VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL CAPITAL IN URBAN POOR COMMUNITIES: PERSPECTIVES FROM COLOMBIA AND GUATEMALA

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INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the excitement about the potential of social capital to solve a wide range of development problems, a growing circumspection about the applicability of the concept has emerged. This caution varies from outright critique (Fine, 1999), to recognition of its negative dimensions, or 'dark side' (Putzel, 1997; Portes, 1998). To date, however, such debate has been largely 'academic' in nature, with limited empirical evidence to support this position.

One potentially negative dimension concerns the impact of violence on social capital, yet, interestingly, few have focused on the implications of violence for the characteristics and functioning of social capital. Does violence erode or reconstitute social capital? Can the extreme nature of this phenomenon provide a specific contribution to our understanding of the importance of social capital in development practice, especially at the community level?

The purpose of this article is to address questions such as these through the analysis of a study of social capital in Colombia and Guatemala. This was undertaken in 18 urban poor communities experiencing high levels of violence and insecurity, using participatory appraisal methodologies (see Moser and McIlwaine, 1999; 2000; 2001a).[1] The analysis seeks to provide a holistic understanding of social capital in the context of violence. In so doing it draws on the conceptual work of Uphoff (1997; 2000) and Rubio (1997) to distinguish between two different but interrelated categories of social capital, namely productive and perverse, and structural and cognitive social capital. The paper highlights

the importance of deconstructing the complex manner in which violence interrelates with social capital. It shows how social capital may be simultaneously eroded, fostered or reconstituted by violence, resulting in both positive and negative aspects of the phenomenon.

CONCEPTUALIZING VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL CAPITAL: TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

While both violence and social capital have been widely debated within the development literature, few have attempted to link them conceptually. Rather than review the well-known theoretical debates pertaining to each,[2] this section briefly defines each before highlighting approaches that are relevant in identifying the relationships between social capital and violence.

While analytical definitions of violence vary extensively, depending on disciplinary approaches (see McIlwaine, 1999; Moser *et al.*, 1999), the current study simplifies this diversity into a three-fold approach categorization. Drawing on the research of violence experts (*violentólogos*) in Colombia and elsewhere in the region (Guzmán *et al.*, 1963; 1964; Jimeno and Roldán, 1996; Deas and Gaitán, 1995), it outlines a conceptual continuum that distinguishes between political, economic and social violence. In each case, violence is identified as the use of forceful acts motivated by the conscious or unconscious desire to maintain or obtain political, economic or social power (Moser and Shrader, 1999).

At the outset it is important to clarify that the three types of violence causally overlap. For instance, gang violence can be categorized as economic in nature if a gang member steals out of economic necessity; yet if the same gang member engages in a violent feud with a neighbouring group over territorial boundaries then this violence may be social in nature. Similarly, there may be causal interrelationships between different types of violence. For example, intra-family social violence can precipitate other social violence, as well as economic 'street' violence, especially gang violence or guerrilla and para-military conflict (Moser and McIlwaine, 2000; 2001a; Pecaut, 1999 on Colombia; Zaman, 1999 on Bangladesh). Thus, it is useful to consider violence as a three-fold causally interrelating continuum, with different types manifested in diverse ways at specific times.

Turning to definitions of social capital, as is well-established, a range of competing, overlapping interpretations can be identified, based mainly on the seminal theoretical work of Putnam (1993), Coleman (1990) and Bourdieu (1993), again varying according to disciplinary perspective. The current study defines social capital, one of the most intangible forms of capital (Bebbington, 1999; Moser, 1998), along the lines of the oft-quoted, 'rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity, and trust embedded in social relations, social structures, and societies' institutional arrangements that enable its members to achieve their individual and community objectives' (Narayan, 1997, p. 50). In addition, it recognizes that social capital is generated and provides benefits through the membership of social networks or structures (Portes, 1998, p. 6).[3]

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[2]For recent writings on violence see Gaspar (1999), Keane (1996) and Turpin and Kurtz (1997). Among the extensive critiques of social capital, see Harriss and De Renzio (1997), Dasgupta and Serageldin (2000) and Portes (1998). For a useful annotated bibliography see Feldman and Assaf (1999).

[3]In Colombia and Guatemala, local researchers with whom the research was collaboratively undertaken, were aware and familiar with the term 'social capital.' In turn, people in the local communities also discussed notions such as *tejido social* (social fabric) *unidad social* (social unity), and *unión social* (social union), all of which are highly pertinent to the concept of social capital.

Recent analysis has recognized that social capital can be inclusive or exclusive in nature, and therefore is not necessarily beneficial for all. This contrasts with the work of Putnam (1993) and Fukuyama (1995) that tended to assume that social capital is not just a 'public good' (i.e. a by-product of social and economic activity), but 'for the public good' (Putzel, 1997, p. 941). Portes (1998), for instance, in distinguishing between sources and manifestations of social capital, comments that 'sociability cuts both ways' (p. 18). Not only do some have more endowments of social capital than others, but they may also have more access to instrumental sources (reciprocity exchanges). This can imply the 'exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on groups members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward levelling of norms' (Portes, 1998, p. 15).

Drawing on frameworks developed in the World Bank by Woolcock (1998) and Narayan (1999), the concept of social capital has most recently been incorporated into the World Bank's *World Development Report* 2000–2001 (World Bank, 2000). Here, the three main types of social capital are delineated as comprising bonding social capital (strong ties among relatives, neighbours and close friends), bridging social capital (weak ties linking individuals who are merely acquainted in a horizontal pattern) and linking social capital (based on vertical ties among the poor and those with influence in formal institutions) (World Bank, 2000, p. 128). So-called 'linking' social capital has been identified as having the potential to cause discord, although to date this has been identified mainly on ethnic grounds (World Bank, 2000; Portes and Landolt, 2000; see also Kyle, 1999). What is clear is that 'social capital for some implies social exclusion for others' (Harriss and De Renzio, 1997, p. 926). One of the most important aspects of this is the recognition that illegal and criminal organizations, such as gangs, mafia organizations and drug cartels, can generate 'perverse' social capital usually premised on the use of force and violence (Rubio, 1997; see below).

While this recent research recognizes the potentially negative dimensions of social capital, linkages between social capital and violence are still rarely made. Moreover, they tend to be concentrated on the United States (see Kawachi *et al.*, 1999), to use approximate proxy indicators of social capital (Kawachi *et al.*, 1999; Putnam, 1993),[4] to identify murder rates as the key measure of violence and crime (see Lederman *et al.*, 1999), or to analyse victimization surveys (UNICRI, 1995). One of the few studies to examine the links between social capital and violent political conflict was undertaken in Cambodia, Rwanda, Guatemala and Somalia (Colletta and Cullen, 2000). Arguing that violent conflict can undermine social capital, as well as reconstitute it, the study states, 'social capital can be constructive and support social cohesion and the mitigation of conflict, but it can also be perverted to hasten social fragmentation and the onset of violent conflict' (Colletta and Cullen, 2000).[5]

Building on these issues, this study focuses on the critical complementarities and distinctions between productive and perverse, and structural and cognitive social capital.[6]

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[4]These proxies have included the proportion of female-headed households or newspaper readership as indicators of the existence of social capital.

[5]The comparative relevance of this study is limited by the fact that is uses different definitions and indicators of social capital, as well as varying methodologies in each country.

[6]Highlighting constraints in the identification of intangible social capital attributes, it is important to acknowledge that most research on social capital relies on what Bebbington (1999–2036) refers to as 'surrogate indicators.' In this study the primary unit of analysis are social organizations—on the basis that social capital refers to the relationships inherently generated as a result of organizational involvement. In the study, the nature of social capital is explored through the structure, functions and assessment of social organizations within local communities with the terms sometimes used interchangeably.

The first distinctive category draws directly on the research of the Colombian economist, Mauricio Rubio (1997). Relating to youth delinquency, gang and guerrilla group membership, Rubio defines 'productive' social capital as that which may generate institutional change and favour growth. In turn, 'perverse' social capital refers to networks, and the legal and reward systems that encourage rent-seeking behaviour and criminal activity. While the concept is not fully developed, Rubio alludes to the fact that criminal activities may have sophisticated organizational structures that provide more viable alternatives to legitimate or 'productive' activities, particularly for youth.

The current study builds on Rubio's work to define productive social capital/social organizations in local communities as those that generate favourable outcomes both for its members and for the community at large. In contrast, 'perverse' social capital/social organizations are those that have positive benefits for its members, but in contrast, include negative outcomes for wider communities. Perverse social capital/social organizations are frequently based on the use of force, violence and/or illegal activities.

The distinction between productive and perverse social capital is interrelated with a second important differentiated category, between structural and cognitive social capital, developed by Uphoff (1997; 2000). Structural social capital encompasses the types of interpersonal relationships that relate to formal or informal organizations or networks, and deals with the arena of roles. Cognitive social capital relates to the realm of ideas, denoting instrumental ideas (such as routines and repertoires) and normative ideas, revolving around values, norms, attitudes and beliefs. These two forms are intricately linked and can be identified along a continuum of levels from societal, local to individual (Krishna and Uphoff, 1999). Building on this definition, in the current study, 'structural social capital' refers to social organizations and formal networks of trust and cohesion. In contrast, cognitive social capital denotes invisible, informal elements of trust, altruism, and charity as experienced among individuals in communities.

The case studies of Colombia and Guatemala illustrate the ways in which the identification of these two different categorizations of social capital, and the linkages between them, provide a useful holistic framework for the analysis of the relationships between social capital and violence in urban poor communities. Not only does this challenge the stereotyped conception of social capital as a 'public good' associated with positive development outcomes, but also highlights the ways in which the phenomenon of violence can contribute to the understanding of the complexity of social capital itself.

VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL CAPITAL IN COLOMBIA AND GUATEMALA: NATIONAL LEVEL CONTEXT

The choice of Colombia and Guatemala as the countries for the research provides interesting comparative experiences of violence. While Colombia is currently in the midst of an extended civil war, Guatemala is in a 'post-conflict' transition phase in which political violence has left an indelible imprint on society. The countries have parallels, as well as differences, in terms of their political, economic and social histories.

Colombia, for instance, has long been characterized as a violent nation, despite its reputation as one of South America's oldest and most enduring democracies, and its status as a middle-income country rich in natural and human resources. It has one of the highest homicide rates in the world, three times the rate in Brazil and Mexico, and 50 times a

typical European country (Gaviria, 2000, p. 2). In part, the high levels of violence are associated with political conflict and the country's fifty year 'simmering' war linked with *La Violencia* (The Violence) between 1948 and 1963 that involved the death of 160,000 people. Currently, the armed conflict results in approximately 35,000 deaths each year. In 1997, there were 132 guerrilla groups, and 100 paramilitary organizations operating in around 300 municipalities (Ferreyra and Segura, 2000, p. 28).

At the same time, it is maintained that over 95 per cent of homicides are not linked directly with the state-guerrilla confrontation (Gaviria, 2000, p. 6). Political conflict has also been exacerbated by drug cartel-linked violence and the current economic recession—Colombia's first for 62 years (Watson, 2000). Moreover, until the 1990s, armed conflict mainly affected those within the conflict itself and marginal populations in remote rural areas, with urban violence primarily impacting low-income *barrio* (community) dwellers. Recently, however, the scale and intensity of violence has increased as the causes of violence have changed. These now include external events such as the collapse of the Cold War, as well as internal changes relating to economic liberalization, coal and oil developments, and the global trade in illicit narcotics.

In consequence, generalized violence is now widespread across the country. Murder rates have escalated, tripling between the 1970s and 1990s. In parallel, kidnapping, car theft, bank robberies and petty crimes have also increased (Gaviria, 2000). This situation prevails in a context of widespread impunity (Giraldo, 1999), which has served to keep levels of social capital low (Sudarsky, 1999). Indeed, continuing violence erodes not only formal social institutions and the effectiveness of judicial system, but also informal community level institutions and households relations (Moser *et al.*, 1999).

Guatemala, in turn, is considered the most violent country in Central America, with the highest regional murder rate (CIEN, 1998). Similar to Colombia, the roots of conflict in Guatemala lie in centuries old exclusion and inequality. In this case, however, inequality has been largely along racial and ethnic lines with the indigenous populations—around half of the nation's population and comprising 23 ethno-linguistic groups, 21 of which are Mayan—largely oppressed. The recent civil war involved extreme and brutal levels of political violence, spatially concentrated in the rural, North Western and North Central departments of the country, in areas dominated by indigenous populations.

Although the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords between the Government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) ended overt political violence, generalized violence has increased throughout the country. This especially affects urban areas, previously relatively immune from the worst violence. Violent deaths increased from 2,699 in 1992 to 3,657 in 1995, and the number of crimes doubled from 11,711 in 1992 to 22,742 in 1995 (PNUD, 1998, p. 148). As in Colombia, kidnapping, car theft and bank robberies also increased throughout the 1990s, such that Guatemala now has more generalized violence than during the armed conflict. Causes underpinning such high levels include unequal access to economic power (especially land), as well as to political power, along with a continuation in state-controlled and paramilitary violence (de León *et al.*, 1999). Underlying all these factors are the deep-seated ethnic inequalities that are still experienced on the part of indigenous populations (Palencia Prado, 1996). As with Colombia, impunity is widespread throughout Guatemala, contributing to the increase of 'lynching' as an illegal and informal way of dealing with accused criminals (Molina Mejía, 1999). In turn, social capital has been severely eroded at the national level by the armed conflict and its legacy among the population, especially in indigenous areas that experienced the worst ravages of the war (ODHAG, 1999).

VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL CAPITAL AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL IN COLOMBIA AND GUATEMALA

To explore these patterns of violence at the national level, the current study conducted participatory urban appraisals (PUAs) in 1999, in 18 urban poor communities (nine in each country) in towns and cities chosen to reflect differences both in geographical zones as well as types of violence. Fieldwork was undertaken collaboratively with 40 local researchers who had previous experience in the chosen communities (for safety reasons).[7] A total of 1,414 people participated in focus group discussions in Colombia, with 1,860 taking part in Guatemala. Focus groups included different age and gender groups, as well as diverse ethnic groups in the case of Guatemala. As a participatory study, empirical findings were based entirely on the perceptions and the great range of so-called 'voices' of people themselves in the different urban poor communities (see Moser and McIlwaine, 1999 for a detailed description of research methodology).

Before examining the relationships between social capital and violence it is necessary to briefly describe how each was generally perceived in the study communities. In fact, the study did not assume *a priori* that violence was perceived as a problem. However problem 'listings,' undertaken at the outset by community members, soon showed that violence dominated their lives.[8] In both countries, a variety of types of violence, and violence-related problems were cited as the most critical concern. In Colombia, for instance, this accounted for 43 per cent of all problems, with drug-related violence, robbery, and general levels of insecurity cited as most common. In Guatemala, they constituted 48 per cent of all problems, with robbery, intra-family, and gang violence emerging as most important. Also significant was the diversity in the types of violence identified, with an average of 25 different types across all the 18 communities.[9] In one community in Bogotá, Colombia, 60 different types were distinguished, while in a community in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, 75 different types were mentioned.

Although political violence was a serious government priority in Colombia, it was not the major concern of the urban poor, for whom economic and social violence were more important. In Guatemala, political violence levels were perceived as low, with social violence predominating. There were also geographical variations. In the Medellín and Cali communities, for instance, drug-related violence was particularly important. In Guatemala, concern with political violence was prioritised in the Santa Cruz del Quiché and Huehuetenango communities, both of which were located in areas most affected by the armed conflict. Variations also emerged according to gender, age and ethnicity. Women,

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[7]In Colombia PUAs were carried out in three communities in Bogotá, and one respectively in Cali, Medellín, Bucaramanga, Girón, Yopal, and Aguazul. In Guatemala, research was undertaken in four communities in Guatemala City, and one respectively in Huehuetenango, San Marcos, Esquipulas, Santa Cruz del Quiché, and Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa. In Colombia, the teams were drawn from the *Universidad Nacional*, an NGO called CEMILLA (*Centro Microempresarial del Llano*), a women's NGO, *Fundación Mujer y Futuro*, and a group of consultants who had previously worked with the *Alto Comisionado para la Paz*. In Guatemala, the teams included one from the *Centro de Investigaciones Económicas Nacionales* (CIEN), a research organization, *Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala* (AVANCSO), a women's NGO, *Asociación Mujer Vamos Adelante* (AMVA), a community-development group, *Fundación de Desarrollo y Servicios Comunitarios* (FUNDESCO), and the organization *Servicios Profesionales Educativos Integrales* (SEPREDI). Daniel Selener, of the *Instituto Internacional de Reconstrución Rural* (IIRR) was the PUA trainer in both Colombia and Guatemala.

[8]The extensive numbers of focus groups undertaken in the study was intended to allow for the quantification of relevant data, especially that pertaining to the detailed listings and rankings.

[9]In addition to the types of problems affecting them and their communities, focus group members were asked to specifically list the types of violence affecting their communities.

for example, were more concerned with violence within the home and street rape, while men prioritised delinquency, gangs and drug-violence.[10]

Focus group listings also highlighted the fact that many of the urban poor were worried about the erosion of social capital. This was exemplified by complaints about the 'lack of union' (*falta de unión*), 'lack of social fabric' (*falta de tejido social*), along with the crucially important comment that 'there's lots of fear' (*hay mucho meido*). In both Colombia and Guatemala, problems linked with a lack of social capital were identified more frequently than those relating to a lack of human capital (14 per cent of all problems in Colombia and 10 per cent in Guatemala).

In addition, a variety of PUA tools identified both the prevalence, and the importance, of social institutions, showing the widespread incidence of social institutions in both countries.[11] In Colombia, people in nine communities identified 372 local organizations in total, while in Guatemala they identified 322. In categorizing these, an important distinction was made between service delivery organizations (in which community members do not make decisions) and membership groups (in which people participate, either formally or informally, in the functioning of the organization). In terms of both prevalence and importance, formal state-run service delivery institutions were the most widespread (around a third of institutions) in both countries, comprising mainly education and health service delivery. Differences included the fact that in Guatemala, service delivery organizations were perceived as much more prevalent than membership organizations (74 per cent as against 26 per cent), while in Colombia the difference was not so marked (52 per cent compared with 48 per cent) (see also below).

In many of the communities, people not only linked the various types of violence, but also identified the relationship between violence and social capital. For instance, in Bucaramanga, Colombia, a focus group of three young men in a youth centre drew a causal impact diagram to illustrate how intra-family violence was linked to insecurity, as well as to gang activity (associated with the formation of perverse social capital), drug taking, robbery, killing, and delinquency. The outcome was identified as 'social mistrust,' 'lack of unity,' 'fear' and 'lack of social institutions'—all manifestations of the erosion of social capital (see Figure 1).

COGNITIVE SOCIAL CAPITAL, VIOLENCE AND FEAR

Cognitive social capital is central to understanding how violence and social capital interrelate. As distinct from the structural social capital that pertains to social organizations, in the research communities, cognitive social capital refers to the norms and attitudes that manifest themselves in trust and collaboration among neighbours. In both Colombia and Guatemala there was a paucity of cognitive social capital, with people across all communities complaining of a lack of trust and unity (see Figure 1). In Guatemala, where membership organizations were less common than in Colombia, people

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[10]For a gendered analysis of the case study, see Moser and McIlwaine (2001b).

[11]Since PUA methodology does not use questionnaire surveys, information on individual organizational membership was not gathered (see for example Groothaert, 1999; Narayan, 1997). However, a particular advantage of PUA is its ability to identify illegal, criminal or violence-related groups in a context of anonymity. For instance, a gang member may not admit to gang membership in a one-to-one interview, yet when asked in a group context which institutions are important in a community, the gang member may find it be easier to identify the existence of the gang in which he or she is a member. Consequently, PUA may often be more effective in identifying violence-related or illegal institutions than conventional questionnaire-based research techniques.
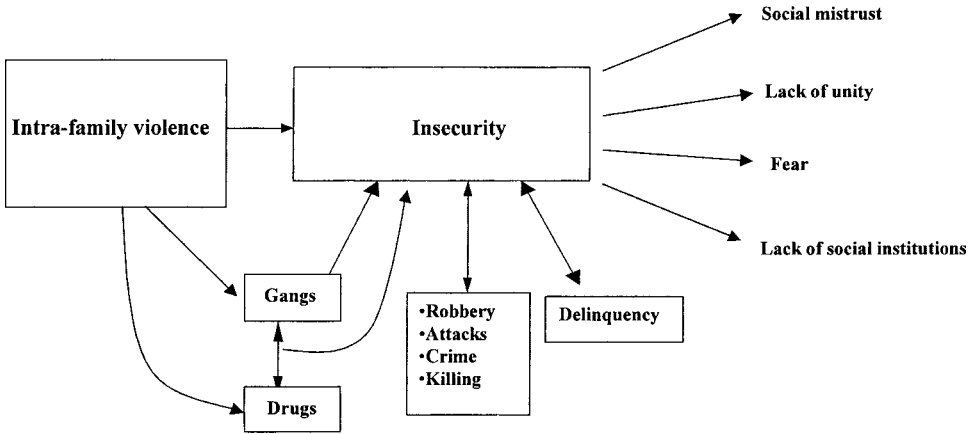
Figure 1.   Causal flow diagram of interrelationships among intra-family violence, insecurity, and social capital in Bucaramanga. Analyzed by three young men from a youth centre

repeatedly expressed extreme reluctance to collaborate with their neighbours. As an elderly woman in San Pedro Sacatepéquez, San Marcos stated, 'No one gets involved in the lives of others,' while another woman complained, 'Everyone lives their own lives.'

In both countries, people commented on strategies of silence—a phenomenon that has already been identified at the level of Latin America (Koonings and Kruijt, 1999a), as well as in Colombia (Pecaut, 1999) and Guatemala (Green, 1995). In Colombia, this was referred to as the '*ley de silencio*' (law of silence), while in Guatemala it was known as the '*cultura de silencio*' (law of silence), and in both cases was closely linked to fear.[12] While levels of fear were high in all communities, different types of violence, as well as gender, age and ethnic composition, affected the manifestation of this phenomenon.

For instance, fear of political violence was most widespread, with far-reaching consequences for the erosion of cognitive social capital. In Colombia, levels of fear were highest in the two communities in Aguazul and Yopal, Casanare, located in an oil-rich region associated with high levels of guerrilla and paramilitary activity (Dureau and Florez, 2000). In Aguazul in the 1996–99 period, two community leaders and a further 12 community members were killed, two disappeared, and ten families fled because of death threats. By 1999, the main threat and source of violence was the paramilitaries. As one focus group member noted, 'Every Friday at 7 p.m. the paramilitary *carros lujosos* (luxury cars) arrive to terrorize us, and they only leave on Sunday night.' Another focus group, comprising four adult women and men, blamed the paramilitaries for the widespread fear that leads to high levels of 'individualism' and 'lack of solidarity.' Living with the constant threat of kidnap, murder, extortion and reprisals, people in this community constantly reiterated the importance of 'keeping your mouth shut' and avoiding gossip, since the mere suspicion of talking to the guerrillas could lead to assassination by the paramilitaries.

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[12]Inevitably, this influenced the research process and in some communities people were more open than others. However, a pre-requisite of the research teams was that they were known and respected within communities, which considerably reduced levels of mistrust.

While fear was especially marked in areas affected by political violence, gang warfare, drug use and insecurity in general also led to fear and the fragmentation of cognitive social capital in Colombia. In Cali, gang warfare caused concern and fear, while in Bogotá, people were afraid of drug users and the attacks associated with them. A woman from a Bogotá community noted that 'before' people were more united and, 'One didn't see young people smoking [marijuana] because there was more communication.' 'Now,' she stated, there was no collaboration, that people no longer respected one another, and that they were afraid to confront others about the problems of the *barrio*.[13]

Political violence has also had a profound effect on the construction of fear in the Guatemalan communities. Even after the official cessation of political conflict, the legacy of violence remains, reflected in widespread fear and the dissolution of cognitive social capital (ODHAG, 1999). In the research communities, fear was most commonly detected in those that had suffered most during the armed conflict, especially those involved in the barbaric massacres of indigenous communities during the 1980s. In the predominantly Mayan community in Santa Cruz del Quiché, a middle-aged man recalled the 1980s: 'If someone talked, they were a dead man; for this reason, people kept silent.' Another man remembered how a gathering of two or more people was regarded as subversive; he said how they couldn't even hold a funeral without fear of being killed by the army. In the post-war period, therefore, this legacy of distrust remains, with fear still the basis of this and of the fragmentation of the social fabric.

However, in all Guatemalan communities, there was widespread fear of economic violence relating to *maras* (gangs), delinquency, and robbery. Women were especially afraid of social violence associated with sexual violence, and especially rape, that was rampant in all communities. This was closely associated with the fact that during the armed conflict rape was used as a military tool of war (Lira, 1998; Datta and McIlwaine, 2000). Figure 2, drawn by a Mayan mother and daughter illustrates various dimensions of fear.

People experienced fear, not only in public spaces of communities, but also in the private arena of the household. Although this is often 'invisible,' focus groups in both countries highlighted the critical importance of fear relating to the alarmingly high levels of different types of intra-family violence. Although conjugal violence—physical, verbal and sexual—was the most common, violence against male and female children was also widespread. For instance, a 13 year-old Guatemalan girl in Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa drew a picture of a male figure towering over a young girl in her bed and wrote as an accompanying commentary, 'I'm afraid that when I'm sleeping I could be raped, that's what I'm afraid of.' Most girls who discussed intra-family violence identified fathers, stepfathers and uncles as the people they were most scared of. Thus, trust among family members was limited, although this was strongly gendered.

In both countries, people adopted strategies of silence in relation to intra-family violence. For example, in Guatemala, women often only felt able to discuss gender-based violence in relation to alcohol abuse, identified as an important causal factor in precipitating such violence. This silence was grounded, not only in fear, but also in shame and a reluctance to disrespect male relatives. Nonetheless, people repeatedly asserted that intra-family violence was the root of all other types of violence, with one young boy from Bogotá noting, 'Violence begins in the home, and it is one of the most important factors in the harmony of the community, and this brings about lack of respect in everyone.'

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[13]For a description of the 'silent terror' and the 'banalisation of violence' in Colombia, see Pecaut, (1997; 1999).
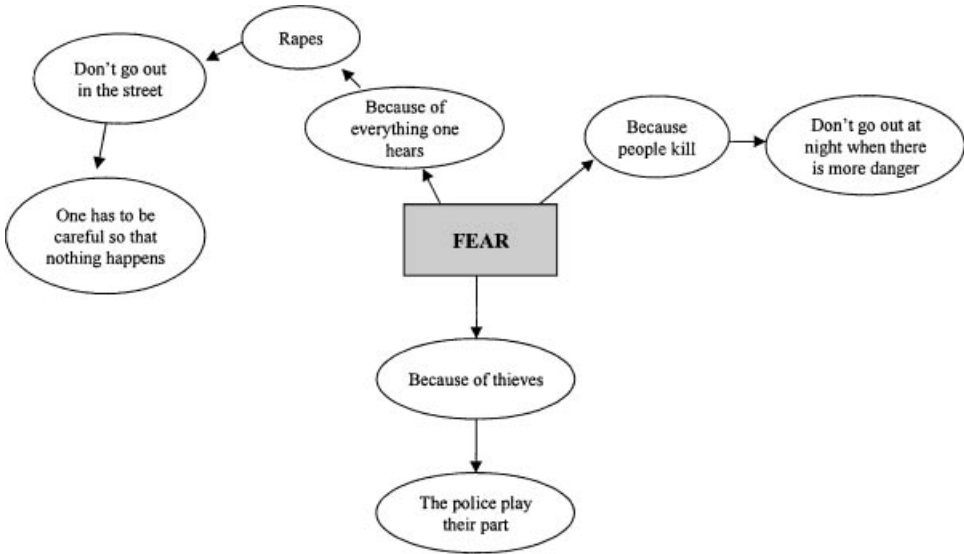
Figure 2. Causal flow diagram of fear prepared by a Mayan mother (aged 38) and daughter (aged 16) in a tortilla-making shop in Guatemala City

Finally, in addition to fear linked to different types of violence, lack of trust generated other types of conflict, sometimes violent in nature. This was especially marked in Guatemala where neighbourhood conflicts were widespread. These usually revolved around two issues; first, fights over land tenure in contexts where people felt they had been unfairly dealt with by neighbourhood groups responsible for the allocation of land and housing; second, physical and verbal conflict among neighbours concerning access to water. In Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, this reached an extreme level when the municipality was set on fire, as a protest about water shortages. The deleterious effects of gossip were also recognized in both Guatemala and Colombia. Gossip, usually heavily gendered, was usually rooted in jealousy over men and children. Such conflicts undermined men and women's willingness to participate in community activities. As one woman in Guatemala City complained, 'We don't like to participate because there are neighbours who talk about us.' Young people complained about being on the receiving end of gossip that lead to severe inter-generational conflicts. For instance in Girón, Colombia, a group of three 15–16 year-old women described how adult gossip made them feel excluded, generating conflicts with their parents.

Overall the perverse manifestation of cognitive social capital was an institutional, cultural and psychological outcome of violence (Koonings and Kruijt, 1999b, p. 15). Political violence, in particular, with high concentrations of power and use of force, is particularly marked in eroding cognitive social capital. At the same time, it is causally linked to other types of economic and social violence, all of which break down the social fabric of society. This is especially the case with intra-family violence, which as the study demonstrates, essentially remains a taboo issue. As Torres-Rivas (1999, p. 294) states, 'To live in insecurity, with the sensation of a permanent threat, or close to pain or death, all contribute to the breakdown of basic solidarity.'

STRUCTURAL SOCIAL CAPITAL, VIOLENCE AND PERVERSE ORGANIZATIONS

Structural social capital at the community level can be either productive or perverse in nature. As noted above, a large number of social institutions exist in the research communities, and while service delivery organizations are more prevalent than membership groups in Guatemala, there is numerical difference between the two in Colombia. While this is a useful distinction to make, in communities experiencing high levels of violence, it is also important to further differentiate between productive and perverse organizations, in other words those that generate productive or perverse social capital. Indeed, in situations of violence, it is important to consider whether perverse organizations are functional to individual and household risk management strategies.

In both countries, the vast majority of social organizations were productive in so far as they were intended to function for the benefit of members as well as the community at large. Most of these were state-linked organizations. In Colombia, for instance, focus groups identified a number of central government institutions, such as the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF), local government organizations, and the partly state-funded community action committees (*Juntas de Acción Comunal*). In Guatemala, productive institutions included schools, hospitals and churches, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs); NGOs were usually externally funded and managed, such as Medicine without Borders, UNICEF and World Vision. Overall, there was far less institutional diversity in Guatemala than Colombia, reflecting the erosion of local organizational trust during the long period of armed conflict.

A significant minority of all social organizations in Colombia and Guatemala can be identified as fostering perverse social capital in that they generated benefits only for their members, and in perpetrating violence, seriously harmed the wider community. These included guerrilla and paramilitary groups, neighbourhood gangs, drug dealers and users and militias. Perverse organizations were more marked in Colombia than Guatemala, with the large number closely associated with the ongoing civil war.[14] In total, one out of every five membership organizations was involved in violence-related activities.

This varied according to community. In Yopal, for instance, violence-related organizations represented more than half of all membership organizations, linked mainly with political violence, while in one Bogotá community, such groups represented a third of all membership organizations, in this case dominated by those involved in drugs and robbery. There was also diversity in terms of specific types of groups, with 16 different types of perverse organizations identified (see Table 1).[15] These were grouped according to their linkages to political, economic and social violence, as well as the sophistication of their organizational structures. Guerrillas (known locally as 'cats') and paramilitaries (known locally as 'birds')[16] were most organized and had the greatest influence on communities (see above). In addition, most were male dominated, with no female-only organizations.

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[14]It is important to note that in Colombia perverse organizations have existed for a considerable time, although they have proliferated since the 1970s (see Pérez and Mejía (1996) on youth gangs and militias in Bogotá, Cali and Medellín; Riano-Alcalá (1991) on the phenomenon in Bogotá).

[15]Table 1 excludes drug related organizations as they have different types of internal structures (see Moser and McIlwaine, 2000). It also excludes a range of other groups, often associated with youth, especially those linked with music, such as '*metaleros*' (heavy metal groups), and '*punkeros*' (punk rock groups). The omission of the latter is because they are not involved in the perpetration of crime or violence.

[16]The term *pájaro* dates back to the Liberal/Conservative conflict that resulted in La Violencia (1949–53). It purportedly refers to the way the Liberals threw the Conservatives out of airplanes, making them 'fly.'

Table 1.   Perverse social institutions in Colombia by type of violence

Type of violence	Institution
Social	
	Parche: A place or group of teenagers that meet to converse, drink or consume drugs. May also involve acts of crime and violence. Usually based on flexible association and spontaneous congregation. Male-dominated, but may have female members.
	Combo: A place or group that commits acts of violence. Less open and more organized than a *parche*. Male-dominated, but may have female members.
	Gallada: A gang of primarily male teenagers or adolescents that congregates in a *parche*. May commit crimes and acts of violence. May form into a *pandilla* if an identity and symbolism is developed.
	Pandilla: A gang with a closed internal organizational structure. Uses symbols and markings to denote gang identity. Comprises mainly men (usually in early 20s) involved in delinquency, territorial disputes and drug consumption.
Economic	
	Raponeros: Petty thieves or 'snatchers.' Operate individually or in groups and mainly comprising male children or adolescents.
	Atracadores: Thieves armed with guns or knives. Usually mug people in the streets, although may specialize in particular types of attacks, such as attacks on taxis. Less organized than *ladrones*.
	Ladrones: Generic name for thieves. May specialise in particular types.
	Apartamenteros: Thieves who specialize in theft from apartments.
	Banda: Group of male delinquents organized to commit crimes, primarily robbery and other acts of violence. A *banda* may offer its criminal services to others. May specialize in a particular good, such as jewellery.
	Oficina: Group of organized male drug dealers or business people that hires others to commit acts of crime or violence.
Political	
	Encapuchados: Literally, hooded people. Generic name for those who commit acts of crime and violence. May be *sicarios*, militia members or guerillas.
	Sicarios: Paid assassins, usually contracted to kill for revenge. Often linked with social cleansing.
	Milicias populares: Popular militias that commit violence, mainly through control of delinquency. Usually informal protection/justice forces. Some linked with guerrilla.
	Grupos de limpieza social: Social cleansing groups. Also known as *paperos* in Cali, *rayas* in Bogotá, and *capuchos* in Medellín. Highly organized male professional killers. Target groups are delinquents, beggars, drug addicts, petty thieves, street children, and prostitutes. Usually have links with the police, the military or other state security forces (DAS).
	Paramilitares/pájaros: Paramilitary organizations known locally as 'birds.' Usually linked with the extreme Right. Includes a range of civil defence groups funded by landowners, emerald magnates, drug traffickers and thought to be linked with military. Ostensibly aim to protect civilians and eradicate the two main guerrilla organizations. Highly organized, male-dominated structure.
	Guerilla/gatos: Guerilla organizations known locally at 'cats.' Includes the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*—Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia), a pro-Soviet guerrilla group, and the ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*—National Liberation Army), a pro-Cuban guerrilla group. Highly sophisticated organizations that control large areas of the national territory.

Some organizations had ties with each other. For example, the popular militias often had links with guerrilla groups, especially in Cali, where some militias were closely associated with the ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*—National Liberation Army) guerrillas. A community leader from Cali noted, 'The militias have the same components as the

guerrillas; before the state they are viewed as guerrilla and in the *barrio* [community] as militias . . . the militias have more power here than the father guerrilla.'

In Guatemala, as with productive organizations, there was also less diversity in the types of perverse organizations, with the two main types identified as gangs (*maras*), and bars (*cantinas*). Nevertheless, the presence of *maras* was perceived as a major problem in many communities, especially in Guatemala City. First associated with El Salvador and, to a lesser extent Honduras, *maras* are a Central American phenomenon closely linked with gang culture in the United States. In post-conflict Central America, many *mara* members are deportees from the United States, while the common *mara* name, 'MI8,' is named after a gang of the same name from Eighteenth Street in Los Angeles. Although some *mara* members in the research community were return-migrants from the US and EI Salvador, the majority were local youth copying the names, customs and patterns of clothing of their counterparts elsewhere. Each community had at least three or four gangs, with such names as White Fence, *Salvatrucha* and *Los Cholos.* While most were male-dominated, one female-only gang was identified in Santa Cruz del Quiché called the *Chicas Big* (Big Girls).

The *maras* in Guatemala City were generally more organized and involved in serious violence revolving around territorial disputes. In the regional towns such as San Marcos and Santa Cruz del Quiché, the delinquency of *maras* was less threatening involving throwing stones, and painting graffiti on walls. The *maras* were a fairly recent phenomenon emerging in the 1990s, but they had flourished since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996. As one woman from Huehuetenango noted, 'Instead of signing peace, they signed violence'; many of those involved in the armed conflict were thought to have joined the *maras* after the war.[17]

Perverse groups were an integral element of community life in both countries, although their diversity and prevalence was greater in Colombia. Generally reviled by community members, they contributed to the erosion of cognitive social capital and the generation of fear. However, from the perspective of its members, the perverse capital fostered within these organizations created significant positive effects, of particular importance given widespread social exclusion experienced within urban poor communities of Colombia and Guatemala. Those in gangs, for instance, identified a strong sense of security and identity that they could not obtain elsewhere.[18] Young gang members in Cali, pointed out that they probably would not live very long, so they might as well have fun with their peers. In addition, gangs were often identified as providing a replacement for productive social institutions, either absent from their lives or, as with the family, not functional. A young man in Esquipulas, Guatemala, for instance, stated that, 'Joining a gang provides a guide for young people, especially when they have family problems.' Such problems, especially intra-family violence, were frequently cited as reasons for young people 'turning to the streets' and joining gangs or other illegal groups. A woman from Bogotá pointed out that, 'For young people who are mistreated in the home, they go into the street and do the same thing there as part of a *pandilla* (gang).'

Gender differences were important in relation to the structure of perverse organizations. For instance, in the '*Chicas Big*' in Santa Cruz del Quiché, Guatemala, young women only became involved in gangs as girlfriends of male gang members and in support functions.

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[17]See Rodgers (1999) on El Salvador.
[18]Salazar (1990) described the same sense of identity in his classic study of the *sicarios* in Medellín. For similar characteristics of gangs in Caracas, Venezuela, see Márquez (1999).

Similarly, a young woman in Guatemala City explained that female adolescents some-times joined *maras*, as a way of acquiring a boyfriend, although sexual abuse by fathers or stepfathers was usually the main reason. This was reiterated by a group of five young women in Girón, Colombia, who also reported how 'street girls' (*muchachas vagas*) involved in male-dominated gangs, were often sexually abused once they joined gangs. Indeed, many of the organising principles of gang membership are based on machismo, power and the subjugation of women.[19]

Bound-up with the creation of perverse social capital thrrough gang membership, were other forms of power. In some cases, this revolved around a desire for leadership among people, who otherwise felt disempowered. A community leader from Bogotá noted the reason for joining a *pandilla*: 'Often is it not economic, nor is it hunger, it's the desire for leadership, the force of power.' Nevertheless economic power was also a primary motivating factor. For young people with few employment opportunities, membership in perverse organizations provided an income. Some organizations had more sophisticated career structures than others; neighbourhood gangs such as the *pandillas*, *maras*, *galladas* and *combos*, provided casual earnings; guerrilla and paramilitary organizations offered a regular income and career prospects (Suárez, 2000); finally drug production and distribu-tion organizations ensured the most lucrative earnings of all, although little of the profits reached the urban poor themselves (Moser and McIlwaine, 2000).

Although they are premised on the use of violence and crime, perverse organizations therefore provide an escape from family problems and the exclusion by wider society, particularly for young people. Internally, they are productive rather than perverse in that they provide essential support functions. The challenge is thus to convert the energy and structure of perverse groups into those that are productive for all. In a number of instances, this has already occurred. For instance, the research community in Medellín had experienced a decade of intense conflicts among *parches*, *combos*, *bandas*, *pandillas* and militias involved in widespread massacres. However, in 1999, a peace process was initiated through which one of the major gangs, *Los Muchachos*, was transformed into a community conflict mediator and protector. Although still feared, they were also respected for their *barrio* protection role. In the words of one member of *Los Muchachos*, 'If it wasn't for us, the school would have been broken into and the children would have been stolen.'

COMBINING STRUCTURAL AND COGNITIVE SOCIAL CAPITAL: TRUST IN SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

In both Colombia and Guatemala, high levels of distrust in state security and justice systems exacerbated the widespread prevalence of perverse social organizations, and the associated levels of fear. Assessments of level of trust in social organizations, associated with both structural and cognitive social capital, were therefore central to the analysis of social capital in communities. To identify levels of trust, community members assessed whether they viewed each organization positively (interpreted as indicating a high level of trust) or negatively (interpreted as indicating a low level of trust).[20]

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[19]For a similar phenomenon in the USA, see Curry (1999). For a study on *galladas* in Bogotá, see Riano-Alcalá (1991).
[20]Institutional mapping diagrams and institutional matrices were used to identify positive and negative evaluations of social organizations.
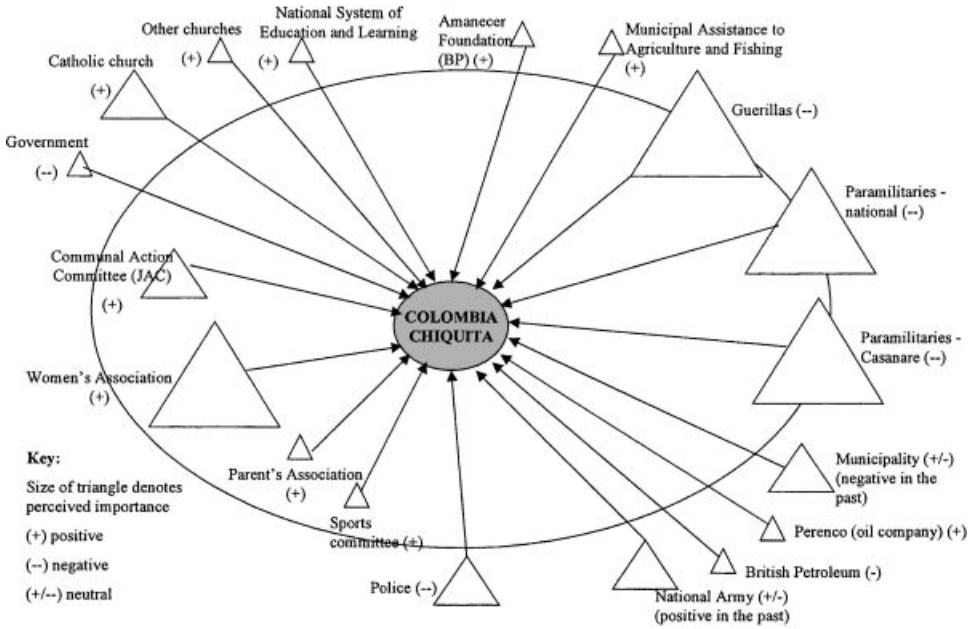
Figure 3. Institutional mapping of a community in Aguazul, drawn by a mixed sex group of seven adults

In Colombia, among membership organizations, women's and childcare groups, all run by women, were the most trusted, receiving the highest percentage of positive rankings (88 per cent) (see Sudarsky, 1999, for similar findings).[21] This was followed by youth groups, the church (79 per cent) and neighbourhood committees (75 per cent). Distrust of the police, military, Administrative Security Department (including the secret police), and the judicial system was widespread, with 51 per cent perceiving them in a negative light. Indeed, the least trusted service delivery organization was the police force that in all communities were accused of corruption and bribery, bolstered by the widespread use of violence. The least trusted membership institutions were those associated with perpetrating or preventing violence—with 82 per cent of respondents viewing them unfavourably. However, it was also significant that some 18 per cent of people trusted these organizations (as illustrated by the example of *Los Muchachos* above). Figure 3 from Aguazul, Colombia illustrates a focus group's perception both of the trust in women's associations, as well as the distrust in the state security forces. While they identified the guerrilla and paramilitaries as highly influential, but in a negative manner, in turn, they acknowledged that the women's association (a local women's self-help and livelihood group) was the most important positive social institution.

As was the case with cognitive social capital, in Guatemala, levels of trust in social institutions were also low. Most trusted of the membership organizations, were youth, sports and recreation groups (with 82 per cent receiving a positive ranking), followed by religious groups (79 per cent viewed them positively). Drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres—primarily Alcoholics Anonymous—received the highest percentage of positive

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[21]Sudarsky's BARCAS concluded that trust was very high in ethnic, women's and ecological groups (1999, p. 3).

rankings among service delivery organizations; the AA had centres in all the communities, reflecting a severe problem of alcoholism in Guatemalan society. Although there were far fewer women's and childcare organizations than in the Colombian communities, they were generally highly trusted (76 per cent). As in Colombia, there was a strong distrust in state security and judicial organizations. The police and army received the highest percentage of negative rankings, even higher than in Colombia (61 per cent). However, it is worth mentioning that the reformed police force (*Policia Nacional Civil*—National Civil Police—reformed as a result of the Peace Accords) was generally more favourably perceived than its predecessor, the National Police (*Policia Nacional*).

The general distrust of the state security forces in Colombia and Guatemala, coupled with widespread impunity, has led to the proliferation of other perverse organizations created to fill the void of law enforcement. These are mainly 'social cleansing' and lynching groups[22] who take the 'law into their own hands.' As a community leader in Cali pointed out, 'Often the people are in favour of social euthanasia [social cleansing] because the state doesn't respond.' In Colombia, social cleansing was more associated with paramilitaries and the police, while in Guatemala it was linked with the phenomenon of lynching (often involving dousing the accused with petrol and setting them alight). In one of the communities in Guatemala City, the lynching of three men accused of gang raping a young girl had become part of the popular history of the community.

Analysis of both structural and cognitive social capital together highlights not only the high levels of distrust of the state security forces, but also the way in which women's and childcare organizations may provide important conduits for building productive social capital at the community level. As non-threatening, non-political and organised from the grassroots, these organizations were uniformly trusted. Thus in Colombia, local community members themselves identified 'community homes' (*hogares comunitarios*) (which are state financed but locally managed childcare groups), as a potential basis from which to build violence prevention and social capital building programmes.

CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted, both empirically and conceptually, how an assessment of violence at the community level in itself leads to a better conceptualization of largely neglected, negative dimensions of social capital. This is intended to provide a more holistic interpretation of the multi-faceted nature of social capital. The analysis of social capital in terms of two interrelated categories of structural/cognitive and productive/ perverse social capital not only provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding social capital in contexts of violence, but also introduces two key aspects of social capital largely overlooked so far.

The first relates to the importance of 'fear' as a constituent component of cognitive social capital. To date, most research on social capital has focused on issues of trust (Fukuyama, 1995), while most work on fear has concentrated on political violence (Koonings and Kruijt, 1999a). Yet as this study illustrates, in communities with high levels of violence, fear is a critical factor in understanding social capital. Furthermore, fear relates not only to political violence, but also to economic and social violence where it is

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[22]Social cleansing is the process of killing those perceived as undesirable by certain sectors of society. Also widespread in Brazil and Uruguay, it usually targets street children, drug addicts, prostitutes and thieves.

experienced as much, if not more, in the private sphere of the household, as in the public arena.

The second key area relates to the nature of perverse organizations as an integral element of structural social capital. The case studies from Colombia and Guatemala highlight the importance and diversity of perverse institutions within communities. Although these groups foster high levels of fear and contribute to crime and violence, at the same time, for those involved, they provide important survival mechanisms in the face of social exclusion, especially for young people. Not only do perverse organizations provide economic livelihoods, but they also offer important forms of social support otherwise absent in their lives. Thus, while ultimately, perverse organisations can damage communities, there are nevertheless great incentives for people to join them.

For those involved in violence reduction and conflict resolution, the great challenge concerns the identification of measures, or interventions, that can successfully transform fear into trust, and perverse into productive organisations. While ultimately this requires national level structural changes, nevertheless, this study has highlighted community-based potential entry points for change that will be necessary in both Colombia and Guatemala. This included the identification of women's and childcare organizations as potential social institutions to facilitate programmes to rebuild trust and cohesion in violent communities. With crime and violence on the increase throughout Latin America, the conceptualisation of social capital outlined in this paper may therefore prove a useful framework for understanding and addressing this problem in other areas in the continent.

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