

## Essays

Medwave 2016 Mar;16(2):e6399 doi: 10.5867/medwave.2016.02.6399

# Violence in Mexico: A social or public health problem?

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**Citation:** Casas Patiño D, Rodríguez Torres A, Salazar Morales MR. Violence in Mexico: A social or public health problem?. *Medwave* 2016 Mar;16(2):e6399 doi: 10.5867/medwave.2016.02.6399

**Submission date:** 25/9/2015

**Acceptance date:** 23/2/2016

**Publication date:** 8/3/2016

**Origin:** not requested

**Type of review:** reviewed by three external peer reviewers, double-blind

**Key Words:** violence, homicide, public health, public policy

## Abstract

This article seeks to explain the importance of violence as a social phenomenon and public health, trying to envision this issue not only from a curative approach to health, but from the social determinants of health, such as economics, politics and the administration of justice. Here, the younger population lacks real opportunities with an "absent State" that fails to provide structure. These frameworks play a fundamental role in the manifestation of violence. Thus, the debate for addressing and resolving violence opens the way to new perspectives regarding social factors as part of a public health, which cannot be oblivious to the state of the collective. Thus, the analysis of this situation shows that we cannot keep overlooking the whole picture of the real problem in the social health of our world instead of focusing on its discordant parts.

## Introduction

In recent years, in the Mexico of the darkness, a parasite 'has been embedding itself' in the finest structures of society. This parasite has been forgotten and denied by the part of the same system in order to create fugacity of the sickly fact. This pathogen has given rise to many social problems that have given chronicity, pain, regret, tears, betrayal, corruption and oblivion, this evil was inoculated, aired, and now, is perpetual. This parasite is named *violence*. This is introduced itself as the latest resource of a decomposed society, in which the crimes of high impact show the extreme violence so that they get economic, political and social control that in many times is consequence of revenge, territorial agreements, 'payment of plaza' or loyalty. In this way a representation of violence is the intentional murder (death), which appears like the star of this evil play, called "final attack against the people".

This conditions among many other effects, a climate of insecurity and social hostility, that talking about a macro

level is equivalent to a lack of foreign investment as well as political instability [1], talking about at the meso level the factual power structures have been at the mercy of zero income by neoliberal policies that prevents to play its protective role of State and are also caught by the organized crime groups and besides that, they are captured by organized criminal groups [2]; and regarding micro social structure level, family and individual are abused with the crimes that are perpetuated inside social structures, shattered by crime and impunity [3]. In that sense, the violence exceeds the limits of the act itself, tormenting collective to a life full of humiliations and to lack of freedom.

It should be understood that intentional homicide is a premeditated act by the perpetrator or (perpetrators) in order to cause their victim's death. The end of this process is the destruction of a life. In the intentional murder there is a subjunctive phase, which is an ideation and motivation to commit a crime and an objective phase where the act is materialized and perpetrated. In this way an isolated

extortion, with the ultimate aim to take life, contains this destructive act of society [4]. Intentional murder has not configured again as the only one event of violence, but suicide and rape exist as well as heinous acts of life itself. In this form death has been built as the end of a deliberated act with unlawful consequences licensed by the State. Thus the giver of absolute truths condones deaths and executes some of them. What should be understood when death lurks at every moment? You try to disappear, but you are cough anyway.

Another case like that, 'happened to Ruben Espinosa Becerril, a photographer, who was assassinated last Friday in an apartment, in the Narvarte neighborhood. This person had the coup de grace by a caliber 9 weapon and injuries in different parts of his body [5]. Should this happen? Or is it happening without reconsidering the accomplished facts?

### How to understand the Mexican violence?

Speculating on the national mass media hypothesis about violence as part of the fight against drug trafficking. This as part of the long awaited Mexican social growth, which sits us in a winding road, full of troubles, since in that sense, the most evident expression of violence is given, we talk about mortality by homicide and the existence of soft forms of itself [6].

This argumentation damages completely all the social tissue from its base to its structure since mass media precepts confront common sense of collectivity creating imaginary socials regarding the concept of violence itself. Thus, the family, its members and the institutions are captured by the great waterfall of adverse events that are developed all over the national territory. In this way manifestations full of violence are held and these increase exponentially. There is no room for peace and quiet in a battered territory by the action and reaction of violence.

The State seeks to keep on the constitutional right at this moment through two lines: social and mass media amnesia, exhausting lines of research, focusing on the end of the cases like a confusion of criminals and to conclude with this unfinished of isolated inquiries [7],[8], in order to create oversights of reality.

Another action, the most powerful, is reaction against the violent act; in this way the police officers of *the Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (Sedena)*, *The Procuraduria General de la República (PGR)* and the *Policia Federal (PF)* responded to the attacks with high-powered weapons [9], a combat helicopter was used in order to suppress the reputed offender [10], it seems that 43 dead in Michoacan, 43 in Ayotzinapa [11], nine in Jalisco [12], 21 in Tamaulipas [13], 10 dead that are added in Guerrero and Monterrey [14],[15], with an accumulation of 105 dead in Chilapa [16] or 193 in Michoacan [17]. They conclude, if the term itself allows, that in Mexico there are days of social sustainable violence that leads to dead like an inevitable act in the country, and besides that, this is assimilated in many mass media corrupted by factual power at that moment. This is similar to the score of two teams that content each other in order to have the greatest losses of the opponent

(the work: the evil against malevolent), at the end of the whole act, when one of the two assumes the defeat, he will build his kingdom and another opponent will emerge again, since one out of three drug trafficker has military background [18] or belong to the same gang only mutating outfit [19].

The clearest example of this transformation is the origin of the strongest 'carteles' of Mexico *Los zetas and the Cartel Nueva Generación*, who are former military or police officers, trained handling high power weapons, war and counterinsurgency tactics [20]. In this sense, when will this illogical and absurd war end? How much damage does it cause? The answer is endless, it has just started, because since years it was planned by CIA (Central Information Agency of United States) and DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) to be held from Washington in Mexican territory and, if we see this worldwide, they are the conductors of wars of the same system, e.g. Colombia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria [21]. These are clear examples of an international infamy.

What will happen with members of collectivity in the present and future?, every hour, day and year in the Mexican territory inert bodies are added full of pain, sequels, ignominy and death, so the violence go without troubles or limits through axes of collectivity, which full of learning acts of a full violence and crime culture, generate the fruit of its same creation: "five adolescents from the same neighborhood met Christopher, a six years old boy, outside his home. They invited him to collect firewood, and as soon as they were far away from the residential area, they decided to play with him, kidnapping " [22]. They tied him. At the end of the performance: death. These killers confessed that "everything was just a game, a kidnapping was pretended"[23]. This is a social disturbance in psychopath environments that sideway to the most heinous act of human violence in escalation against the own species.

It is important to mention that Mexico has presented raising homicide rates in recent years, which from 1990 to 1999 was of 14.4, then from 2000 to 2009 was of 10.3 and from 2010 to 2013 is of 22.8 –for each thousand-[24],[25]; these indicators give us an idea of the prevailing reality in the country. We can offer examples by worldwide context that in eight months of 2013 there were 13,775 murders in Mexico. If it is compared to nine months of 2014 with the militia of the Islamic State (EI) in Iraq and Syria (Asia) corresponds to 9,400 dead.

Here, there is a declared war [26] between two parts. It is seen by political analysts as a war that requires international intervention in order to stop that destruction. But instead in México, it is sold the built idea: this fight will pacify the whole territory. Thus, an increase of the number of dead related to deprivation of life is seen. This generates a domestic and general scene. The first one is analyzed as a territorial conflict by power gangs, or alliances between opponent gangs; the second one as a sporadic action between power-groups that are dissatisfied with their territory. In this way the violence is fragmented as the final

part of the combat to the establishment of legacy by the State. So what can be observed in almost all the Mexican republic are charged images of the destruction of human

life, which contrasted to the images fragmented by the tactual axis, sold as sporadic ones and out of place (Figures 1 and 2).



**Figure 1.** In the port of Acapulco clashes have occurred between armed groups, despite the presence of federal forces. Javier Verdín's photo, Journal, La Jornada, Sunday, March 22nd 2015, p. 2.



**Figure 2.** "Violencia & fotografía. Publicar o no, he ahí el dilema". Revista Cuartooscuro Agencia de fotografía y Edición. Carlos María Meza y Anasella Acosta, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

It is noteworthy that this violence is focused in certain areas of the country such as: Guerrero, Baja California Norte, Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Durango, Nayarit [27], but definitely they can't be isolated from general conditions of the country, without considering a holistic and critical approach. This analysis shouldn't be decided only with

numbers on raw data, from which the State is based on, there should be a transformation aimed to values, where the possibility of 100 dead from one side against 10 from the other side doesn't delimit the fact of the existence of a malevolent entity from side to side of the country. All this corresponds to a same phenomenon of fatal conclusion,

where the analysis of the homicide is fundamental part of overall outcome of an ineptitude of law enforcement system.

The region of the American Continent presents a range of murders of 28.5 -per each thousand inhabitants-[28], the highest in the world, surpassing geographic area of Africa. Talking about American continent, Honduras leads this ranking with a rate of 90, followed by Venezuela with 54, Belize with 45, El Salvador with 41, Guatemala with 40, Jamaica with 39, Colombia with 31, Bahamas with 30, Trinidad and Tobago with 28, Brazil with 25 [24]. This social epidemic is weakening the strongest tissue of society, the social trust to the power State axes, which has failed its citizens. In this way all of us are observers of 'mass marches' that seek to raise awareness among states about the existence of violence as destroyer entity of and collectivity. This violence doesn't have clear boundaries or creeds and nor even religion. World is witness of this unusual test full of cruelty and disgrace.

Every State is asked to give constitutional arguments to execute the Article 3 of Universal Declaration of Human rights: "everyone has the right to life, to freedom, and to their personal security". Here it is an excerpt of the social speech of a reality that shows, with sorrow, the chaos of living without protection in an evident area of death. "We think of Valle de Mexico, Morelos, Guerrero, Tamaulipas, Michoacan and all the country. Jalisco is the climax. Crime challenged the State" [29].

The cartel *Jalisco Nueva Generación (CING)* accumulates so much power that it has spread to all over the continents: Africa, Europe, Asia, and Oceania [30]. This is the evolution of an international criminal organization which mutates in a sophisticated way in connivance to powerful politicians, and besides that their power fragmenting justice: "El Mechito, considered by the Mexican government as the second most important man in the criminal organization and their financial operator ... The *Procuraduria General de la Republica* has already tried twice he could be processed by organized crime and operations with illegal resources, but they have not provided enough evidence in order he might be accused and to have a trial..."[31].

Who lashes against his own system if this is broken from its base? This prevailing corruption of the system conditioned a spectacular escape happened in a high security prison. This was held through a 1.5 kilometers tunnel of length and a 10 meters of deep and from a gap of 50 squares centimeters, will reach a cell of one of the most wanted drug traffickers of the world: el Chapo Guzman [32]. No authority realized of the phenomenal and hard work craftsmanship through which the criminal run away. From this, we take out two questions: who knew the architecture of high security prison? Who allowed the construction without noticing the noise? An only one answer emerges: the own state system that offers justice in all levels is the direct responsible of this lie, and we have to mention something else: there are also outputs from high security jails by state decree. This is through the federal trial, which noticed, that one of the historical leaders of

drug traffic in Mexico should be released immediately in 2013, Rafael Caro Quintero [33]. Thus the ailing reality of a system that offers justice vanishes policy papers that show only complicity, corruption and cynicism.

### **Different subtle ways of dying, in this unhealthy Mexico.**

In this sea full of hostile wrecks, we found that in Mexico, the fact of being shot, beheaded, dismembered, stabbed drowned and even being stoned [34], it could be a subtle way to disclose the act of dying in a disarticulated society, in a political reality, that forgets about those who are suffering; speeches full of arrogance and lack of self-criticism.

In this context, the State claims on the mass media: "even if there is no responsible arrested, the investigation should be stopped" [35], "in this issue doesn't notice that might be generalized or systematics attacks against at a civil population, but even if there are delicate, sensitive and relevant facts, constituted isolated events" [36].

This versions of the authority, which seeks justice in the territory, demonstrates the undeniably speech of the social oblivion, where the violence has increased in all over the levels of the collective. There is evidence of high and dangerous stress in social groups of the same age (11 to 20 ages), such as in Guerrero, which cause somatic, social and psychologic disorders [37].

Likewise, post-traumatic stress, understood as a symptomatic response that a person develops after had been exposed to a highly stressful event (being witness of death, physical attacks, sexual violence, child sexual abuse, etcetera), is presented as the main manifestation in the Mexican population, with data such as: one out of four Mexicans has experimented sudden death of a family member or close friend, mugging or threatened with a gun and direct association with persecution, harassment, rape, hijack and sexual abuse [38].

Now the post-traumatic stress and the social psychosis are traces of violence in Mexico [39], mentioning that the northeaster police are a violent factor, is saying that migrants are violated in their human rights: sexual abuse, rape, deprivation of liberty and abuse [40], in the same way, Ciudad Juarez has high hospital discharge rates because of bone fractures, injuries by weapon stab, amputation, dislocations, sprains and burns; which is four times higher in the national measure [41].

Also, they have records that there are some states that have high rates of police arrest in minors, who have been carrying guns, assault rifles, grenades and crimes against health [42]. For these teenagers, the only viable alternatives of work are the criminal groups, which seduce them with a good job and payment in dollars; in this way they will never starve [43].

The violence that is being lived in Mexico is not the same in comparison with the one that used to be lived in the early last century, but it is nourished by a perversity born of degradation processes of the State and its institutions [44].

A few specialists claim that this social violence is caused by social dissatisfaction talking about the authorities in charge of offering and giving justice [45], where inequality and weakness of the State represent some factors that make violence perpetual. Likewise, economic inequality (gap between rich and poor people) [46], and poverty are another factor of raise of violence in society [47]. At this moment, in Mexico, collectivity is being permeated of chronic and irreparable damage. This violence can spread epidemiologically each of its members in order to perpetuate unwilling violent acts against those who can least defend themselves, devoting so an epidemic of violence atrocity.

There are some risk factors for presentation of violence, one of them, the most important, is inequality talking about the distribution of earnings. In Mexico this is presented as one of the greatest inequalities among the countries than belong to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCDE) [48], since 'restrained poverty' is found in a universe of 61.4 millions of Mexicans [49]. This shows a terrible social setting for a society that seeks among rubble of oblivion a motive to calm the pain that is being submitted in a chronic way and it seems will go on.

In Mexico, poverty and destitute people have increased, according to Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) [49]. It is necessary to add that Mexico has lagged in combating child malnutrition and it also has the highest averages of Latin America and the Caribbean [50], and likewise, extreme poverty (inhabitants who don't have resources even for nourishing themselves) is also installed in 53.3 million of Mexicans, which represents 46.2 % from all the Mexican population, according to National Council for Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL).

Besides that, 79.5% of Mexican population live in situation of poverty and vulnerability, now presented in urban groups on cities. These conditions turn into social inequality: collectivity who do not have access to food and dwelling. This is part of what reconstruct the subtle basic form of human perpetuation. This information shows that México is one of the countries with the greatest inequality in the world because of the earning [51]. Decades have passed, famine is raising, social unrest accumulates, the social 'anomia' spills between collectivity, thus similar programs to this social catastrophe, lack of real impact. This situation has accompanied to a kind of paternal policy towards this group of collectivity, without clear, verifiable and sustainable results.

Adding to the above, we can talk about that in México there are more than 7 million of 'Ninis' (they don't work or study) who are in a range of 16 to 29 years old, from this is born another social problem [52], where besides that, there is a rate of unemployment of 14.9% until 2014 [53]. This conditions, by one hand, precariousness of employment, which provokes stagnation of consumption of households and businesses, and in contrast to, there is unemployment with void income per capita by each household. A mini-salary of 70 pesos per day contributes as well (4.3

American dollars) similar to the ones in Haiti, India and Bangladesh, caused by entrepreneurs and 'tercerización' (outsourcing) where the margin of profits is established for colluded businessmen, by policies and politicians, thus demobilization of workers conditions sceneries of social marginalization [54].

In addition to this, suicide 'the action of killing oneself', has had a transition of this phenomenon towards the age group of adolescents and young people, conditioning a rate of 4 cases each 100 thousand inhabitants[55]. Official data reveals that in Mexico, the suicide rate increased significantly by 50% so far in 2011, so it was ranked as the second cause of death. In 2010 more than half of suicides were associated to male people who didn't have a job [56].

With this collective marginalization are created enabling environments of social instability, throwing collectivity to a challenge against death. Emerging, in this way, the beginning of a life, regardless crime, attitude and glorification in a thick demographic layer of the country; in this level, life or drug traffic culture is redefined, which contrast to the state order into a mockery of what is denied, but allowed. Here, much of the youth debate, they seek an immediate life, fame, fortune, where all related to politics, economy, social and culture allow the game between the drug trafficker, the police officer, the corrupt politician. In this way, the economy of violence has been developing and getting stronger in Mexico, around an overrun State by poverty, marginalization, social credibility, with a lack of social ethics and politic willing.

#### **What can we do in times of social forgetfulness?**

The analysis of violence in México shouldn't be distorted by the intervention of the State as the highest rector of justice, power and authority, so in this cognitive process comes out that the State is found in an initial phase called 'escape', which is the undeniable result of the great basic factual structure of the State delegates the authority to police officers or private institutions, conditioning, in a direct and indirect way, an emptiness of responsibility, which originates loss of legitimacy, sovereign, identity and authority. A less bureaucratic State that causes decreasing costs of administrative apparatus.

The well called privatization of the State has changed into multiple political edges of legislative and judicial intervention. This has involved a reduction of the instruments of economy [57] that transform into international marketing forces, where the support and decision, in politics, are always distorted of the necessities of collectivity. Thus, without a social practice and with the theoretical argument about the middlemen assure efficacy, better results and less corruption, a reality is built thanks to the State in escape, disrupted completely by a reality in marginalization, poverty and violence, that turns absolutely into a collectivity full of social 'anomia, hopelessness and exhaustion.

The Mexican State in its evolution or metamorphosis has created a new way of ruling Mexico, SA (Anonymous Society). This is being consolidating every day more and

more, through that named 'Pact for Mexico' [58], which according to its addendum serves to deepen in the process of democracy of the country, based on three guiding axes: strengthening of the State, democracy in the economy and policy, and also amplification and effective application of social rights, and eventually, the participation of citizens as fundamental actors in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies.

In the course of our reality we can find that the end of the citizen is to pay the consequences of this new social regulation, the State in escape (Figure 3). Here is no room for marginalized or poor, all of them are guilty because they didn't include themselves in this sea of rapacious opportunities. Here is no comfort in living, without the cost of their own life, here they live, here they pay, either in economic or social cost of the development or in the own process of dying without social cost.

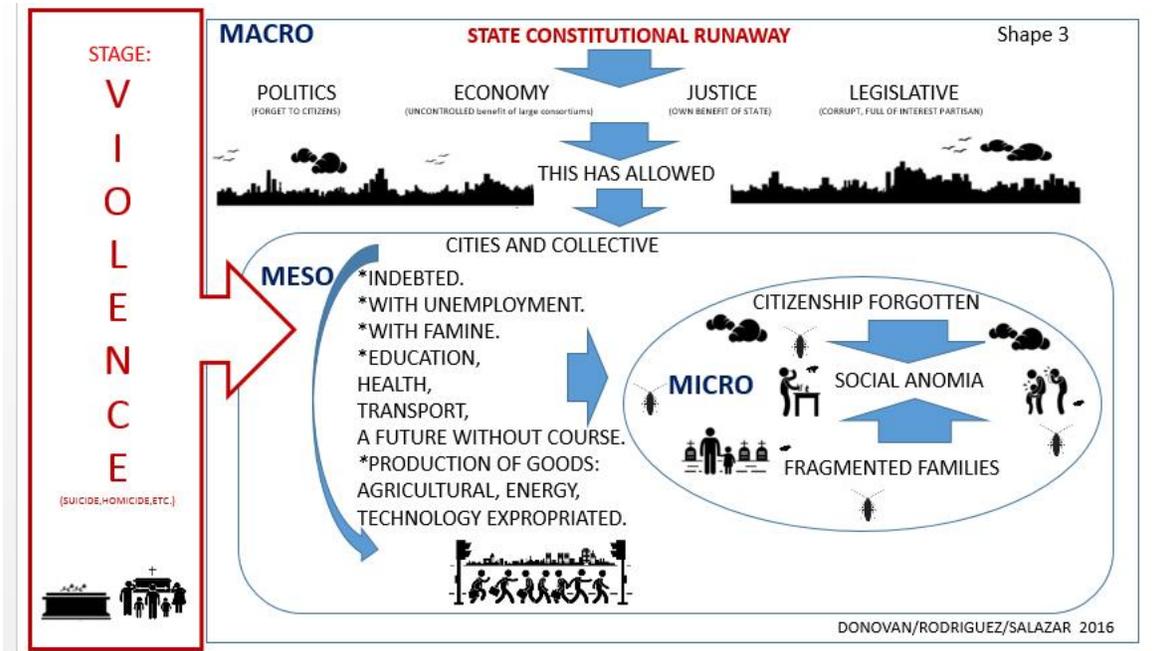


Figure 3: New social state regulation on the run.

Today is a critical moment where social issues transform the life of collectivities submerged by the forgetfulness of their monarchic democracy of political parties of private representation, in addition to scientific and intellectual corrupt sectors [Mexican Foundation for Healthy A.C. /Mexican Petroleum/ Federal Commission of Electricity, etcetera]. Social issues continue transforming the public ones without a search of the common good. The Mexicans are on their knees, begging crumbs from a corrupt government.

In this way violence has been piecing together a countenance in México; intentional murder, suicide, death, are part of social folklore of a drop never expected by the health area, thus the violence has an epidemiologic behavior with serious consequences for collectivity.

Violence is an EPIDEMIC, since it has a risk of presentation (risk factors) very high in collectivities where marginalization, poverty and hopeless condition social perpetuation of death in the collectivity. It also has a spread, presentation, contagion and vehicle. All the layers of society have suffered aggression, theft, rape,

kidnapping, cheat (fraud), through a faint solicit of justice, where social reproduction conditions inappropriate acts against collectivity, likewise, it provokes in the collectivity short and long term sequels, depression, anxiety, angst and social 'anomia'.

This epidemiology of violence has also several pathological manifestations (symptomatic): suicide (firearm, penetrating weapon, unspecified weapon), homicide (intentional, attempt, negligence), sexual rape (attempt, seduction, rapt, sexual aggression) where the period of manifestation and projection will lengthen for more years, thus epidemiology of violence has a risk, a period and manifestation, so collectivity will keep waiting for suffering a violent event in a short period, according to projections of this epidemic. There is no vaccine for this illness, there is no incentive to come to alleviate this enormous illness. This is a whole health problem.

Moreover, this epidemic is social as well, it has throughout, determining social factors that behave as a direct and indirect risk for this pathology of bad die where economic backwardness of families conditions that in its sickness

emerges process of malnutrition, poverty reproduction, unemployment, mini salaries, and social educational backwardness. This, besides politics of legislative power in State Escape, create torturous environment of ignominy, with no social participation. The citizen is taken from his few social, education, health and nature, security assets in order to finish being thrown into a rapacious neoliberalism of zero social inclusion.

We should mention that judiciary power ends offering no justice for citizens, which causes a constant permanence of crime without persecution. This is the constant imperfection of the road in a State that doesn't have clear boundaries of justice, so the epidemic in violence has social determinants that operate in this reality. In this way Public Health can't be detracted from prevention of acts and much less annul this reality, which in contrast to in social panoptic come inside of the whole in order to have a critical analysis in the area of health.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the clear object of analysis of this research, points absolutely violence not only as a short-lived act of a brief medical attention with sequels, or the indicator of total risk, social or philosophic theory of this terrible evil. Violence shouldn't be rebutted from real sceneries that are lived in a country of ignominy and oversights. This pathology has dived inside all the state axe in a swing full of death, corruption, bribe and terror. There is no corner in this country where collectivity can find shelter. Medicine academies, Public Health Institutes and Procuracion of Justice should be in charge of diffusion of these atrocious acts of common life, they should settle their position against such consternation, and likewise they should propose clear options from a multidisciplinary vision of the social determination of violent acts.

The State in turn should reconsider the opinion of collectivity, their feelings, their sorrow through the creation of forums of discussion about violence from an inclusive approach, trying to understand that all social actors are part of reality and they are not isolated entities. We can't go on only with authorized voices of State. Besides that, the State should consider violence as a national epidemic in order to have real levels of operation against violence without being a violence generator. Education, social cohabitation, rescue of public places and improvement of integration and continue social security in collectivity can be clear options of mediate solution to this pandemic. Likewise, the State should pay attention to all those hidden relationships of inappropriate political function before the social implosion provoked by this crisis of violence against collectivity (case of Ayotzinapa and death in Iguala).

Therefore, violence is national priority. This is recomposed of factors of social determination that stablish thereby a space, with rules and the right territory for spread, perpetuate and reproduce, this is the moment for considering this epidemic as a public social health problem, and not only instants of isolated analysis from each discipline, since the factual consequences of death of

collectivity are evident. It's the moment to stop creating an object of disembodied violence in order to change it into reality that has to be attended urgently. How many dead are needed in this territory for understanding that this is a public social and health problem? Prevent violence should be at this moment national priority.

### Notes

#### From the editor

The authors originally submitted this article in Spanish and subsequently translated it into English. The *Journal* has not copyedited this version.

#### Conflicts of interest

The authors completed the ICMJE declaration of conflicts of interest, translated into Spanish by *Medwave*, and declare they have not received funding for the completion of the report; have no financial relationships with organizations that may have interests in the article published in the last three years; and have no other relationships or activities that could influence the published article. Forms can be requested by contacting the responsible author or editorial direction of the Journal.

#### Funding

The authors declare there are no external funding sources for this article.

#### Acknowledgement

Thanks to everyone because of their unconditional support to this country, especially to Guatemala, country that has opened to the world the senses, the idea of beating corruption from its inside. Guatemala shows the beginning of the search of a better world. And thanks to all the staff that includes the Journal *MEDWAVE* for opening the doors to confronting health knowledge.

Translation made by *Lic. María de Lourdes Álvarez Rojas*, AMECAMECA languages teacher from the University Center of the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico.

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