

On December 3rd, 2010, in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexican authorities detained Edgar Jimenez Lugo, alias 'El Ponchis', convicted of kidnapping, torture, and multiple murders whilst working for the Beltran Leyva cartel. Whereas Mexico has grown accustomed to high profile arrests of drug trafficking kingpins and their corresponding atrocities, the arrest of El Ponchis was markedly different; he was only fifteen years old. Initiated into the cartel at the age of eleven, his age sent shockwaves through the international media, however it also highlighted a dangerous trend in Mexico; Drug trafficking organisations (DTO) recruitment of children. Whilst there is a suggestion that the participation of children in organised crime is on the rise (Vasquez Romero, 2012), the majority of studies covering gang related violence come from the global North therefore we know very little about the role of children in organised crime in the global South (Atkinson-Sheppard, 2018). This is a worrying omission when one considers the large population of children that live on the streets in the global South and their vulnerability to the advances of DTOs. This paper will give an overview to the issue of child involvement in organised crime in Mexico with the objective of highlighting the broader problem of children involved in crime in the global South. By examining both the push and pull factors which determine why children are being increasingly recruited to organised crime groups, the paper will offer suggestions to where Mexico can go to tackle this growing problem.

During the last decade, Mexico has undergone an on-going conflict, which has costs the lives of upwards of 200,000 lives (INEGI, 2017); to make matters worse, 2017 was recorded as the worst since modern records began (The Guardian, 2018). Against the backdrop of continuing violence, poverty in Mexico is widespread, with 21.2 million Mexican

children and adolescents living in poverty in 2015 (UNICEFCONEVAL, 2016). This amounts to 54 per cent of the country's children and adolescents in a position where they are unable to realise their social rights (Azaola, 2018). As Atkinson-Shepard (2018) has suggested, here lies the crux for the lack of research into the role of children in organised crime. Whereas research into street children predominantly leans towards issues of poverty and accessibility to social rights (Ennew and Swart-Kruger, 2003), it ignores the association of children with criminal enterprises. Research into gang involvement conversely, has been largely conducted in the global North and research into organised crime in the global South is often preoccupied only with the perspectives of adults (Gambetta, 1993; Varese, 2010). The combination of continued violence and high poverty is leaving many of Mexico's children vulnerable to the approaches of organised crime groups whilst research fails to cover the perspectives of this demographic.

Whereas research may have failed to gather the perspectives of children when examining issues related to organised crime, the problem has been exacerbated by a statistical failure in recording involvement of children which makes the issue difficult to assess. Jamison (2005) suggests that annually there are over 250,000 child soldiers involved in conflicts globally; determining a figure of participation in Mexico is more difficult to ascertain. The statistics that the Mexican governments provide are not reported annually so data is irregular and released by differing institutions. The Mexican Secretary of Public Security reported in 2011 that 1044 children had been detained for crimes related to organised crime such as homicide, drug trafficking, and carrying a weapon (Cisneros, 2014). Montalvo (2012) looked at homicide statistics in 2012 and found that 1,188 children had died in armed clashes which roughly equates to 2.5% of the estimated drug related deaths

for that year. A figure provided by the Child Rights Network in Mexico (REDIM) maybe reflects a more accurate estimation; they suggested that there are approximately 30,000 children cooperating with organised crime groups (Moreno, Sanchez and Toledo Aguilar, 2012). If we consider a figure of this magnitude, it highlights the failure of the Mexican institutions to provide any data; according to the French Press Agency, the Mexican government had informed the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that it does not record information regarding minors involved in organised crime (Montalvo, 2012). It is therefore necessary to examine the micro-level data provided in Mexico to assess whether the issue is on the rise, fortunately a number of states do provide some statistics to give a broader picture for the purpose of this article. Chihuahua state said that between 2008 and 2010, child homicides related to organised crime more than doubled from 136 to 386 (Gutierrez, 2011). Zacatecas state showed similar findings; the director of Zacatecas state Centre for Youth Internment and Comprehensive Care says cases involving children in organised crime had increased 150% from 2011 to 2012 (Moreno, Sanchez and Toledo Aguilar, 2012). Whereas these are limited statistics from only two states and from different timeframes, they both appear to suggest that the recruitment of children is growing. Concurrent to the increase in numbers, Emmerich (2011) suggests that the age of children regularly recruited has fallen from children aged 14 to 16, to children between 12 and 14, which is widening the recruitment pool in terms of age demographics. One statistic which should be noted is that according to the Mexican justice department, 60% of children captured have been aligned to either the Zetas cartel or Gulf cartel (Moreno, Sanchez and Toledo Aguilar, 2012), which suggest that child recruitment is focused to these two cartels. However this is problematic for one main reason; this information is over five years old, and whereas the Zetas and Gulf cartels have diminished in terms of territorial control during this

period, this does not mean that child recruitment has diminished. As we have seen throughout the Mexican Drug War, tactics of one cartel is very quickly adopted by other organisations (Hari, 2012); child recruitment may now be far more widespread across all active organisations.

Accordingly, with the Mexican government not examining the role of children in organised crime, providing an overview of the recruitment process is problematic. This is exacerbated by the nature of Mexican organised crime groups who are less communicative in terms of discussing their operating practices than some of their global South counterparts. Mexican DTOs generally distance themselves from any atrocities in order to garner support from the public, utilising narco-banners to blame security services or other groups for violence in the area. Acknowledging recruitment of children into illicit labour roles would be deemed detrimental to their portrayed public image so we are unlikely at any point to receive information directly from organised crime groups. As a result, our understanding of the recruitment process still lacks clarity, but a number of studies have allowed us a general overview of the process of child recruitment. In researching gangs in Rio de Janeiro, Dowdney (2003) identified that recruitment generally occurred at around 13 years old before progression to becoming a soldier and carrying a firearm at around 15 years of age. His study detailed the criminal ladder of power and violence employed in organised crime groups, which also demonstrates the critical nature of tackling child recruitment before they reach fruition of a fully-fledged weapon carrying youth. Moreno et al (2011) produced a similar structure in their study on children in Mexican criminal groups; they found that children are typically recruited as an informant or *Halcon*, and then they are promoted to movement of drugs or looking after safe houses. Eventually they are then

scaled up to kidnapping and homicide. The role of Halcon, from which this paper takes its title, appears to be of critical importance to how children are initially recruited. Seemingly harmless positions in the greater hierarchy, *Halcones* or lookouts, provide information at a specific locale and monitor incoming and outgoing persons of interest, and whether security forces are in the area (San Luis and Avendano, 2016). Encinas-Garza (2016) suggests children at the age of 9 or 10 years old often carry out this job, especially in areas controlled by organised crime. Whilst this role appears relatively nonviolent, it is the first step for children to being facilitated into normative relations with organised crime groups making the eventual transition to hitman a dynamic process.

Obviously not all of Mexico's street children turn to organised crime as a manner of illicit labour, but for those who do, what is the attraction of organised crime? This is a position which has the general life expectancy averaging around ten years (Cisneros, 2014). Prior to exploring the circumstances which push children to enrolment, the role of DTOs in proactively recruiting children should be addressed, especially as they are far from passive agents. In terms of looking solely at Mexican organisations, they have been heavily influenced by the actions of their international counterparts. The organised crime groups such as the Mara Salvatrucha and M18 have influenced their approaches; The Mara Salvatrucha work alongside Los Zetas and have approximately 35000 children working for them whilst the M18 work with the Sinaloa cartel and have approximately 8000 (Moreno, Sanchez and Toledo Aguilar, 2012). As result children are now recruited for three main reasons; the first is that they are a necessity for replacing members who are killed in the conflict. The organised crime conflict continues unabated and replacing soldiers is a requirement to maintain power in an unpredictable environment. Children and adolescents

are also the largest demographic in Mexico (Emmerich, 2014). This continuous recruitment demand however is causing DTOs to offer opportunities to start a delinquent lifestyle at younger and younger ages (Hernandez, 2008). The second reason for recruitment is the indispensable manner to which new recruits are utilised. Children are often sent to attack impenetrable military targets, unbeknownst to them, that they are dispensable in order to merely demonstrate continued threat towards the security forces (Beckhusen, 2013).

Finally, children are also tactically valuable for DTOs. In a conflict sense, they can be utilised against enemies due to their perceived unthreatening nature, children can pass checkpoints more easily, or enter enemy territories without arousing suspicion (Jayakumar, 2011). They are also more malleable and obedient than adult soldiers (Beber and Blattman, 2013) making them tactically and attractive proposition for gangs as they are easier to control and retain but also this indoctrination means they will commit to acts that adult recruits may be more reluctant to commit. Brett and Specht (2006) point out that children are more willing to enter conflict for non-pecuniary rewards, therefore the status of becoming a gang member can be sufficient in guaranteeing enrolment rather than the promises of financial gains. These factors have made children an integral feature of DTOs, and the demand to replace deceased or incarcerated recruits will only drive higher recruitment of minors.

The cultural movement of *Narcocultura* or Narco-culture has aided recruitment for DTOs but it is often unfairly depicted by the government and conservative media as embellishing organised crime and driving adolescents to its ranks. Narco-culture was born from society's experience of living alongside the presence of organised crime, a response to living in an environment of on-going Mexican Drug War. With organised crime so prominent in daily life it is of little surprise that a counter culture has arisen, spreading to songs, films,

TV series, and books. According to REDIM the continued presence of organised crime groups in Mexico is having a cultural impact upon adolescents and children. Narcocultura has now found its position under threat as the government seeks to blame it for increased violence whereas DTOs are attempting to hijack the movement as a kind of propaganda for joining organised crime.

In November 2016 Senator Robledo and Congresswoman Limon released a statement in which they called for the government and Federal Telecommunications Institute to be more restrictive in airing *narcotelenovelas*, or narco soap operas, during peak TV viewing hours. Following the government stance which censors narcocorridos, or drug ballads, in many states where there are restrictions of the music genre, the senator and congresswoman said of the TV programming, 'promotes and glorifies violence and depicts drug trafficking and its [related] activities as an aspirational life-style'. Miguel Cabanas (cited in Insight Crime, 2016) criticises this approach from the government and sees it as an agenda to placate the blame away from the government. He argues that the problem is not seeing organised crime portrayed on TV or film but to see it on the streets. Furthermore he criticises the governments conventional and institutional means of communications which do not fully explain the dynamics of organised crime, narcocultura thus widens the debate. Unfortunately whilst the government points the finger, organised crime groups have moved quickly to cultivate the allure and fascination depicted in traditional narcocultura, hijacking it for their own means. Different cartels and drug kingpins have commissioned their own narcocorridos to tell their versions of their lives and depict them as heroic figures. The depiction in commissioned narcocorridos videos show expensive cars, elaborate parties, fancy clothing, and this glamorisation of the culture enables DTOs to then recruit younger

people with promises of expensive materialistic lives. Unlike the intentions of the original narcocultura, this organised crime driven narcocultura has indeed influenced children who now have aspirations of becoming leaders of DTOs or at least imitate the behaviours depicted in narco news (Encinas Garza, 2016). The notion that children and adolescents are attaining to become organised crime leaders and assassins is supported by other authors (Moreno, Sanchez and Toledo Aguilar, 2012; Munoz, 2011). Despite this, it is very easy to act as the government has and point the finger at cultural influences like narcocultura, the reality of the problem is that many Mexicans have little opportunity at upwards mobility. According to the Centre for Studies Espinosa Yglesias (CEEY), 48% of Mexicans in the poorest quintile of the population will never escape that demographic in their lifetime. In an environment of such poor social mobility, it comes of little surprise that drug trafficking is viewed by many as their only opportunity to escape poverty. It is the pull of DTOs, through necessity on the behalf of organised crime, and the glamorisation depicted in narcocultura which pulls young people towards organised crime and its perceived benefits. Equally important to the lure of pull factors for children, is the circumstances which pushes them and make them vulnerable to the approaches of criminal enterprises.

Can we therefore place the responsibility of children involved in organised crime with drug trafficking organisations? If children are perceived to be readily volunteering to join these groups, attracted by the glitz and glamour of narcotraffickers, are they in some way responsible? Machel (1996) dismissed the idea of 'volunteerism' completely when discussing children in armed conflict, as he believed that against a backdrop of poverty and survival; the choices of these children are far from free and fair. As we have discussed, a vibrant narcoculture is predominant in Mexican society which serves to pull children into

the lifestyle, but this is compounded by the push factors which leave children vulnerable to the advances of organised crime groups. Cisneros (2014) argues that the reason that children in Mexico are able to kidnap, torture, humiliate, and decapitate other humans goes beyond the coercive recruitment of gangs and is due to a faltering social fabric. Evaluating the circumstances within which many children are forced to endure in Mexico goes part of the way to explaining why the pull factors mentioned previously have so much gravitational weight in drawing children.

Children may actively seek out employment within organised crime; this is often due to a belief that recruitment to DTOs presents a guarantee of quick and easy access to money and power. This notion that monetary gains can be attained quickly and with relative ease is further born from the circumstances that many children and adolescents face in terms of obtaining legitimate opportunities in employment or education (Munoz, 2011). Encinas Garza (2016) believes that whilst adolescents may voluntarily enter criminal activities, it is born of the pressures of society upon the youth in Mexico. He suggest it lies in what he calls 'delayed gratification'; as society prolongs the inclusion of young into licit channels of society, it creates circumstances for the young to seek out 'postponed gratification' and force entry into monetary gains in short time periods often via entry to illicit channels. To exacerbate the vulnerability of children joining organised crime groups, many children, based on their young age and without a way of realising educational aspirations, demonstrate a developmental immaturity and lack of formal education which prevents children from making an informed choice or understanding the terms of conflict (Atkinson-Sheppard, 2018). Of the statistics we do have access; school dropout age appears to correlate with crime conviction rates for convicted children in Mexico (Cisneros, 2014).

Coupled with these circumstances, a desire for power, status, or financial gain moves Mexican youth towards organised crime as the state fails to offer licit opportunities to procure said desires.

It appears that the circumstances of children increase their propensity and vulnerability to the charms of narcoculture. Cisneros (2014) suggests that the government and its institutions are to blame for failing children who join DTOs. Certainly a lack of opportunities for Mexico's youth, both employment and education has increased the propensity for delinquency but children are also drawn to gangs because their social structure has collapsed. The social environment is critical, as for some children, joining organised crime is their only option (Moreno, Sanchez and Toledo Aguilar, 2012) with cartels purposefully targeting and recruiting school drop-outs and unskilled workers. A recurrent theme in the literature is that a 'ruptured social fabric' (Cisneros, 2014; Munoz, 2011), has pushed children who are excluded from the state, schools, families, and/or society into the welcoming arms of organised crime. Any child in Mexico of the age of ten or under has known nothing but the Drug War, so has spent their whole life with the daily violence associated with the conflict. When children and adolescents are exposed to violence repeatedly or over prolonged periods of time, their bodies and brains adapt to focus on self-preservation (Azaola, 2018), this ultimately leads to children being pushed to criminality as a way to realise a sense of control over their violence dominated lives. Children are therefore pushed to cope with the emotional complexities which associate regular exposure to violence. Finally, there has also been a chronic failure in protecting children from recidivism in Mexico's judiciary system, both making them more attractive to DTOs and causing children to be further pushed into organised crime.

Current Mexican laws for detainment of minors have made children more enticing to organised crime groups, and whilst this fault may not lie at the feet of the Mexican judiciary, the failure to offer children legitimate options away from crime pushes the children back to organised crime. The age of criminal responsibility in Mexico under the juvenile justice system is 14–17, children under the age of 14 are not deemed as legally responsible for their crimes, whereas children aged 14-17 usually receive sentences between three and ten years (Azaola, 2018). Unfortunately this has begun to be exploited by organised crime groups; children can commit crimes with relative impunity and if caught can be back with active ranks within a minimum period of time (Emmerich, 2014). Edgar Jimenez Lugo, or 'El Ponchis', who we started this article referencing his crimes, received a sentence of three years despite the crimes he had committed due to maximum juvenile sentencing laws. It has been suggested that this is one of the reasons DTOs have begun to heavily target children as even if they are apprehended they can quickly be assimilated back into active duty post detention (Vasquez Romero, 2012). The state of the Mexican laws regarding minors would be commendable if they had a system of protection for detained children and providing them with the education and employment opportunities to aid them in avoiding returning to crime. However no such system is in place, and by both failing to prevent children returning to crime whilst detaining them for shorter periods of time than adult detainees, the Mexican judiciary system is making children more enticing for organised crime group's attentions.

There appears to be two principal factors explaining the recruitment of children into organised crime in Mexico. The first being the circumstances of these children living in poverty and neglected by the government, families, education, society, and employment

makes them incredibly vulnerable to DTO recruitment. The second is the activities of organised crime groups; they have begun an active recruitment process which is demanded by their on-going demand for new recruits whilst also manipulating Mexico's juvenile laws. This coupled with a well presented narco culture trumpeting their prestige, power, and financial rewards have facilitated a surge in child recruitment. These pull and push factors examine why and how this surge has occurred but looking at the list of crimes undertaken by children, to what extent can they be considered at fault for the crimes they commit? Can these child sicarios be classed as evil?

As discussed above children are often recruited to organised crime due to external forces such as circumstances and coercion from criminal gangs, so does this alleviate responsibility of child soldiers? Whilst frequently considered as victims, children do indeed commit atrocious crimes, and to victims of crimes seeking retribution, portraying criminal minors as victims is hard to fathom. Some argue that as the child is also a victim, responsibility lies with the gang leaders manipulating children, this argument is founded in the consideration that children are often manipulated to commit atrocities or threatened with punishments for refusal to act. Furthermore a combination of children being more malleable to persuasion, being too young to understand the consequences, and children being drugged to desensitise them to their behaviours means they should be not seen as criminally responsible. However others disagree and some cases of children being fully aware of their crimes and not showing remorse leads to some calling for children to face criminal charges. Vaha (2009) believes that criminal responsibility should be reserved for older children who are actively involved in combat and not those in supporting roles. The

Goldin Institute (2011) suggest that responsibility should lie with children because it can both allow them to be reintegrated into their communities post detention, and they may not learn from the atrocities they have committed as they have become desensitised if they are not properly punished. A complementary argument from Popovski and Arts (2006) is that children should be held accountable as it both serves justice and the child's interests in the long term. Their argument is that by not holding children responsible, gang leaders or military leaders may manipulate this legislation and purposefully delegate the worst orders to children, an occurrence which may already be present in Mexico. Therefore Popovski and Arts (2006) believe that by not holding children accountable they are actually exposing children to future risks rather than actually protecting them. Achieving some kind of balance in how Mexico portrays minors arrested in organised crime conflicts therefore needs to consider these opposing points of view.

Generally international law sees child soldiers as victims, even in cases where atrocities are committed (Happold, 2008). Cacho (2012) believes that every *halcon* or child *sicario* has an adult who has manipulated them and exploited them so by treating children as criminals side steps the true culprit of the crime. The same author believes that DTOs have succeeded in manipulating children to become easy cannon fodder in their battles. The Child Rights Network in Mexico says the state should see children involved in organised crime as victims of child abuse, spokeswoman Veronica Morales says 'The drug cartels are not training them to be ringleaders' (as quoted in Montalvo, 2012). Emmerich (2011) also points out that these children are routinely first approached and recruited with minor jobs at the age of 9-10 years old, where the consequences of enrolling with a group may not be clear at such a young age. However leaving organised crime groups, especially under an aura

of threat is a difficult task, ultimately a feeling of nihilism, appears to prevail leaving the children further at the will and command of DTOs. In situations where children are coerced or that they are in situations which they are unable to withdraw consent, they should not be seen as responsible and as a result it would be beneficial to see the children as victims rather than perpetrators.

Suggestions for how to tackle the problem of children involved in organised crime in Mexico is mired in the difficulty in that as so far we know far too little about the subject. Moreno et al (2012) in their paper claimed that numerous justice departments in Mexico hindered their investigation by refusing to provide information on children involved in organised crime. Azaola (2018) has recently undertaken a project to speak to children in Mexican detention centres, and hopefully her work will galvanise interest in the subject. Unfortunately impunity levels in Mexico have reached up to 99% (Insight Crime, 2016) so collating a sample from incarcerated children, as did Azaola, can only serve to tell us part of the story. An immediate concern for Mexico should be to establish a reliable statistical database to keep track of children involved in organised crime. Not only can this improve research into the area and maybe offer solutions or policy provisions in the future, it is also of great urgency because neither the Mexican government nor any nongovernmental organisations are working to keep track of the number of children who have lost parents during the criminal conflict (Barra and Joloy, 2011). This failure to record the estimated tens of thousands of orphans (Pastrana, 2010) who are a direct consequence of the Drug War is neglecting a cohort of children who are vulnerable to recruitment. As the casualty rate increases so do the social consequences of the men and women killed in the conflict. Azaola

(2011) approximates that 40,000 children have become orphans due to the conflict in Mexico, whereas Villagran (2013) estimates a higher figure of 180,000. Children who become orphans either directly or indirectly due to the conflict become a demographic at risk of vulnerability, marginalisation, and future enrolment into DTOs. Munoz (2011) suggests that such a demographic may grow disillusioned with the injustice of their circumstances and seek anti-social means to lash out at perceived perpetrators of their situation. As the consequences of the organised crime conflict in Mexico yields higher and higher numbers of casualties, the issue of preventing future recruits to the conflict becomes an ever increasing issue.

Preventative techniques provide an alternative approach for tackling organised crime violence and even more pertinent to tackling child recruits as they can be specifically targeted at children who are yet to be enrolled to DTOs. A problem which has arisen from the Mexican government's approach to tackling the violence has been to treat the problem as a security issue rather than understanding the social implications, such as the marginalisation mentioned earlier in the paper. By adopting approaches which tackle structural causes of the violence, the state can take a long term approach to tackling violence. The most applicable to the issue of child soldiers would be investing in education opportunities for children. A poll taken by *El Debate* newspaper revealed that 73% of Mexican citizens knew a minor involved in the drug trade. The majority of these respondents felt that educational programmes would be the most effective way of deterring young people away from DTOs (Jammed Up News, 2013). To date, no approaches have been made to deal with the continual recruitment of children, rather leaning towards a policy which deals with consequences of the violence rather than its causes. Educational policies

could prove beneficial; Cisneros (2014) looked at data from apprehensions of minors in Distrito Federal and found that the children aged between 14-18 that only 17% had completed primary or secondary school. Presumably working on the assumption of the incapacitation effect and that children enrolled in school are unable to participate in crime, school enrolment offers one avenue for tackling youth related crime. With an upcoming Presidential election, Mexico needs a long term approach to tackling these problems which can continue unhindered by changes in administrations.

Mexico also needs to move to strengthen its judiciary system if it is to protect children from the clutches of organised crime. Recidivism is high in Mexico and any chances of children receiving rehabilitation and reintegration in Mexican prisons is minimal; the National Commission of Human Rights in Mexico suggests that 60% of Mexican prisons are run by crime organisations (Insight Crime, 2012), effectively turning penitentiaries into universities of crime. As these children become labelled as criminals, their social exclusion is likely to increase, leading to a perpetual cycle which again moves them into the hands of Mexican gangs. Numerous studies have shown that it is of vital importance to ensure that the justice system allows children to realise their development needs and does not inflict further irreparable damage to incarcerated children (Department of Justice 2012; Carrington and Pereira 2009; Cunneen et al. 2015). Judiciary systems have great potential to offer children restorative interventions and place them back on a path to reintegration into functioning society. Unfortunately this is often missed in favour of punitive measures that are harmful to children and merely creates an environment for future recidivism (Azaola, 2018; Cunneen et al. 2015). Finally, returning to the start of this paper, *El Ponchis*, following his detention said, 'I am not afraid, I know what is going to happen to me' (My translation,

quote taken from Cisneros, 2014). It is unclear exactly what the fifteen year old meant; whether he was demonstrating the nihilism of so many youths, knowing that he would most likely die young or end up in prison so he has accepted his predicament, or that with no options away from organised crime, he knows that he need only serve his sentence before returning to the lifestyle he had before incarceration, neither bodes well for the future of child recruits in Mexico.

This paper has sought to demonstrate the necessity for further research into organised crime conflicts and its impacts upon children. As it stands the research into the role of children involved in organised crime in Central America is scarce, often with a tendency to focus on the adult perspectives of the conflict. As the conflict evolves it appears with more regularity that atrocities committed are being perpetrated by actors of younger ages, whilst research and statistics can be accused of neglecting a growing issue. As the age of DTO members fall, and *halcones* increasingly become *halconcitos* and *halconcitas*, there is a necessity to explore the dynamics of children becoming active participants in organised crime.

The increased recruitment of children not only has consequences for the wider public but these children who are enticed into joining DTOs have short lifespans, averaging around ten years in a DTO (Cisneros, 2014) either ending with incarceration or death. If Mexico seeks to decrease its on-going conflict with drug trade organisations it must seek to reverse the trend of marginalised children entering the conflict. With the Drug War responsible for an estimated 180,000 orphans in Mexico, the government should act now to prevent them from becoming a future recruitment pool for drug trafficking organisations. It

would do Mexico well to remember the adage that 'Children of today are citizens of tomorrow'.

References

Atkinson-Sheppard, S. (2018). Developing a Global South Perspective of Street Children's Involvement in Organized Crime. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Criminology and the Global South* (pp. 473-492). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Azaola, E. (2018). Violent Crimes Committed by Juveniles in Mexico. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Criminology and the Global South* (pp. 551-567). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Azaola, E. (2012). La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre. *Desacatos*, (40), 13-32.

Barra, A., & Joloy, D. (2011). Children: The Forgotten Victims in México's Drug War. *Children of the Drug War. Perspectives of the Impact of Drug Policies on Young People. The International Debate Education Association. USA.*

Beber, B., & Blattman, C. (2013). The logic of child soldiering and coercion. *International Organization*, 67(01), 65-104.

Beckhusen, R. (2013) How Mexico's Drug Cartels Recruit Child Soldiers as Young as 11. Danger Room, March 28. www.wired.com/dangerroom/2013/03/mexico-child-soldiers/#more-106341 (accessed November 29, 2016).

Brett, R., Specht, I., & Grey, J. (2006). Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight. *International Journal*, 60(4), 1181.

Cacho, L. (2012) Niños: entre asesinos y halcones. Available at www.sinembargo.mx/opinion/12-07-2012/8144. Accessed 24 November 2016.

Carpenter, A. C. (2010). Beyond drug wars: Transforming factional conflict in Mexico. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 27(4), 401-421.

Carrington, K., & Pereira, M. (2009). *Offending Youth: Sex, Youth and Justice*. Sydney: Federation Press.

Cisneros, J. L. (2014). Niños y jóvenes sicarios: una batalla cruzada por la pobreza. *El cotidiano*, 29(186), 7-18.

Cockayne, J. (2013). Chasing shadows: Strategic responses to organised crime in conflict-affected situations. *The RUSI Journal*, 158(2), 10-24.

Cunneen, C., White, R., & Richards, K. (2015). *Juvenile Justice: Youth and Crime in Australia*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Danelo, D. (2011) A New Approach is needed in Anti-crime Fight in Mexico. Available from <http://www.mexidata.info/id2896.html>. Accessed 21 December 2016.

Department of Justice. (2012). *Report of the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence*. Washington, DC: Department of Justice.

Dowdney, L. (2002). Child combatants in organised armed violence: a study of children and adolescents involved in territorial drug faction disputes in Rio de Janeiro. *ISER/Viva Rio, Rio de Janeiro*, 1-180.

Emmerich, N. (2011): *Cruce de fuegos: niños, niñas y adolescentes en el narcotráfico en mexicano*, Documentos de trabajo, Buenos Aires, Universidad de Belgrano.

Emmerich, N. (2014). Estudios sobre el narcotráfico en América Latina Estudio I. Infancia y narcotráfico en México. Working Paper: University of Belgrano

Encinas Garza, J. L. (2016). Jóvenes sicarios: la generación desechable: vivir rápido y morir joven. *Ciencia UANL*, 19(80), 59-65.

Fantz, A. (2012) *The Mexico Drug War: Bodies for Billions*. Available online at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/01/15/world/mexico-drug-war-essay/index.html> (accessed 24 November 2016).

Goldin Institute (2011) Child soldier: Juvenile Justice Debate. Available at <http://www.goldininstitute.org/index.cfm?n=2&sn=1&id=185> (Accessed 24 November 2016)

Gutierrez, M. (2011) Slain kids cast larger shadow on Mexican drug war. Available at www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-crime-idUSTRE76I5WF20110719. Accessed 24 November 2016

Grayson, G. W. (2014). *The evolution of Los Zetas in Mexico and Central America: Sadism as an instrument of cartel warfare*. Army War College Carlisle Barracks PA: Strategic Studies Institute.

Happold, M. (2008). Child soldiers: victims or perpetrators. *U. La Verne L. Rev.*, 29, 56.

Hari, J. (2012). *Chasing the scream: The first and last days of the war on drugs*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Inegi. (2017). Mortality statistics. Retrieved February 14, 2017, from

<http://www3.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/sisept/default.aspx?t=mvio20&s=est&c=22662>

Jammed Up (2013) [Mexican Govt: Los Zetas most responsible for recruitment of minors](#).

Available at <http://news.jammedup.com/2016/05/16/mexican-govt-los-zetas-criminal->

[group-in-mexico-most-responsible-for-recruitment-of-minors/](#) Accessed 24 November 2016

Jamison, M. A. (2005). Detention of Juvenile Enemy Combatants at Guantanamo Bay: The Special Concerns of the Children. *UC Davis Journal of Juvenile Law & Policy*, 9, 127.

Jayakumar, K (2011). Wars and the Child – Unending Saga of Child Soldiers, Working Paper

Kan, P. R. (2014). Malicious Peace: Violent Criminal Organizations, National Governments and Truces. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 3, 125-132.

Kemp, W., Shaw, M., & Boutellis, A. (2013). The Elephant in the Room: How Can Peace Operations Deal with Organized Crime? New York: International Peace Institute.

Kerr, C. (2012). Mexico's Drug War: Is It Really a War. *South Texas Law Review*, 54, 193.

Koonings, K., & Kruijt, D. (2007). *Fractured cities: social exclusion, urban violence and contested spaces in Latin America*. Zed Books.

Lessing, B. 2013. "Violent corruption and violent lobbying: logics of cartel-state conflict in Mexico, Brazil and Colombia." Stanford International Crime and Violence Lab.

Machel, G. (1996) *Impact of armed conflict on children*. New York: UNICEF.

Márquez, G. G. (1996). *News of a Kidnapping*. Penguin UK.

Montalvo, T. (2012) Children in Mexico: criminals or victims? CNN Available at www.cnn.com/2012/01/17/world/americas/mexico-children-crime/index.html Accessed 24 November 2016

Muñoz, R. R. (2012). Los establecimientos escolares ante el narcotráfico: efectos y prevención. *Archivos de criminología, Criminalística y Seguridad Privada*, (8), 16-9.

Nwoko, K.C. (2011) A bleak future, a wasted generation: child soldiers in Africa, *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 13(4) 68-92.

Olivera, L. E. T., Trujillo, Á. J. V., Espinosa, M. F., & Chong, N. R. G. (2016) Mortalidad por causas violentas en México, síntesis de dos décadas recientes, *Innovación más Desarrollo*, 5(11) 1- 18

Pastrana, D (2010) Mexican Govt Turns a Blind Eye to Orphaned and Disabled Children. *Inter Press Service*, July 23.

Popovski, V., & Arts, K. (2006). *International Criminal Accountability and Children's Rights*. United Nations University Press.

Romero, V.(2012). Statistical Approach to Reality of Children Offending in Mexico: Legislation and Organized Crime, New Challenges. *Universitas Psychologica*, 11(4), 1105-1114.

Reguillo, R. (2011). 'Dying Isn't Enough': A Young Hit Man in Michoacán. *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 44(3), 25.

Sánchez, M., Antonio, C., & Aguilar, A. E. T. (2012). Los menores de edad en la delincuencia organizada en México. *Letras Jurídicas. Revista Electrónica de Derecho del Centro Universitario de la Ciénega*, (15), 1-41.

San Luis, G., Hortensia, A., Avendaño, A., & Manuel, A. (2016). Impacto del narcotráfico en jóvenes de Tamaulipas, México: drogas e inseguridad. *Revista de Psicología (PUCP)*, 34(2), 445-472.

Sambanis, N. (2004). What is civil war? Conceptual and empirical complexities of an operational definition. *Journal of conflict resolution*, 48(6), 814-858.

Seelke, C. R., & Finklea, K. M. (2010). *US-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond*. Library of Congress Washington DC: Congressional Research Service.

Vaha, M. E. (2011). Child soldiers and killing in self-defence: challenging the 'moral view' on killing in war. *Journal of Military Ethics*, 10(1), 36-51.

Villagran, Lauren. (2013) *The Victims' Movement in Mexico*. Wilson Center. Working Paper Series on Civic Engagement and Public Security in Mexico.

Whitfield, Theresa. (2013) *Mediating Criminal Violence*. The Oslo Forum Papers. Available at http://www.hdcentre.org/uploads/tx_news/MediatingCriminal-Violence.pdf Accessed 24 November 2016