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Under the Shadow of Apprehension: Exploring Women's Perceptions of Public Insecurity in Tijuana, Mexico.

Bajo la sombra de la aprensión: Explorando las Percepciones de las Mujeres sobre la Inseguridad Pública en Tijuana, México.

ABSTRACT

This article explores how the perception of crime can weigh more heavily than actual victimization, particularly among women in urban contexts marked by structural violence. It adopts a qualitative exploratory-descriptive approach, grounded in the analysis of 233 in-depth interviews with women aged 18 to 50 residing in diverse areas of Tijuana. Although national surveys such as ENDIREH and ENVIPE are referenced to frame the broader context of gender-based violence in Mexico, the study's findings derive exclusively from qualitative fieldwork. No quantitative analysis is conducted as part of the research design. The interviews, conducted with a semi-structured guide informed by an ethnographic glossary, capture the everyday realities, fears, and strategies employed by women across generations. The narratives reveal how perceptions of violence are shaped by age, life stage, and lived experiences. Young women (18–25) describe heightened fear and distrust, often tied to direct or observed violence during formative years. Older women (46–50) articulate broader understandings of violence, encompassing psychological, institutional, and spatial dimensions. This

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intergenerational lens enables a deeper reading of how women make sense of insecurity and navigate their urban environments. The findings offer valuable insights for policy, feminist theory, and the development of gender-sensitive urban strategies.

Keywords: Sexual violence, Qualitative Research, Female Victims, Violence, Gender Approach.

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora cómo la percepción del delito puede tener un peso mayor que la victimización directa, especialmente entre mujeres en contextos urbanos marcados por la violencia estructural. Se adopta un **enfoque cualitativo de tipo exploratorio-descriptivo**, basado en el análisis de 233 **entrevistas en profundidad** con mujeres de entre 18 y 50 años, residentes en diversas zonas de Tijuana. Aunque se hace referencia a encuestas nacionales como la ENDIREH y la ENVIPE para contextualizar el fenómeno de la violencia de género en México, los hallazgos del estudio provienen exclusivamente del trabajo de campo cualitativo; no se realiza análisis cuantitativo como parte del diseño metodológico. Las entrevistas, guiadas por un instrumento semiestructurado derivado de un glosario etnográfico, recogen las realidades cotidianas, temores y estrategias de las mujeres entrevistadas. Las narrativas muestran cómo la percepción de violencia se configura según la edad, el momento vital y las experiencias vividas. Las mujeres jóvenes (18–25) expresan un miedo elevado, asociado a violencias presenciadas o vividas en su formación. En contraste, las mujeres mayores (46–50) elaboran concepciones más amplias de la violencia, que incluyen dimensiones psicológicas, institucionales y territoriales. El enfoque intergeneracional aporta claves analíticas para el diseño de políticas urbanas sensibles al género.

Palabras clave: Violencia sexual, Investigación cualitativa, Víctimas femeninas, Violencia, Enfoque de género.

Introduction

The city of Tijuana, Baja California, has historically been a focal point in the examination of violence and delinquency in Mexico. Nonetheless, it is imperative to investigate how this phenomenon distinctly impacts women, who navigate and reside within the city informed by unique perspectives and experiences. The notion that perceptions of crime often overshadow the actual prevalence of crime (Stafford,

et al, 2007) sets the groundwork for this article's analysis, given that such perceptions can diminish women's ability to fully exercise their citizenship in public domains due to criminal activity (Bastomski and Smith, 2017, p.74). An undeniable reality exists: women in Mexico have encountered constraints on their freedom of movement in urban areas owing to communal violence occurring in public spaces and the prevailing perceptions thereof (Garfias, et al, 2020).

The aim of this article is to examine the perception of violence among the women of Tijuana. This study, conducted with a qualitative lens, endeavors to offer an intricate and multifaceted understanding of women's experiences and perceptions, shedding light on the narratives and lived experiences of those residing in the city. Through their accounts, the intention is to grasp the emotions, perceptions, and decisions underpinning each experience. The research delved into how these women navigate life in a city marked by pronounced levels of violence, whether derived from their personal encounters or through third-party narratives.

At a national scale, the perception that violence and crime are ubiquitous is unmistakable, even more so when addressing violence against women. According to the ENVIPE¹ 2022, in Baja California, 68% of the population aged 18 and over identified insecurity as the most pressing concern afflicting them. This perception of insecurity has been on an upward trajectory, with 74% of women expressing feelings of insecurity when walking alone in the vicinity of their homes during nighttime. In contrast, 58% of men reported feeling unsafe (ENVIPE, 2022).

Consequently, this study also probes into the strategies and measures that women in Tijuana employ to confront and circumvent potential threats, pinpointing locations and times deemed most perilous. Through this research, perceptions are delineated by age brackets, aiming to comprehend potential disparities between the viewpoints and experiences of younger and older women.

¹ The National Survey of Victimization and Perception of Public Security (ENVIPE) 2022 is the twelfth installment of the statistical series generated by the National Subsystem of Information on Government, Public Security and Justice Administration (SNIGSPJ), coordinated by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) of Mexico. For the design of this statistical series, the best practices in the field of victimization surveys were used, specifically the recommendations of the United Nations (UN); likewise, the proposals of public security and justice authorities and academic experts in Mexico were taken into account, being also very valuable in its conception the experience of INEGI in conducting surveys related to security and justice, experience that dates back to the late eighties. Due to its importance, since December 2011 the ENVIPE was declared information of national interest by INEGI's Governing Board, which means that its use is mandatory for the Federation, states, Mexico City and municipalities, so its publication is regular and periodic.

At the heart of the security crisis lies Tijuana. Through a meticulous review of literature, as provided by Fuentes and González (2008) and Urbalejo (2021), the roots and contemporary manifestations of violence are discerned. The absence of urban planning, precarious conditions, and demographic saturation, coupled with an escalation in organized crime and societal issues, have forged a breeding ground for the victimization of women (Cruz-Triviño & García- Callejas, 2022).

The urban dynamics in border cities such as Tijuana have transformed public spaces into arenas of hostility for women. These realms, intended as symbols of integration, social cohesion, and societal advancement, instead mirror anxieties, perils, and constraints. While it is imperative to acknowledge the extent of this dilemma, the purpose of the accounts shared is not merely to highlight adversity, but to discern and evaluate the patterns, motivations, and strategies employed by women to navigate these challenges.

To guide the reader through the analytical process, this article is structured as follows: the first section presents the methodological design, detailing the qualitative strategy employed, the construction of the interview guide based on an ethnographic glossary, and the coding phases that led to the development of the analytical categories. The second section discusses the results, organized by age groups, highlighting inter-generational differences and continuities in women's perceptions and experiences of violence. The third section offers a critical discussion that relates the empirical findings to theoretical debates on gendered fear, spatial practices, and structural insecurity. Finally, the article concludes by outlining the main contributions of the study and its implications for feminist research and public policy in urban settings marked by violence.

Women's Perspectives on Violence in Tijuana.

In vast sections of Tijuana, growth is evident on informal settlements, absent of discernible urban development policies. Residents on the fringes have occupied vacant plots, driven by an ever-present need for habitation (Urbalejo, 2021, p. 49). Thousands reside in areas devoid of essential services such as water, on unpaved streets, with scant or non-existent public lighting, and lacking police presence.

The city ranks among the most violent in the nation. Since the 1980s, organized crime has intensified in border cities, and demographic growth has been concomitant with societal challenges such as substance abuse,

gang activities, domestic violence, and the like (Fuentes & González, 2008, p. 259).

It is imperative to probe the fear of crime experienced by women in Tijuana, as such trepidation carries detrimental implications at an individual level and reverberates throughout the social and communal fabric. As posited by Bruton-Smith and Jackson (2012), this apprehension can jeopardize women's physical and mental well-being while eroding societal cohesion and trust. Conversely, Yates and Ceccato (2020) characterize it as a "persistent feeling of the need for continual vigilance". Studies, such as that by Stafford et al. (2007), have correlated it with a decline in mental health and increased limitations in physical functionality, noting its particular impact on the youngest and oldest generations.

In Mexico, the need to address gender-based violence is evident. Mellgran et al. (2017) delineate violence against women as any gender-based act that could result in physical, sexual, or mental harm, warranting in-depth exploration to formulate effective countermeasures. While many women encounter this menace in private domains, public spaces are not devoid of perils. As per the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence, when manifesting at the community level, it encompasses acts that infringe upon women's rights in public arenas.

The perception of violence and the fear it engenders can markedly reshape human behavior, as indicated by Calonge (2022). Decisions regarding how and when to traverse a city are, at times, more influenced by trepidation than by individual agency. Urban design and planning play a pivotal role in shaping these perceptions and choices (Dymén & Ceccato, 2012).

Feelings that arise for many women navigating Mexican cities—apprehension, mistrust, caution, among others—are not unfounded. Experiences of sexual harassment in public spaces correlate with a range of adverse psychological and behavioral consequences (Mellgran et al., 2017). The perpetual perception of being at risk constrains women's mobility and is intrinsically linked to their fears of harassment and sexual violence (Yates & Ceccato, 2020; Macmillan et al., 2000).

The gender-fear paradox suggests that women harbor a disproportionate fear of crime relative to their actual risk, a perspective meticulously examined by Rader et al. (2020). Women feel more vulnerable to sexual violence (Condon et al., 2007), exhibiting heightened levels of fear and anxiety compared to men (Dymén & Ceccato, 2012).

Within this intricate landscape, urban environments and city planning play a pivotal role in the perception and experience of fear. The structures and dynamics of public spaces, as well as the interactions that transpire within them, can either facilitate or inhibit feelings of apprehension. A woman who perceives her surroundings as hostile or perilous will curtail her movements and activities, directly affecting her quality of life, autonomy, and freedom. Thus, public spaces become arenas for potential acts of violence, mirroring and magnifying perceptions of danger.

The perception and reality of fear carry a profound gendered connotation. In the Mexican context, this concern is substantiated by official data from the National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships (ENDIREH). As shown in Table 1, women consistently report higher exposure to sexual violence in public spaces. For instance, in both 2016 and 2021, more than 65% of women reported experiencing sexual violence in the street in the past 12 months, a figure that reflects the persistent and pervasive nature of this threat. These data underscore the structural conditions that shape women's heightened perception of insecurity in everyday urban life.

Table 1. Comparative Percentages of Intimate Partner and Community Violence 2016–2021. ENDIREH².

ENDIREH	Partner violence	Community violence		Assaults occurring in the street	Sexual violence in the street
	Throughout your current or last relationship	Last 12 months	Throughout his life	Last 12 months	Last 12 months
2016	44%	26%	39%	24%	65.3%
2021	40%	20.7%	46%	22.4%	67.2%

Source: Prepared by the authors with data from ENDIREH 2016 and 2021.

² The ENDIREH 2021 provides information on the experiences of physical, economic, sexual, psychological and patrimonial violence that women aged 15 and older have faced in the family, school, work, community and intimate partner environments. It also presents data on the aggressors and the places where the aggressions occurred, as well as additional variables that allow for the analysis of violence against women in Mexico. Due to its relevance, the ENDIREH was declared Information of National Interest by INEGI's Governing Board in December 2015.

Methods.

In the initial phase, an “ethnographic glossary” was devised, centered around 5 items to be addressed in an in-depth interview. The articulated items included: “narratives of everyday life,” “migration,” “gaps and inclusion,” “violence,” and “trans-border life.” Each item constitutes a section of the glossary; concurrently, each section encompasses a description of specific exploration criteria and guiding questions to be formulated (Flick, 2018). This stage spanned two months (May-June 2022), conducted through collaborative meetings among researchers specializing in each of the items.

Drawing upon the script crafted during the initial phase, the second stage entailed the execution of 233 in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method (Patton, 2014). This stage spanned four months (August-November 2022). The target population consisted of women residing in Tijuana, aged between 18 and 50 years. To ensure an environment conducive to candor and introspection, interviews were conducted in their homes, mitigating the potential influence of external distractions on their progression (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The objective of these interviews was to discern their perceptions concerning local crime. Such perceptions are shaped by a myriad of elements, including the rise in criminal activity, personal experiences, anecdotes from acquaintances, and their views on the city’s image. Notably, the physical and environmental facets of a city critically influence an individual’s sense of safety or threat (Ceccato, 2012, 4).

A particular emphasis was placed on analyzing how women perceive danger on specific streets and within neighborhoods of the city. At the local level, experiences and sentiments of crime and fear are more tangible. Moreover, it is within this microcosm of society that voices traditionally marginalized or excluded can gain greater visibility and exert more substantial influence. Part of this perception is grounded in the reality that the swift escalation in crime rates surpasses the local government’s capacity to deliver basic services, including ensuring the safety of its residents.

Regrettably, there has been a conspicuous absence of initiatives to directly listen to and address the concerns and experiences of those who bear the immediate repercussions of insecurity. This research endeavors to be a stride toward acknowledging and comprehending these voices.

Interviews were conducted utilizing a semi-structured approach, allowing for a thorough exploration of pertinent subjects (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The script, informed by the ethnographic glossary, was flexible in design to accommodate responses and pursue relevant lines of inquiry (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2019). All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed using the Trint software, which produced verbatim transcriptions. Once transcribed, the recordings and corresponding transcripts were independently reviewed and analyzed by the research team, ensuring interpretive depth and contextual accuracy³.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted with MAXQDA Analytics Pro, applying a thematic coding strategy grounded in the principles of grounded theory. Categories and analytical codes were systematically derived from the content of each transcript, and were then organized by age group, allowing the identification of intergenerational patterns and differentiated experiences of fear and violence. This analytical process facilitated the emergence of conceptual categories and themes reflecting both the objective conditions and subjective experiences described by the women (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The primary objective of the qualitative approach in field data collection during this research was to attain a rich and detailed understanding of the complexities and nuances of women's experiences within the studied context (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), and to amplify individual narratives that collectively construct the broader landscape of women's realities in the specific setting (Patton, 2014).

Sample

The acquired responses were subsequently categorized by age groups. The distribution was as follows: up to 25 years (36 In-depth Interviews), 26 to 30 years (12 In-depth Interviews), 31-35 years (11 In-depth Interviews), 36-40 years (33 In-depth Interviews), 41-45 years (45 In-depth Interviews), 46-50 years (42 In-depth Interviews). Upon gathering this data, all interviews were transcribed for subsequent analysis.

³ In alignment with the study's interpretive and qualitative nature, the presentation of findings is based on a purposive selection of interviews that displayed the most analytically rich narratives. After conducting the full coding process—open, axial, and selective—across all 233 transcribed interviews, the research team identified five interviews per age group (18-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, and 46-50) that offered the most salient reflections on the themes of fear, insecurity, and urban violence. This selection was grounded in narrative depth, emotional resonance, and thematic centrality to the axis of "violence" in the ethnographic glossary. The approach does not seek statistical representativeness, but rather interpretive and generational diversity, ensuring that the findings reflect both shared concerns and differentiated life experiences across age cohorts. This strategy adheres to qualitative standards of theoretical saturation and analytical transferability, and serves to foreground voices that best illustrate the study's core themes.

Utilizing MAXQDA software (Analytics Pro 2022, version 22.7.0), the research team undertook a rigorous process of open coding grounded in the methodological principles of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The coding began with a line-by-line analysis of each transcript to identify recurring concepts, particularly those associated with the thematic axis of "violence" from the ethnographic glossary. This axis had been previously operationalized in the interview guide through open-ended questions about experiences of fear, risk, and exposure to violence in everyday urban life.

During this initial phase, special attention was given to references explicitly or implicitly linked to notions of "fear" and "violence," allowing for a corpus of codes to emerge organically from the participants' narratives. This open coding was followed by axial coding, through which codes were grouped into broader conceptual categories (e.g., "public space avoidance," "gendered fear," "institutional distrust"), revealing both convergences and contrasts across interviews. Selective coding was then applied to refine and consolidate the core analytical themes.

Based on this layered interpretative process, the research team identified five interviews per age group that most comprehensively embodied the themes and subthemes associated with the violence axis. The selection was not arbitrary, but grounded in the density, narrative richness, and thematic centrality of the responses, following qualitative sampling logics informed by Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007) and Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2019). These interviews were chosen because they exhibited salient firsthand experiences and reflections on urban insecurity, and because they offered illustrative variation within and across generational segments.

This purposeful sampling from within the larger corpus ensured that the analysis preserved both conceptual saturation and representational diversity, thus reinforcing the analytical validity of the findings while respecting the epistemological integrity of qualitative research.

By encompassing a broad age range, the study succeeded in capturing a myriad of experiences and perspectives, reflecting both shared and unique lived experiences across demographic segments. This diversity is paramount in understanding how intersections of age, experience, and context influence the perception of violence within the city. Consequently, the sample offers a representative snapshot of Tijuana's female population and provides invaluable insights to fulfill the core objective of the article: to furnish a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of how women in Tijuana perceive and navigate violence in their daily lives.

The voices of these women, stemming from diverse life stages, underscore the pervasive nature of fear and violence in their daily lives, and the ways in which resilience, adaptation, and resistance manifest amidst adversities. Moreover, this representativeness ensures that the article's findings and conclusions are not confined to a specific subsection of the population but remain relevant and applicable to the broader experiences of women in Tijuana.

Qualitative Analysis

Following the completion of the field interviews and their transcription, the coding and analytical phase began. The participants—233 women between the ages of 18 and 50—were selected through purposive sampling to reflect diversity in age, socioeconomic background, occupation, and geographic residence within Tijuana. This approach aimed to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences related to urban insecurity and gendered violence.

The interview script was constructed based on a five-axis ethnographic glossary encompassing the following thematic dimensions: (1) everyday life, (2) migration, (3) inequality and inclusion, (4) violence, and (5) transborder experiences. Each axis included interpretive descriptors and guiding questions designed to facilitate open-ended responses and thematic flexibility. For the purposes of this article, the analysis focused on the “violence” axis, as it contained the richest empirical material regarding perceptions of insecurity.

The theoretical approach to data analysis was informed by grounded theory, particularly the framework proposed by Corbin & Strauss (2015), wherein coding is understood as the central engine of qualitative interpretation. The process unfolded in three interrelated stages:

- Open Coding: a meticulous line-by-line review of the transcripts was conducted using MAXQDA software (version 22.7.0). Fragments were assigned descriptive codes derived from participants' language and contextual frames, without imposing predefined categories. This stage allowed for the emergence of initial patterns and themes, particularly those associated with expressions of fear, perceived danger, and spatial avoidance.
- Axial Coding: in this phase, codes were compared, grouped, and linked across transcripts to form broader analytical categories (e.g., “emotional adaptation,” “public space avoidance,” “institutional

distrust"). Properties and dimensions of each category were identified to deepen the understanding of the mechanisms through which fear operates in women's lives.

- **Selective Coding:** this final stage involved identifying the most salient and recurrent categories and crafting a coherent theoretical narrative that captured the intergenerational differences in how women interpret and navigate violence. The resulting structure of analysis respects the inductive nature of grounded theory and supports the study's aim to articulate empirically grounded, socially situated insights.

Results

The following section presents the analytical results derived from the qualitative coding of interviews, focusing specifically on the axis of "violence" from the ethnographic glossary. This thematic focus was selected due to its empirical density and its direct relevance to the study's core objective: understanding how women in Tijuana perceive and navigate urban insecurity. The categories presented here were developed through an iterative process of open, axial, and selective coding, as detailed in the methodology. These categories are not pre-established but rather emerged inductively from the interview material, capturing recurring emotions, experiences, and interpretations related to fear, spatial avoidance, and institutional distrust. Organized by age groups, the following findings reflect both generational continuities and distinctions in women's narratives, reinforcing the importance of life-course perspectives in the analysis of gendered violence.

Additionally, it is important to note that all interviews were originally conducted in Spanish and later translated into English for analytical and editorial purposes. Particular care was taken to preserve the original meanings, cultural nuances, and emotional tone of the testimonies. This attention to linguistic and contextual fidelity aligns with ethnographic rigor and reinforces the interpretive validity of the findings presented below.

Organized by age groups, the following findings reflect both generational continuities and distinctions in women's narratives, reinforcing the importance of life-course perspectives in the analysis of gendered violence.

**Opinion of the interviewed women in the age group of
"18 to 25" years on the topic of "violence"⁴.**

In-Depth Interview	Definition of Violence	Everyday Places	Influence of Violence	Personal Experience	Risk Time	Specific Hazardous Areas	Recent Experience of Violence
M19	Associated with fear of going out in the street for fear of robbery, kidnapping or homicide. Constant fear in women of the possibility of violence, including drunken attacks or abuse.	Not specified.	The constant fear, especially in women, of suffering violence or harassment. The need to live with that fear and learn to cope with it.	Experience of almost burning down his house on two occasions and discovery of a body in the dam near where he lived.	As a woman, she is afraid and uncomfortable with harassing stares at all hours of the day.	Sanchez Taboada and Revolucion. Described as places where robberies, kidnappings and other forms of violence occur.	It does not mention any events.
M24	Abuse by authorities, between people, between families. Constant fear in everyday situations.	1. Beach 2. House 3. Some public places.	Fear of going out, fear for safety of family members, distrust of others.	Almost assaulted in broad daylight in his subdivision.	All the time, given the multiple events at different times.	In the Downtown and in the surroundings of the colonies located in the canyons of the city.	She was assaulted in the subdivision where she lives during the day.
M24	Situation of women missing and found dead, violence by cartels, living in Tijuana means living in fear.	1. Home	Violence on the rise, Tijuana very dangerous, living in constant fear.	Attack upon leaving the university, pursuit and physical aggression by two individuals.	Afternoon and evening, after classes at the university.	a) Downtown b) Anywhere in the city when you take public transportation at night when leaving the university.	Assault upon leaving the university, resulting in injuries and the need to be incapacitated for two days.
M24	Making a person's life difficult. Vivir en ciudad violenta es triste y muy difícil, sin paz mental.	1. Home 2. Work	Feelings of threat at the health center, aggressive behavior on public transportation.	Experience of being followed on a pedestrian bridge, seeking shelter in a tent and being picked up by her husband.	Weekends, mainly at night.	a) Downtown b) The bus station	Incident on the pedestrian bridge where she was followed by an unknown person.
M24	Lack of values. Living with constant caution, distrust and the need for self-defense.	1. Home	Need to carry defensive weapons, not trusting strangers, danger when walking in the street, exposure to aggression.	Experience of harassment while walking to work, incident of a homicide on your property, home invasion in the past.	Night, especially when it is dark.	a) Downtown; b) Camino Verde.	Homicide on the interviewee's property, she felt unsafe and decided not to return home for a while, staying with a friend in the United States and in a hotel.

Source: Ethnographic Glossary "Border Urban Polyphony", FEyRI 2022.

For the age group of 18 to 25 years, the perception and experience of violence are inextricably woven into daily life. Fear emerges as a predominant emotion. Women consistently feel under the shadow of potential

⁴ **Item "Violence".** Objectives: a) Identify the connotations related to violence and the danger zones in the territory as recognized by the interviewee; b) characterize the areas of violence and danger as identified by the participant; c) identify the experiences of violence and danger of the participants. Exploratory criteria: a) explore a specific story of danger or violence that the participant has experienced in the region; b) identify narratives concerning the general opinion of the interviewee regarding safety in the city. Source: Ethnographic Glossary "Border Urban Polyphony", FEyRI 2022.

assaults or abuses. The city's central regions are perceived as especially perilous, particularly during nighttime. Narrated personal experiences underscore the palpable nature of this fear, with several participants recounting traumatic incidents. A deep-seated distrust of others, extending even to the authorities, coupled with a sense of the necessity for self-defense, are salient features within this demographic. Tijuana is seen as a locale where safety and serenity are compromised, impacting not only daily routines but also overall mental peace and well-being.

*Opinion of the interviewed women in the age group of
"26 to 30" years on the topic of "violence".*

In-Depth Interview	Definition of Violence	Everyday Places	Influence of Violence	Personal Experience	Risk Time	Specific Hazardous Areas	Recent Experience of Violence
30	Illegal activity, corrupt management of money, economic violence	1. House 2. Beach 3. Places where you buy goods	High rate of graffiti, environmental violence, community impact	Breathalyzer experience, abuse of authority	Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays	1. Insurgentes 2. 3rd and Negrete of the downtown neighborhood	Improper retention and damage to your vehicle by the authorities
27	Tijuana, fear and insecurity. Living in fear that something will happen to you.	1. Home 2. Work 3. School.	Fear at home, theft at work, worry at school due to schedules and public transportation.	His house was broken into; people have tried to steal cars in his neighborhood.	In the early morning, between 03:00 and 05:00 am.	a) Sanchez Taboada; b) Villa Fontana; c) Montes de Oca Street; d) Terrazas.	Robbery at his home in Villa Fontana at 03:00 am. He also recalls that they jumped on roofs and there were chases with guns.
28	Violence. I don't know, a super chaotic scenario.	1. Home 2. Office 3. Trolley	In their home: Before, they did not have security and were victims of robbery, especially at Christmas. Currently, they feel that their home is a safe place.	He has not been a victim directly, but he knows people who have been robbed or had their property stolen.	Afternoon-evening. The evening is when he feels that most violent acts occur, especially because the areas are not well lit.	a) Sánchez Taboada; b) Boulevard 2000	He has not had a recent experience of violence.

In-Depth Interview	Definition of Violence	Everyday Places	Influence of Violence	Personal Experience	Risk Time	Specific Hazardous Areas	Recent Experience of Violence
27	It can happen anywhere, even in neighborhoods considered safe. It relates violence to assaults and crimes that can occur in public places such as on transportation or while walking downtown.	1. House 2. School	At home, always try to keep doors locked for fear of strangers. Relate violence to the possibility of your child being snatched or having an accident with a vehicle, especially if the driver is drunk.	You once lived near drug addicts and criminals who demanded money and became aggressive if you did not give it to them. 4. You have not been a direct victim of assaults or robberies. 4. A man yelled at her and said things to her when she was about 18 years old, which caused her a lot of fear.	Weekends and evenings.	Downtown, in particular a street near Revolution Street where the cathedral is located, as it is dark, and a robbery occurred in front of her and her companion.	He mentioned that once, when he was with Miriam, they saw a girl's phone snatched on a dark street near Revolucion Street.
29	She did not answer.	1. Home Work 3. Alameda Plaza.	It affects how people are observed and causes caution in suspicious situations or individuals.	Assault at night when I was a student, father assaulted after withdrawing money from an ATM.	Night, especially when it is dark.	a) Downtown; b) Camino Verde.	She did not answer.

Source: Ethnographic Glossary "Border Urban Polyphony", FEyRI 2022.

Within the age group of 26 to 30 years, a cohesive trend regarding the perception of violence and its impact on participants' daily lives is evident. "Violence" is perceived not only as overt acts of aggression but also as subtle environmental manifestations, such as the presence of graffiti, residential insecurity, or even corrupt handling of resources. The home emerges as the primary daily milieu for all participants, serving both as a sanctuary and a source of apprehension due to experienced or known security incidents. It's noteworthy that the majority associate specific areas, such as the Sánchez Taboada neighborhood or the city center, with heightened perceptions of danger. Personal experiences range from thefts to confrontations with aggressive individuals, reinforcing the pervasive sentiment of insecurity. Evenings and weekends stand out as the most perilous times. Although not all participants have been direct victims of recent violent acts, their narratives resonate with a persistent concern and adaptation to an environment perceived as threatening.

Opinion of the interviewed women in the age group of
"31 to 35" years on the topic of "violence".

In-Depth Interview	Definition of Violence	Everyday Places	Influence of Violence	Personal Experience	Risk Time	Specific Hazardous Areas	Recent Experience of Violence
32	Shootings, assaults and generalized violence as "in the Middle East".	1. Home 2. Work 3. Park	When she goes out on the street, she is afraid that something will happen to her, such as being mugged.	She was caught in the middle of a gang shooting near her home after visiting a Swap Meet.	In the evening.	1. Sánchez Taboada 2. Boulevard 2000 3. Natura	In his colony, the nights are more dangerous.
35	Fear, especially in relation to the safety of her family and daughter. Fear of hearing gunshots regularly at night.	1. Home 2. Work 3. Shopping mall	Violence is considered high and for that reason you should be cautious for your own safety. In any place, there is always a degree of violence, although some places are quieter, and others are more brazen.	He has been the victim of an attempted assault in which his glass was broken, he was hit in the arm and a cement block was thrown at him.	In the early morning, usually in the evenings.	Anywhere in the city is dangerous at night.	She alludes to having been a victim of violence but does not provide specific details of a recent event.
32	Living in a violent city would mean the inability to go out, take children to school, go to the park or to work due to shootings and robberies in broad daylight.	1. Home 2. Work 3. Children's school	Violence would affect their ability to work if there were assaults on trucks. Fear that their children will be kidnapped on their way to school.	She was robbed shortly after moving to Tijuana. Her purse and phone were stolen. This experience taught her to be more cautious on the street.	In the evening.	The entire city of Tijuana at night.	She was mugged many years ago in Tijuana, where her purse and phone were stolen. This experience marked her and taught her to be cautious on the street.
35	Like violence against women, because that is what she has seen the most. Violence against children, violence against children and violence against women. For example, going out on the street and not feeling safe, as if in some way violated by other people.	1. House 2. School	It associates violence with some sexual aggression, physical aggression, and verbal aggression.	She was once mugged and her newly purchased truck was stolen. She was very affected by this situation, and it took her a long time to feel confident to go out on the street again.	At night in any area of Tijuana.	Downtown and Boulevard 2000.	A couple of months before the interview, he had another attempt to steal his truck very close to his home.
35	Shootings, problems in the city and with people, lack of culture and values that affect well-being.	1. Home 2. Work	May be burglarized, danger at night, need to lock houses securely.	There was burglary violence in their former residence, gas theft, dog poisoning, harassment of women.	At night, when there is more activity of dangerous people.	The downtown city, mainly at night.	He has not been a direct victim in Tijuana recently, but he is aware of violence in some neighbors and has heard about murders in the news.

Source: Ethnographic Glossary "Border Urban Polyphony", FEyRI 2022.

For the age group of 31 to 35 years, perceptions of violence are intensely manifested through the direct or indirect experience of traumatic episodes. Violence is primarily envisioned as gunfire, robberies, and a pervasive sense of danger, which some individuals liken to extreme conflict zones, such as the Middle East. A recurring theme within this group is the fear associated with everyday spaces such as homes, workplaces, or recreational areas, with nighttime identified as the peak risk period. The repeated mention of specific city areas, such as the Sánchez Taboada neighborhood and Boulevard 2000, accentuates the notion of high-risk zones. Personal experiences span a range from robberies to attempted car thefts, underscoring genuine exposure to criminal activity. Emotionally, beyond concerns for personal safety, there is a tangible distress regarding the safety of loved ones, especially children. In this age bracket, the awareness and impact of violence appear deeply ingrained in daily life, prompting continuous precautionary adaptations in their routines.

*Opinion of the interviewed women in the age group of
"36 to 40" years on the topic of "violence".*

In-Depth Interview	Definition of Violence	Everyday Places	Influence of Violence	Personal Experience	Risk Time	Specific Hazardous Areas	Recent Experience of Violence
40	Aggressions, insults, insecurity, harassment, impotence.	1. House	Living in a violent and dangerous city is traumatic, generating fear and restrictions on personal freedom and freedom to own possessions.	Two assaults have occurred at your work. A co-worker has been threatened by an assailant on two occasions.	Especially at dusk and dawn. Also in the afternoon.	1. El Tecolote 2. La Gloria 3. Lagunitas 4. Sánchez Taboada 5. Santa Fé	Two recent assaults have occurred at your work. An assailant has threatened and robbed at work, showing a gun.
39	Drug trafficking.	1. Home 2. Work 3. Your child's school	When you go out you have to be careful, observe your surroundings well because you do not know if someone is following you or watching you. Caution should be taken in Tijuana due to the lack of security.	Witnessed a robbery of a lady at 05:00 in the morning while she was on her way to work. The assailants headed towards where she was, but eventually retreated.	In the early morning, usually in the evenings.	Anywhere in the city is dangerous at night.	He witnessed an early morning robbery and mentions chases in the city without specifying the recency.
39	Robberies, assaults, deaths, what is experienced daily on the border.	1. Church 2. Work 3. Children's school	Insecurity prevents people from going out freely, concern about shootings in schools, goes to church to ask for an end to violence.	They broke the glass of his car and stole a backpack.	In the evening.	The entire city of Tijuana at night. And the schools in San Diego.	Incident in which her car window was smashed to steal a backpack.

In-Depth Interview	Definition of Violence	Everyday Places	Influence of Violence	Personal Experience	Risk Time	Specific Hazardous Areas	Recent Experience of Violence
38	Associated with his daughters' insecurity, assaults, robberies and bad friendships.	1. Home 2. Work 3. Cinema	Concern for their daughters and the bad friendships, assaults and robberies that affect their peace of mind and safety.	She was the victim of an assault while pregnant and suffered domestic violence.	Any time of the day in any area of Tijuana.	Tijuana in general, mentioning the police as criminals.	Assault during her pregnancy and domestic violence in the past.
39	Violence is beatings, death, abuse, mistreatment. Domestic violence, abused children, violence in schools, violence in the streets.	1. House	Violence can manifest itself anywhere, whether at home, at school or on the streets.	Two men in a van who wanted her to get in with them. On another occasion, while she was working, an assailant threatened her with a gun to get her to give him money.	Any place can be dangerous because there are violent, armed, drugged or drunk people everywhere.	He cannot specify a particular location as he believes that all locations have potential risk due to people.	Years ago, she had two dangerous encounters: one with two men who wanted her to get into their van and another at work where an assailant threatened her with a gun.

Source: Ethnographic Glossary "Border Urban Polyphony", FEyRI 2022.

Within the age group of 36 to 40 years, the perception and definition of violence broadens to encompass not only public forms of criminality, such as thefts and assaults, but also the more private and intimate forms of violence, like domestic abuse. This diversification may arise from experiences accrued over time and exposure to varied environments. Nighttime remains the period identified as posing the greatest threat, although there are now mentions of violent episodes transpiring throughout the day. The specific areas deemed hazardous remain consistent, with Sánchez Taboada prominently recurring.

In the personal experiences of this group, violence is markedly evident. They have not only been witnesses but also direct victims of criminal episodes and more intimate forms of aggression. The fear associated with daughters and concerns about detrimental affiliations underscore a parental anguish that overlays individual apprehensions. In summation, for this age bracket, violence is not just an external menace but also permeates intimate and personal spaces, with a pronounced emphasis on family safeguarding. Drug trafficking and school insecurity emerge as additional concerns, which were not as prominent in the preceding group.

**Opinion of the interviewed women in the age group of
"41 to 45" years on the topic of "violence".**

In-Depth Interview	Definition of Violence	Everyday Places	Influence of Violence	Personal Experience	Risk Time	Specific Hazardous Areas	Recent Experience of Violence
42	Assaults, murders, car thefts, home invasions. Various types of violence, including that which he personally experienced.	1. Home 2. Work 3. Shopping malls	Impact on the economy, increase in food prices and other necessities.	He was the victim of a robbery on his way to work.	Mostly at night, although there are occasions of assaults during the day.	1. Camino verde 2. Sánchez Taboada 3. México Lindo 4. 3 de octubre 5. Downtown	Assault in which his bag was taken from him at gunpoint while he was waiting for transportation at night.
42	Fear, terror, anguish, depression.	1. House 2. Shopping malls 3. School	Constant fear everywhere. Robberies, assaults while driving, kidnappings, drugged people who could enter the house.	Vehicle theft while at home. Lack of security support.	All the time, day and night.	All of Tijuana, there is no specific place. All over the city you can find people on drugs.	Theft of a vehicle while at home. Lack of support from the authorities.
43	Shootings in Tijuana, assaults, assaults and homicides, rapes of women.	1. House 2. Children's schools 3. Beach 4. shopping malls	Fear of going out, insecurity in recreational spaces, rudeness/aggression from people, lack of enjoyment in recreational places.	Shooting at a market on wheels; assault on a vendor; experiences of assaults while driving.	Night, especially on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.	Spaces with a high concentration of drunken people, where there are fights, armed people and use of knives and razors.	Assault by a man while getting off a bridge; assaults while driving.
44	Violence as hitting, both physical and psychological. You do not need to hit to do violence to a person.	1. House	Restricted freedom to go out, especially at night. Not feeling safe coming home late.	She has not experienced direct situations of violence or danger that would lead her to consider moving.	Anywhere in Tijuana from 5:00 p.m. onwards.	1. La 5 y 10 2. Presidentes 3. Sánchez Taboada 4. La Cañada	Fear of taking an Uber alone at night but does not mention a recent experience of direct violence.
42	Violence is associated with "insecurity".	1. Home 2. Work 3. School 4. Some open spaces	Insecurity that restricts access to public places and fear in spaces such as schools due to nearby violent events.	Shooting near work, attempted assault while in car with daughter.	He traditionally associates danger with the evening, but nowadays he feels it is at all hours.	In general, he perceives the entire city as dangerous, but specifically mentions the Sánchez Taboada neighborhood and areas near Bulevar 2000.	A recent event was when they tried to open her car at a traffic light and she had to take shelter in a nearby shop with her daughter to protect herself until help arrived.

Source: Ethnographic Glossary "Border Urban Polyphony", FFEyRI 2022.

In the age cohort of 41 to 45 years, the definition of violence is characterized by a mosaic of experiences and viewpoints. While some focus on tangible crimes (such as thefts and assaults), others provide emotive delineations of violence, highlighting the profound psychological toll it exerts on their lives. Of significance is the acknowledgment of violence not merely as a physical act but also a psychological one. There's a pervasive concern about the economic ramifications of violence, the curtailment of liberty, and an ever-present dread. This distress also impinges upon their ability to relish recreational pursuits and is frequently accompanied by an apprehension about returning home late.

While the night continues to be discerned as a period of heightened vulnerability, there is an escalating sentiment that violence can transpire at any given moment, signifying a deterioration of the sense of security once associated with daylight hours. The personal accounts delineated within this cohort are diverse and frequently harrowing. From public shootouts to overt thefts and confrontations whilst driving, this group has intimately encountered violence.

Recent encounters range from outright assaults to attempted thefts in everyday situations, underscoring the pervasive level of perceived menace. The Sánchez Taboada district recurs, accentuating its infamy as a hazardous zone. Nevertheless, it is paramount to highlight the escalating inclination to regard the entirety of Tijuana as perilous.

Individuals within the age bracket of 41 to 45 convey a profound sentiment of insecurity and vulnerability, not solely in terms of physical violence but equally regarding its psychological repercussions. While the domicile remains a primary locus of concern, there's a heightened sense of unease in places traditionally deemed as sanctuaries, such as shopping centers and educational institutions.

*Opinion of the interviewed women in the age group of
“46 to 50” years on the topic of “violence”.*

In-Depth Interview	Definition of Violence	Everyday Places	Influence of Violence	Personal Experience	Risk Time	Specific Hazardous Areas	Recent Experience of Violence
48	Violence is reflected in rudeness, bullying, bad treatment at work and assaults.	1. House 2. School 3. Work	There is no violence at home. At school there is bullying. At work, there is mistreatment.	Assaulted on the beaches of Tijuana.	At night in any area of Tijuana.	The center due to the large concentration of people.	Boys near your residence displaying rude and violent behavior.
46	He links violence to daily assaults in Tijuana.	1. Market 2. Shopping malls 3. Neighborhood stores 4. Work	Avoid going out after 6:07 p.m. for fear of robbery.	Assaults in the work area; attempted kidnapping of a coworker.	After 18:07 and on weekends in the work area.	The entire city of Tijuana as the sunset begins.	Assault on coworkers and attempted kidnapping of a female coworker.
50	Social breakdown, mainly at the family level.	1. Home 2. Work 3. River Zone	You feel that the places where you spend your time daily are safe.	A "virtual kidnapping" of her daughter that was a traumatizing situation.	Late at night in the river zone and around 8:00 p.m. in the community where he lives.	Module three of your community, near the line.	A "virtual kidnapping" of her daughter; and on occasion she has been around people who are violent, although it did not affect her directly.
49	Living in fear and worry, uncertainty about safe return home, government and police inaction.	1. House 2. Children's school 3. shopping mall	Constant fear at their children's school, worry at home and robberies at the market.	Entry of a delinquent into his home and a robbery near his subdivision.	a) Sánchez Taboada b) Camino Verde	El Camino Verde, where kidnappings and corpses are found.	Assault near her subdivision and entry of a delinquent into her home three months ago.
46	Assaults, homicides, robbery of establishments and of workers such as cab drivers and cashiers. For the interviewee, all of this constitutes violence.	1. Home 2. Work 3. Children's school 4. shopping mall	Assaults in homes, violence by parents and teachers in schools, including psychological and moral violence, and possibly in the workplace.	Assault on herself, attempted assault upon her return from work and the attack on her son.	At night, especially in entertainment areas.	No particular location is specified, but emphasis is placed on tourist and entertainment areas.	Personal assault and an attempted assault upon return from work.

Source: Ethnographic Glossary “Border Urban Polyphony”, FEyRI 2022.

Within this age cohort, the conceptualization of violence transcends mere physical and criminal acts, encompassing issues such as workplace maltreatment, bullying, and societal disintegration. At this juncture in life, the perception of violence appears more encompassing, acknowledging subtle aggressions as well as familial and societal tensions. The domicile persists as a primary focal point, yet there emerges an augmented apprehension regarding workplaces, their children's educational institutions, and shopping precincts. This could suggest that concern now permeates spaces integral to their familial nexus and daily regimen.

Fear and trepidation pervade this cohort, constraining their mobility and engagements post-dusk. Routinely, they recalibrate their daily practices to circumvent prospective hazardous scenarios. There is also a pronounced apprehension for the well-being of their offspring and professional associates. The vicissitudes encountered by this group are diverse and frequently traumatic, encompassing assaults, abductions, and direct confrontations with malefactors. Such episodes bolster the overarching sentiment of insecurity.

Nightfall is once again pinpointed as the interval of heightened vulnerability. Yet, it is striking how certain participants specify the exact time (e.g., "post 18:07"), potentially reflecting a meticulous adaptation to the observed or experienced criminal patterns. Some localities, such as Camino Verde and Sánchez Taboada neighborhoods, recur from previous groups, but touristic and entertainment zones are also invoked. This buttresses the notion that violence is ubiquitous and may transpire in any setting.

Women within the age bracket of 46 to 50 exhibit an expansive view of violence, spanning from physical aggressions to emotional and societal strains. The home, workplace, and their children's schools emerge as focal points of apprehension, and their acclimation to criminal trends is evident in the specific precautions they undertake. Traumatic encounters are commonplace, engendering a pervasive sentiment of insecurity.

Discussion

The fear of crime significantly affects lives, often as much as crime itself (Gidong & Mikyoung, 2023). Factors influencing this fear include physical ability, age, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and previous victimization (Dymén & Ceccato, 2012). Among these, gender remains a central determinant: women report more frequent harassment from strangers (Bastomski & Smith, 2017), contributing to

what has been termed the “gender-fear paradox”—a phenomenon where women express higher fear levels, despite men statistically being more likely to suffer violent crimes (Rader et al., 2020; Gordon & Riger, 1989; Sutton & Farrall, 2005, 2012).

However, fear is not simply a reflection of victimization risk. As Pain (2001) and Stanko (1995) argue, it is shaped by broader **social structures and gendered expectations**, becoming a rational adaptation to the experience of urban space. In line with “**the geography of fear**” literature, women’s daily routines are often reshaped to avoid perceived threats, reinforcing a spatial performativity in which gender and vulnerability become intertwined. This is particularly relevant in border cities such as Tijuana, where the visibility of violence and territorial fragmentation exacerbate perceptions of insecurity.

Our findings confirm that such perceptions are not uniform, but shaped by intergenerational experiences. Younger women often internalize fear during their formative years and develop hypervigilant behaviors, while older women interpret violence through structural and psychosocial lenses. This diversity of voices reinforces the relevance of incorporating life-course perspectives when analyzing how fear is produced and navigated. The breadth and depth of the qualitative corpus—233 in-depth interviews—allowed for a nuanced inductive coding process that captured emotional, spatial, and institutional dimensions of fear, grounded in women’s own narratives.

While official statistics may suggest that women are less likely to be victims in public spaces (Condon et al., 2007), our study reveals how media exposure, social discourse, and lived experience shape a perceived threat that remains pervasive and often more impactful than the actual event. This dissonance between objective and perceived risk is also sustained by urban aesthetics: visible disorder—such as graffiti, vandalism, poor lighting, or neglected infrastructure—acts as an emotional trigger that intensifies insecurity (Bruton-Smith & Jackson, 2012; Jenkins & Phillips, 2017).

The literature on urban criminology and spatial semiotics supports this claim, noting that fear is produced not only by criminal acts but also by how people read and interpret the physical and social environment (Weisburd et al., 2014; Jiménez & Rentería, 2019). In this sense, the city becomes a “stage of fear” where gendered subjectivities are continuously negotiated, often in unequal ways.

Moreover, the burden of responsibility is frequently shifted to women, reinforcing patriarchal discourses that frame personal safety as an individual obligation. As Garfias (2023) and Marganski (2019) note, this logic constrains women's mobility, autonomy, and self-perception, diverting attention from perpetrators and systemic failures. This "preventive accountability" leads women to self-regulate behavior, perpetuating a cycle of silence and containment.

On the other hand, various studies have illustrated that the configuration of space influences the incidence of crime (Gidong and Mikyoung, 2023, 8). Within this framework, it can be posited that the design of numerous urban areas in Tijuana is conducive to criminal activity. According to Dymén and Ceccato, both the risk and the apprehension of crime are swayed by the appearance and perception of the urban milieu. It is recognized that signs of disarray and physical degradation of public spaces are significant determinants in engendering fear, beyond the actual crime rate in a locale. The perception of the urban environment plays a pivotal role in shaping feelings of security or insecurity amongst its residents.

The interplay between urban geography and the fear of crime has been a focal point in environmental criminology in recent years. The spatial layout of a city, the presence of "hotspots" of criminal activity, and the arrangement of public and private spaces can significantly influence how residents perceive and experience fear (Weisburd, Groff, & Yang, 2014). Urban landscape features such as the presence of greenery, adequate lighting, and the maintenance of buildings and streets can play a pivotal role in either mitigating or exacerbating fear (Jansson, Wendt, & Åström, 2017). Neglected urban areas or those displaying visible signs of decay are often associated with heightened levels of fear, even when crime rates are not particularly high (Jiménez & Rentería, 2019).

Indicators of disorder can be more influential in shaping the fear of crime than the actual incidence of crime in the neighborhood (Bruton-Smith and Jackson, 2012, 56-57). Furthermore, the fear of crime enhances the perception of disorder. According to Bruton-Smith and Jackson, "fear of crime is positively associated with the recorded crime level and visible signs of disorder (litter in public areas, vandalism, and deteriorated property) in the neighborhood" (2012, 63).

The research by Jenkins and Philips (2017) affirms that visual deterioration and disorder, such as graffiti, abandoned buildings, and garbage accumulation, can heighten the perception of insecurity, irrespective of actual crime statistics. These indicators of social and physical disorder

function as a form of emotional barometer, exacerbating fear and residents' sense of vulnerability. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2021) observed that in areas where urban beautification and cleaning programs have been implemented, fear of crime significantly decreased, even if crime rates remained steady.

On the other hand, in spaces where violence against women looms large, the burden of responsibility for this violence typically falls upon them, leading them to believe that their protection and well-being hinge on their vigilance, ultimately curtailing their freedom of movement (Garfias, 2023,1). This conception of violence and responsibility has deep-seated roots and has been the subject of numerous investigations in recent years. Marganski (2019) underscore how patriarchal structures in society perpetuate the notion that women are accountable for their own safety, thus perpetuating a culture of victimization. This victim-oriented approach not only damages women's self-image but also diverts attention from the real issue: the perpetrators of violence. It has been observed that by constantly focusing on women's self-defense and how they "should behave," a system is reinforced in which their autonomy and mobility become increasingly constrained.

According to a study by Villeseche, Meliou, and Jha (2022), self-imposed or socially conditioned restrictions on women's mobility and freedom have significant impacts on their mental health, quality of life, and economic opportunities. The constant fear of victimization hinders women's access to public spaces and can curtail their involvement in the labor market, social events, and recreational activities. This marginalization is detrimental to women as individuals and has broader implications, constraining the social, economic, and cultural potential of the entire community.

This study offers an original contribution to the field by combining a large, generationally diverse sample with a grounded theoretical framework. It expands on contemporary debates about gender, space, and security, and contributes to a growing body of literature that challenges simplistic readings of victimization and advocates for contextual, narrative-based understandings of fear in urban life.

Conclusions

Situated within the intricate socio-cultural and demographic landscape of Tijuana, this study offers in-depth insights into how women, across different stages of the life cycle, perceive and navigate urban violence. The findings demonstrate that perceptions of insecurity are deeply conditioned by formative socialization processes and by the cumulative exposure to structural and territorial violence. Younger women (18–25) report heightened fear and mistrust, often linked to the normalization of violence during adolescence and early adulthood. In contrast, older cohorts (46–50) articulate more systemic interpretations of violence, framing it as a multidimensional phenomenon tied to labor, institutional dynamics, and social erosion.

These generational narratives collectively reveal that fear is not only an emotional response but a sociopolitical condition that shapes daily life. The study confirms that the perception of insecurity directly impacts women's mobility, autonomy, and emotional well-being, imposing behavioral restrictions that limit their access to public spaces and participation in social, economic, and cultural life.

The results highlight the importance of integrating gender-sensitive urban interventions, such as improved lighting, secure transportation, and visible institutional presence in areas identified as high-risk. These actions must be grounded in the lived realities of women and informed by the knowledge they produce.

Moreover, centering women's voices at different stages of life contributes to spatial and symbolic justice, offering essential input for the design of preventive programs and policy innovation. By recognizing how fear is produced, transmitted, and managed across generations, this study supports a more contextual and human-centered approach to public safety.

While this article focuses specifically on Tijuana, it raises broader questions applicable to other high-violence urban contexts: How do women's perceptions shift across geographies and sociocultural settings? What can intergenerational narratives teach us about long-term resilience and systemic vulnerability?

Ultimately, this research does not only produce a nuanced understanding of violence perception—it also bridges academic inquiry with social transformation. The resilience and adaptation strategies shown by

women in Tijuana are both testimony to their agency and a call to action: safe and inclusive cities will only be possible if grounded in the voices and experiences of those who move through them in fear and resistance.

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