish, and were recorded with permission. In addition notes were taken during the interviews. Though the interviewer conducted the interviews in Spanish, the notes taken during the interview process were in both English and in Spanish as the interviewer is bi-lingual. All interviews and coding were conducted by one individual, the primary interviewer.

Interviews began with residents being asked about differences they perceived living in either ‘pasajes’ or main streets. This starting point emerged from research done the previous year with the same community residents that suggested that a greater percent of cigarette and drug use was found among families living in main streets versus *pasajes*. In addition, a greater percent of families living in main streets versus *pasajes* experienced victimization. This line of questioning was the doorway to discovering how residents felt about their neighborhoods, their perceptions of drug availability and use, and their beliefs of their own self-efficacy. Follow up questions were added to the interview protocol based on responses provided by participants. For example, in response to the question “Which do you perceive to be safer: a main street or a passageway street?” responses were followed up with probes.

The interview schedule built on the semi-structured interviews conducted in the mixed-methods pilot study a year earlier with the same group of individuals and attempted to further explain differences in passageway living versus main street living. Interview questions addressed factors that show independent validity for neighborhood effects (Sampson, Morenoff, Gannon-Rowley 2002). For example, participants were asked the open ended question “Tell me about a typical day for you” in an attempt to understand parental attitudes and behaviors of routine activities which can uncover how land is used, navigated, and negotiated.

Analysis

After interviews were conducted, they were transcribed, and coded in Spanish. All quotes used in this article have been translated from those original codes. Interviews were written into rich text format using Microsoft Word and coded using a text analysis computer program, MAXqda. The interviews were coded using inductive analysis that allowed the discovery of “patterns, themes, and categories” (Patton, 2002). Several themes arose from the inductive analyses that are discussed below. The 12 drawings of the neighborhoods were reviewed by the lead author for common themes and pictorial replication, i.e. a certain neighborhood element would appear repeatedly.

RESULTS

All participants were homeowners between the ages of 30 and 70 and had at least one child between the ages of 13–16 years. Most had lived in their homes for more than ten years. Most had some occupation either working at home as a child caregiver (nanny), or selling various products such as homemade hats. One couple ran a small convenience store. One of the husbands worked in construction, the other drove a taxi. In describing their ‘comunas’, residents often referred to their neighborhoods as the ones that you see on the nighttime news cast with “the police chasing people.” The common perception of these areas is that they are working-class poor, high drug use areas, and increasingly dangerous places to live.

Surprising, though this study was focused on drug use, the participants in the study contextualized the problem of drugs as an external issue and equated it with *other individuals*. Though this is consistent with the literature (Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002) that states social ties are an empirically accurate way to look at neighborhood effects. Yet though this discovery was unique, it became the major theme across all interviews. The term that residents used to illustrate this theme was that of “los delinquentes” or “the delinquents.” Unexpectedly, every interviewee, without probing, referred to this term. Through follow up questions participants were encouraged to elaborate on the meaning of this term both as a reality for themselves and their families as well as for their communities. Hence, residents made meaning of their association with drugs as an *externalizing* process imposed upon other human beings, notably the youth of the Santiago *comunas*.

“Los delinquentes” was a general concept used to describe the group(s) associated with the problem of high drug use, neighborhood deterioration, and general fears for safety. The concept is an in-vivo one, in other words, concepts that are analyzed taken straight from empirically driven data can be used to extend our understanding of individual meaning-making.

For the purpose of this analysis, this concept is utilized as the fulcrum for understanding the parental perceptions of neighborhood effects on their children’s lives. The perception of parents and caregivers may have direct effects on the health and behaviors of children

through the process of socialization (Galster & Santiago, 2006). For this reason, the importance of understanding the script of “los delincuentes” is vital.

The perception of “los delincuentes” was understood by residents through three emergent categories: (a) reaction to real danger, (b) understanding of ambiguous danger, (c) learned powerlessness. Each of these processes aid in untangling how residents make sense of living in high-drug use neighborhoods. Each of the above was a concept that expressed an empirically driven analysis, and attempting to distinguish other concepts of how delinquents are perceived, we used simple direct language in defining these domains.

Reaction to Direct Danger

Reaction to real danger refers to parents having first hand and direct experience with delinquents. For these residents, their perceptions of delinquents and their affect on neighborhood health was a result of an immediate experience. This includes day-to-day life and reactions to trauma. Each family, regardless of whether they lived on main streets or in ‘pasajes’ had direct experiences of direct danger. For example, one mother who owned a small convenience store below her apartment (someone who lives in a main street) told of a story of when she came downstairs one morning to find her cash register stolen along with food, and some other materials. Equally, residents who lived on ‘pasajes’ spoke of how they had plants stolen from their yards, or their community spaces vandalized. Families in general did not believe there was a difference between living in ‘pasajes’ or main streets.

In asking the level of satisfaction with the neighborhood, most families would begin by stating they were satisfied. They were happy where they lived. Even as residents indicated that they felt safe where they lived, during the course of the interview they revealed that they lived with regular sounds of gunfire going off, destruction of community property, or neighborhood assaults. Residents further offered that this could be avoided if outdoor gates were locked as thieves could enter if one was not vigilant.

All of these residents live in ‘*comunas*’ of Santiago that are high in poverty, crime, and drug use. One woman mentioned that her neighborhood was part of one that you see on the nightly news all the time, with the police chasing delinquents down the street. The participant indicated that these areas were dangerous especially after dark, though one woman mentioned that her 13 year old daughter had been assaulted only just the day prior in plain daylight. Her daughter had been walking home from school around two-thirty in the afternoon and took a call on her cell phone, thinking it was her mother. The moment she took a call, a young man came up behind her, threw her down on the street, and ran off with her cell phone. The young girl, her mother indicated, was fine after awhile, but the incident, understandably, distressed her greatly.

In another instance, one of the fathers mentioned that as a taxi driver he had noticed around the neighborhood that young people were getting more disrespectful and dangerous, and last week he had a couple enter his taxi, assault him, and make off with his money. He called the police but, he complained, they were not helpful. Upon coming to the crime scene, the police took down the information, and then informed him that they could not do anything. He would have to go to file a separate report in another area of the city. The frustrated taxi driver left and did not make the second report. “How could I?” he continued, “I have to make money today, and I can’t lose all that time.” He also indicated that there is a new phenomenon occurring in these neighborhoods in Chile and that is children and adolescents not letting vehicles drive through their neighborhoods without the driver having to pay some amount of money, albeit small, to be allowed through. If they do not pay they fear that as they drive on these youth will throw stones and damage their vehicles.

Other families spoke of hearing gunshots throughout the night, and of having petty thievery in their homes or from their porches. Residents as a result did not keep any valuable items inside their patio area. Even so, two separate residents reported that they had lost plants on their patios. Further probing as to why someone would steal a plant, resulted in one mother claiming, “the drugs, they will still anything for drugs...even a plant.”

Still other families mentioned that gangs were beginning to show up in their neighborhoods from young children calling themselves “Los Pokemons” to the more dangerous and violent “Neo-Nazis.” Gang members carried knives and guns, sold drugs, intimidated women, and destroyed property. The notion of gangs has been a new phenomenon in Chile, and has increased in the past ten years. The proliferation of gangs and organized crime has coincided with robbery and gunshots in the night. These gangs, they noted, were showing up in specific and defined areas of their neighborhoods. “When we take our children out to play, we need to always be careful. We don’t go where the gangs hang out. But yes, you can see them from here.” This statement came from a mother who lives on a street across the way from a school. In the far corner of the school yard, congregations of gangs were just recently beginning to claim their territory.

These residents in fact all dealt with a tangible reaction to danger. Almost every respondent claimed that drugs were the main problem with the delinquents. The delinquents, they indicated, were made crazy, greedy, and violent by the easy access to drugs. Drugs provoked the fighting, the catcalls to young women, the gunshots at night, and the stealing of property. When asked which drugs they used, most residents claimed “pasta base” which is a cocaine derivative of very poor quality often mixed in with any powdery substance, even stucco or chalk (base’).

Understanding of Ambiguous Danger

Understanding of ambiguous danger refers to threats that are perceived. These are not direct threats such as muggings or other assaults. These are the perceptions of danger that are heard about, through secondary sources. Yet, these perceptions can be just as powerful in shaping attitudes and behaviors about neighborhood effects as direct danger. Perceived threats ignite powerful scripts that inform a resident’s view of the circumstances. Although there were no direct differences between individuals who live in main streets or ‘pasajes’, the residents in ‘pasajes’ did believe that their not living on main streets afforded some defense; they described being isolated as a protective factor. Interestingly, individuals living on main streets cited access to police vigilance as a protective factor in their safety.

The threat to safety is one such important theme that arose. One of the interesting aspects of why the residents felt unsafe was because “outsiders” were coming into their neighborhoods and destroying and stealing. One mother mentioned that in her ‘pasaje’ there were no problems but on the ‘pasaje’ next to her, there was a disreputable house. This place had as its owner a woman who sold drugs around the neighborhood and young men who were “international thieves” or robbers who traveled abroad to thief. When probed about this, the woman answered that this new wave of delinquents were showing up. What she and others in the community refer to as ‘international thieves’ consist of individuals who travel to the United States and Europe to steal Ipods, Wii systems, clothes, money, and so on. Then, “they ’import’ these items back to Chile and walk around the neighborhood with these fancy clothes and would try to sell them as well”, this mother continued.

When asked where these “outsiders” come from, most residents said they did not really know. Some claimed that the delinquents were even poorer individuals coming from the ‘comunas’ that had absolutely no recourses, where no one worked and where there was a lot of drugs and crime. In understanding their location and place, only one of the respondents

indicated that the drug users or delinquents were from their neighborhoods. Almost always, these individuals were perceived as coming from elsewhere. This elusive concept of “elsewhere” or danger from strangers was another prominent theme that surfaced in this study. Such a framing of the problem highlights the difficulty in creating policies and interventions for community health and organization. This script of the “stranger” contributes to a vague perceived threat. This is not to say the threat of being shot or accosted by drug dealers and addicts is not real, however by employing the discourse of the ambiguous ‘other’ or ‘outsider’ the development of appropriate intervention strategies is further complicated. For example, how does one hope to eradicate drug use and its consequences in a neighborhood when one does not know who the users and sellers are exactly?

Learned Powerlessness

Learned powerlessness refers to the process by which residents engage in activities that would otherwise improve their neighborhood health, but are in some way defeated rather than uplifted by their efforts. In this study, the residents learned that they were powerless when they had made fruitless efforts over time (linear progression) to maintain their neighborhood through garden projects, and ejecting delinquents from their streets, and also in the inability to secure access to local institutional resources. For this process, there was a distinction between individuals living in ‘pasajes’ versus main streets. Decidedly, the individuals living in ‘pasajes’ felt more isolated and less able to make effective change. They believed that they were safe on their street, but did not attempt to venture past a few houses. This was after experiencing repeated frustration at their attempts to improve community health and safety. Individuals living on main streets, on the other hand, were inclined to express hope for change, but in the end were not engaged in any community health projects either.

For several of the residents, community health was an important value but one that they met with frustration. Disgust for political corruption was palpable. Anyone walking through the neighborhoods can see walls lined up with the names of various political leaders such as “Mayor Olvado¹ lies.” As one resident put it, “When it is time to change mayors (elections), they start to offer you things. They offer to put up lights around the neighborhood, to illuminate the dark streets. They offer this and that, but once they are elected nothing happens. They don’t come through.” When asked more about this, the mother continued that “this has always happened here. Even if you get someone good, they are giving away resources to other people.” The frustration at not having adequate resources was echoed throughout many of the interviews.

Another father mentioned that he had tried to maintain a small green plaza area outside his home:

“What we do doesn’t last long here. Because one time one of our neighbors acquired some playground equipment from the municipality. She got them and we had to install them. We worked for three weeks continuously, every weekend, to put up the equipment and some stone work for the corners of the plaza. Then suddenly the next day, they [the delinquents] came and destroyed everything. Just to hurt us. Just to destroy things. They stole the stonework, just to do it...when they are on drugs they just destroy things.”

Residents who exhibit a willingness to improve their neighborhoods come up against so many barriers. And there is little to no support from the elected officials or the police. The

¹Name changed.

only community agencies at work were faith-based, mainly running out of Catholic and Evangelical churches, and they provided services only at the church.

For most parents, then the most common solution to protect their children was for the children to remain inside. Lack of public resources and institutional supports prevent these residents from making effective change in their communities. As a result, they have learned hopelessness and tend to feel disempowered with regards to their neighborhood health.

Neighbors were generally not cohesive in this environment. Most residents referred to their neighbors as people that they knew but would not call upon for help or to be social with. Few residents in these neighborhoods had any larger sense of who lived near them. Most knew or could identify their neighbors on their street or 'pasaje', but when asked about other neighbors residents answers were less direct. Also, very few individuals even knew the names of the 'pasajes' within a two-minute walking radius of their house, or even at times the name of the 'pasaje' down the street from them. Almost no one socialized with their neighbors beyond polite exchanges when they would meet on their way in or out of their homes. This social isolation appears to be a complex mix of external realities (drug dealers, violence), and internal controls (perceived threats).

DISCUSSION

In unpacking how the perception of "los delincuentes" was understood by residents, three categories emerged: (a) reaction to real danger, (b) understanding of ambiguous danger, (c) learned powerlessness from physical disintegration. Living in neighborhoods where residents are exposed to violence, live in fear of the unknown, and where their efforts to improve their homes are met with obstacles and frustration can have serious negative impacts on the lives and health of parents and their children. The combination of the various psychosocial conditions that affects these families interact synergistically. The social and cultural processes at play in these neighborhoods place residents at risk of developing severe complications to their mental and physical health (Singer & Clair, 2003). Borrowing from Singer's concept of a syndemic, which is defined as "two or more epidemics, interacting synergistically and contributing, as a result of their interaction, to excess burden of disease in population" (Singer & Clair, 2003, p. 425). One area to consider then would be to examine how these perceptions of neighborhood safety, access to drugs, increase in gang activity, decrease in institutional supports, lack of safe outdoor spaces to play and enjoy all impact one another in ways that create a larger effect than each of these issues would on their own. In addition, these issues may be compounded by communities that lack ability for change. Though there were very little differences in perceptions of neighborhood effects and its causes, individuals living on main streets did have a slightly higher use of language that was interested in political and social change. It is possible that individuals living on main streets are those who have been affected more directly by the relocation policies of the military government and as such express more interest in political and social changes. Further research is certainly needed to understand what it is about people living in main streets that may feel more politically involved than people living in 'pasajes', even though these expression of interest do not appear to translate into actual political involvement when compared to residents living in 'pasajes'.

Altogether, the study findings suggest that one potential intervention point would be not to directly attack the delinquent population. It would be worthwhile to invest in more research to discover who these individuals are exactly. As they are forming in 'comunas' where there is high unemployment, lack of opportunities, quick access to drugs, and decreasing quality of schooling, structural limitations should be examined more closely. Learning more about the residents' lives and circumstances would help focus interventions on addressing their

needs, rather than their fears. For instance, the plaza or central square has been a staple of Latin American culture. Spaniards brought this concept with them to the new world and clearly defines a traditional and well-understood cultural icon of neighborhood identity. To illustrate this concept, we note that the children's program 'Sesame Street' is called "Plaza Sésamo" in Latin America. Interestingly, all participants suggested that 'plazas' should be the foci of interventions. When simply asked, "tell me about what would be one aspect you would change about your neighborhood and why" the answer repeatedly without any probing was a plaza: A safe, clean, green area for their children to play in and for families to gather in. For policy makers this is a compelling and important point. One critique that (Kelling & Coles, 1998) assert in their discussion about neighborhood efficacy is that there are two approaches: the criminal justice system and community-based prevention. In the criminal justice model, approaching delinquency and neighborhood disorder focuses on the offenders, on more centralized organization of the police and court system, and in general dealing with deviant behavior through the criminal justice system. However, the system of the community based prevention provides more efficacy for the residents by identifying and acting on neighborhood priorities. From this study, it was clear that residents favored the latter than the former.

In addition, in order to meet the needs of the community and address issues of neighborhood effects careful attention must be paid to key stakeholders. Table 2 (below) begins to map out some of the community stakeholders that act and are acted upon by the families. For example, if local government agencies such as comuna mayors wish to allocate more funds to their districts, they must receive support from state and federal government levels especially in regards to budgetary and service supports. In addition, local law enforcement agencies must be on board to work with families and community leaders to further garner trust and mutual respect. Each of the outlining spheres indicates a stakeholder involved in the life and success of the family.

Clearly, the needed support and training is not currently in place for these comunas. In the interviews, many caregivers mentioned only church as a site for help and personal fulfillment. If neighborhood level interventions were to take place, new understandings and relationships would have to be forged between the community and government as well as law enforcement. Issues of mistrust, lack of faith, and disillusioned hope must be addressed. Also as these communities are often the target of police raids and intervention, new policies addressing community and police partnerships must be forged.

The study findings should be considered within the context of the following limitations. First, only 13 individuals were interviewed, and of these only two were male caregivers. Due to logistical constraints, more interviews could not be conducted. More research is certainly needed with larger numbers of participants, particularly fathers. Preliminary analyses of the larger SLS project indicate that the quality of the relationship between the adolescents and the father may be a more important protective factor against drug use than the quality of the relationship with the mother. Future qualitative research is certainly needed with fathers to further elucidate the potentially strong protective factors that involved fathers may have on their children, even if they live in neighborhoods where drugs are easily available and crime is prevalent. In considering further qualitative research, two important ethical considerations come to the forefront. First, Patton (2002) suggests that interviews are interventions and "are highly personal and interpersonal...qualitative inquiry may be more intrusive and involve greater reactivity than survey, tests, and other quantitative approaches" (p. 407). Due to this, Patton (2002) cautions interviewers to develop their own ethical framework. This is especially of concern for researchers engaged in research addressing drug use and subject matter that might involve illegal activity. A second ethical issue raised is the concern as to whether interviewees gain any benefit from being interviewed (Kleinig

& Einstein, 2006). Both of these ethical issues can be addressed through a committed partnership with the faculty and staff at the Instituto de Nutrición y Tecnología de los Alimentos (INTA). All participants in the study have great respect and trust for INTA and have received over the past 15 years both formal and informal supports. For example, in speaking with one mother she mentioned that as a small gift her son was given four tickets to the movie theater, which was something they could not have afforded. She claimed that this small gift allowed the whole family to be together, to spend some quality time having fun in a safe entertaining place. In addition, INTA provides supports for the families on a more informal basis such as helping the families with housing, food, and other social supports.

A second limitation is that the participants were recruited from only two of the four ‘comunas’ where the participants in the larger SLS project live. Future research is needed to include individuals from these other ‘comunas’ to identify if different themes emerge. In-depth interviews with the children of the families especially the teenagers would help unpack how youths are affected by their neighborhoods and how they make meaning of those realities vis-à-vis their family ties.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the present study provides in-depth information about how caregivers perceive the major issues for neighborhood health. The themes identified suggest that caregivers are not interested in involving more strict punitive arrangements but rather lean towards strength-based models of intervention. Through this study, it appears that a good point of intervention would be to enhance and create green spaces in the form of plazas and monitor these for safety for the residents to enjoy rather than attacking an ambiguous group of youth known only as “los delicuentes.” In the twelve drawings of neighborhoods, almost all indicated they would like to have a safe plaza for their children to play in and for residents to enjoy. The area would need to be protected and maintained, they reiterated. As it is, however, they keep most of their children indoors where computers have replaced outdoor activity. Instant messaging on the computer, and hanging out in chat rooms has replaced time spent outdoors, playing soccer, or swinging on the swing sets.

In conclusion, the study findings point out that much research remains to be done to investigate the complexities and nuances of neighborhood effects of the different Latino cultures in the U.S. and Latin America. Such work would truly be an important contribution to many elusive questions of culture, place, agency and structural effects both in the United States, Chile, and the knowledge base in general. As researchers and professionals the results of this study both saddened and inspired the authors. Saddened because of the normative nature of neighborhood disorganization apparent, in other words so many of the individuals perceived their circumstances to be lamentable but in some way “normal” and inescapable. We were also inspired by the results that suggested there were unifying concepts, in particular that of the plaza, that could in tangible ways be addressed by local stakeholders to begin the long process of neighborhood revitalization. In the end, we are both hopeful with some caution about the extent that this work could contribute not only the larger discussions of culture and neighborhood effects, but the specific interventions that might take place on localized levels.

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Figure 1.
View of pasaje

Figure 2.
Main Street View

Figure 3.
Playground View

Figure 4.
Stakeholders involved in policy change

Table 1

Selected Characteristics of Comuna Caregivers

Characteristic	%	Mean (sdev.)
Sex (Female)	87.0	
Age		37.1 (11.02)
Educational status		
Completed university	7.0	
Completed high school or vocational program	73.0	
Completed middle school or did not complete high school	7.0	
Did not complete middle school?	13.0	
Marital Status		
Married or stable partner	80.0	
Widowed	8.0	
N/A	2.0	
Number of children		1.6 (1.19)
Number of family members living at home (includes children)		4.6 (0.63)
Works from Home	38.0	
Amenities ²		
Average	16.0	
Most	38.0	
All	46.0	
In public housing	84.0	
Live on a passageway	46.0	
Live on a main street	54.0	
Religion		
Catholic	69.0	
Mormon	23.0	
Evangelical	8.0	
Internet connection at home	85.0	
Economic status since a year ago ³		
Same	7.0	
Change for the Better	85.0	
N/A	3.0	
Presence of community groups in neighborhood (Yes) ⁴	54.0	
Participate in community groups (Yes)	30.0	

² Composite score of the extent to which participants have television, washer, stereo system, refrigerator, and/or car where 'Average' refers to having three of these five amenities, 'Most' refers to having four of these five, and "All" refers to having all five amenities.

³ Answer to question "How is your current economic situation now compared to the last time we saw you (a year ago)?"

⁴ Answer to question "Are there any groups in this neighborhood such as bloc clubs, community associations, social clubs, helping groups and so forth?"