

macro-social, the meso-social, and the micro-social. The specific factors within each level of the proposed framework appear appropriate to demonstrate their roles in fomenting violence in many cities of the developing world.

The structural factors proposed by Briceño-León are often utilized by social theorists to explain various development issues. However, the evidence and arguments he presents for the widening gap between the small rich and large poor populations in a social setting that showcases wealth and power, the reduction of work opportunities among the educated youth, youth's rising expectations, and the inability of cities to meet their aspirations, as well as declining social control by the family and religion are convincing to demonstrate their relevant association with violence in cities. It would be worthwhile to include the declining ability of the government to control urban violence because of burgeoning population, corruption, and inadequate resources to meet basic needs, including the health and security of city-dwellers.

On the other hand, the author contends that meso-social factors have "less structural roots" and thus instigate violence, because they are easier to modify than macro-social factors. While it is understandable that segregation of a large segment of the urban population in slum and squatter colonies is a factor that foments violence because these settings harbor the poor and dysfunctional, I find the masculinity factor at this level a bit underplayed. As a gender issue, the patriarchy has structural dimensions and has persisted longer. Men across generations and cultures have instigated civil and global wars, so that to box in masculinity as one of many factors that foment urban violence is rather limiting. Men are the ones who are heavily involved in the entry, marketing, and use of drugs, firearms, and alcohol as well as the use of force to persuade others to engage in unlawful behavior. They are generally less verbally expressive of their feelings and are more likely than women to act aggressively. They also play a key role in religion, the family, and government because they dominate these social institutions. I believe that this gender perspective should cut across the three levels of the sociological framework.

Briceño-León's description of the resilience of segmented populations to respond to conditions of insecurity is a phenomenon that is taking place in many cities the world over. The presence of security guards in wealthy and middle-class housing areas as well as neighborhood vigilantes to maintain peace and order in poor urban communities, the use of var-

ious gadgets to ward off intruders in homes and establishments, the use of malls as "excursion" sites to provide a temporary breath of freedom and security, and the avoidance of neighborhoods and occasions that hasten the victimization of law-abiding citizens are the present-day city-dwellers' coping strategies to survive in the cities. Will the city as a former haven of "freedom and citizenship" ever be restored in this complex world?

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The article follows a line of reasoning that is pleasant to read from beginning to end and demonstrates the theme's scope.

The proposal is to explain urban violence in Latin America. The author uses a sociological theoretical model with three levels of explanation: factors that originate violence, structural factors or those referring to long-lasting social processes that allow violent behaviors to be created; factors that foment violence, of cultural or situational factors with an immediate effect on behavior; and finally factors that facilitate violence, with a more individual nature and which facilitate the violent act.

As the basis for the theoretical model, Briceño-León uses both theoretical justifications and data from surveys. Since he presents some quantitative data, from the scientific point of view it would be interesting if some statistical tests were performed to demonstrate the relations that are discussed, such as the relationship between the urban population percentages and the homicide rates.

All use of indicators is known to involve some limitations, since they are summary measures, it is possible to conceive of studies with a multilevel methodology, which take into account the social, economic, cultural, and other indicators pertaining to the various levels or dimensions in order to test the hypotheses raised in the present article, as well as to verify the factors with the greatest weight or which make the greatest contribution to urban violence (expressed here as the homicide rate) in order to orient actions.

According to the article, individual factors or those that facilitate violence involve greater flexibility of action, but when acting on individuals there are forces representing the contextual factors of the society to which they be-

long. The question then is how much the violence rates are modified with measures like the public disarmament campaign now under way in Brazil.

An ecological-type study by Gawryszewski & Costa ¹ in the city of São Paulo used a multiple logistic regression analysis to show that the independent factors related to the homicide rate were income (with a negative correlation) and the proportion of adolescents from 15 to 17 years of age not attending school (with a positive correlation). These findings illustrate what the current author states, i.e., that violence is a problem that occurs with youth, and according to Gawryszewski & Costa ¹, with young people who are not in school!

Organized society needs to invest in citizens with social programs, education, medical care, and vocational training, but it also needs to look further. How can society provide education when the citizens' family structure is jeopardized, when citizens live in segregated urban areas with a weak state presence, lack of public lighting, recreation, and culture, and to top it off a limited job supply.

In order to modify society's structural factors, it is necessary to study their contribution to urban violence, or else one runs the risk of merely implementing isolated measures. The main challenge is identifying where and how to act to attempt to modify this panorama of urban violence in Latin America.

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1. Gawryszewski VP, Costa LS. Homicídios e desigualdades sociais no Município de São Paulo. *Rev Saúde Pública* 2005; 39:191-7.

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The dynamics of social violence in Latin America

The paper by Roberto Briceño-León is an undeniably profound, mature, and sociologically and socially committed effort by the author to the process of transformation in Latin America, highlighting how the dynamics of violence corrupt the region's entrails. His erudite, methodical, and complex reflection on the convergence of factors that contribute to generate this phenomenon is certainly the most complete document of its kind produced in recent years, dealing with the issue in an explicative,

contemporary, and comprehensive way. His paper especially reveals an experienced sociologist, with vast capacity to read the international and Latin American classics, in dialogue with contemporary data on the region's demographic, epidemiological, educational, socioeconomic, and cultural transformations. Thus, without a shadow of a doubt, Briceño-León's paper is a milestone in the reflection on violence, due both to its original proposal and the wealth of theoretical and informational material provided to readers as the basis for his arguments.

In my role as discussant, I will attempt to raise a few questions to complement the reflection, in the understanding that a study of such breadth will leave out a few questions that need to be approached. In this debate I will mention three aspects: I will approach conceptual aspects; I will delve into some necessary distinctions in the Brazilian case; and I will contextualize the issue of contemporary crime (a term used throughout the paper as an implicit quasi-synonym for violence) in the world and Brazil, creating an ethos differentiated from the traditional forms of social transgression.

Conceptual aspect

The first point I wish to highlight is that Briceño-León does not refer exactly to violence as a multifaceted phenomenon ranging all the way from cruel and fatal aspects (e.g., homicides) to those that are taken for granted (like traffic violence) and covert, subtle forms (as in the case of intra-family violence, moral harassment, and others). Rather, he uses the phenomenon that is most visible and easiest to count, to treat statistically, and to compare, namely homicide. As a backdrop, his concept of violence runs up against the notion of crime, especially crime perpetrated and experienced by poor youth. In fact, this is an appropriate approach, as long as it is made explicit and viewed in a relative light, since homicide rates are the most reliable and sensitive indicator to reflect on social violence and its trends. However, this category does not encompass the entire phenomenon of violence which, from the public health intervention perspective, needs to be unveiled, understood, and explained in its multiple dimensions.

Further within the conceptual sense, and even referring only to the homicide phenomenon, Briceño-León leaves a conceptual gap when he omits the weight of subjectivity (and what kind of contemporary subjectivity is being created?). This theoretical and practical parameter is crucial for dealing with processes of