

# Quantitative Methods in Contexts of Everyday Violence

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**Abstract** The analysis of violence from an individual or household perspective is arguably one of the most challenging research areas in social science. Outbreaks of violence affect the core of human relations and social norms. They occur in non-linear cycles, and co-exist at different levels of social interaction within the family, the community or the state. Analysis of this complexity cannot be restricted to one social science discipline or method of analysis. This article reflects on an innovative methodology adopted to capture the experience of living with violence in communities in Brazil, Jamaica, Mexico and Nigeria. The methodology confronted disciplinary boundaries by encouraging close dialogue between quantitative and qualitative researchers in violent settings, and creating processes for learning and sharing. This article describes the methodology, presents the main results of the quantitative analysis and reflects on the challenges and lessons.

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## 1 Introduction

The analysis of violence from an individual or household perspective is arguably one of the most challenging research areas in social science. Outbreaks of violence affect the core of human relations and social norms, disrupting livelihoods, socioeconomic security, health and the formation of group interactions and social networks. They occur in non-linear cycles, where times of violence and peace do not necessarily represent opposite ends of a continuum, but rather co-exist – often simultaneously – in different degrees of intensity and at different levels of social interaction within the family, the community or the state. This complexity cannot evidently be restricted to the boundaries of one social science discipline or method of analysis.

This article reflects on an innovative methodology adopted by the Violence, Participation and Citizenship (VPC) group of the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability<sup>1</sup> to capture the experience of living with violence in communities in Brazil, Jamaica, Mexico and Nigeria that made use of quantitative methods of analysis implemented within qualitative research processes.<sup>2</sup> This methodology has confronted different disciplinary boundaries by encouraging

close dialogue between quantitative and qualitative researchers in violent settings, and creating processes for learning and sharing. The novel aspect was to implement the quantitative instruments within the qualitative process and not as a parallel methodology. This article describes the methodology used, presents the main results of the quantitative analysis and reflects on the challenges and lessons presented by the methodology employed in the different case studies.

## 2 Methodological approach

Some of the most relevant insights into why individuals and groups engage in violence and the processes that lead to the onset of violence have been gained from localised qualitative research undertaken by sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists (Chatterji and Mehta 2007; Hume 2007; Jaffrelot 1996; Moser and McIlwaine 1999 and 2004; Pearce 1986). Their work relies on contextualised studies and qualitative information gathered through participatory and ethnographic methods.

Quantitative analyses of the causes and consequences of violence at the individual and household levels have only started to emerge recently due to improvements in the availability

and collection of systematic and comparable micro-level datasets (Justino 2008). However, with the exception of recent research on civil wars (Kalyvas 2007; Petersen 2001; Weinstein 2007; Wood 2006) and urban violence (Moser and McIlwaine 2004), few studies combine large quantitative surveys and qualitative methods of analysis to research the outbreak, consequences and processes of violence at the micro-level. This absence is due to the difficulty in applying traditional methods of micro-level quantitative analysis in violent contexts, notably the implementation of quantitative surveys based on random samples of individuals, households and communities (Justino 2009).

People involved in forms of violence and conflict are either averse to answering questions related to their experiences – for fear of retaliation, particularly among interpretation, or reluctance in reviving painful memories – or will try to use the research process itself to advance their causes.<sup>3</sup> In addition, both perpetrators and victims of violence tend to hide and change their identities, making the tracing of social and political transformations difficult (Belousov *et al.* 2007; Justino 2009; Lee and Renzetti 1990). Outbreaks of violence destroy documents and infrastructure, displacement is frequent and often not registered, making it difficult to follow households into new locations. Researchers and subjects of research in contexts of violence often face considerable security problems and ethical challenges (Justino 2009; Wood 2006). The use of standard survey methods in large samples of individuals and households may therefore result in high non-response rates or inaccurate answers, as answers to more sensitive questions depend on the establishment of strong bonds of trust between interviewee and interviewer, something for which traditional survey methods may not allow space, time or resources. In addition, random sampling of representative individuals or households in conflict contexts is often difficult as conflict events tend to be highly clustered geographically and among certain types of individuals.

This project attempted to address some of these shortcomings by bringing together aspects of quantitative and qualitative methods that complement each other in the design of the research process, and the collection and analysis of the information. This article reflects on some

of the quantitative results obtained thus far. The team of researchers employed qualitative methods typically used in in-depth studies of conflict contexts, to apply a questionnaire. This was designed to capture quantitatively fundamental aspects of violence and links between communal living and socioeconomic welfare at the individual level across a sample of 646 people in four distinct communities (229 respondents in Brazil, 187 respondents in Jamaica, 85 respondents in Mexico and 145 respondents in Nigeria). The questionnaires were implemented within the qualitative process itself, having first been discussed among the research participants and then implemented within the various communities, in some cases by the very same participants (Cortez Ruiz, this *IDS Bulletin*). Baseline data were collected on individuals, households and communities being researched by the VPC teams in Brazil, Jamaica, Mexico and Nigeria, using questionnaires containing a mixture of open and closed questions, adapted to the local context and to the particular focus of the study in question.

The main objective of the questionnaire was to build a database that was comparable between the various case studies. A ‘master’ questionnaire was adapted by the field researchers for the local context. This gives us a mix of information on violence comparable across countries where the same questions were asked everywhere, as well as data that are context-specific. In particular, the Jamaican data is heavily context-specific due to the child-focused nature of the research (Moncrieffe, this *IDS Bulletin*).

The questionnaire contains several modules. Modules A-D refer to key socioeconomic characteristics of individuals and households, module E includes information on community-level variables and module F contains information on violence across space and time. A particular emphasis of Module F was on establishing ways of capturing quantitatively notions of chronic violence at the micro-level in each of the communities where research has taken place. We analyse these results in more detail in the next section.

The questionnaire was implemented using two different sampling methods, both largely purposive. In Brazil, Jamaica and Mexico, the

**Table 1 Gender and age distribution of respondents**

	Brazil	Mexico	Nigeria	Jamaica
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	97 (42.4%)	39 (45.9%)	83 (57.2%)	82 (43.9%)
Female	131 (57.2%)	37 (43.5%)	36 (24.8%)	99 (52.9%)
Missing data	1 (0.4%)	9 (10.6%)	26 (17.9%)	6 (3.2%)
<b>Age</b>				
Young (up to 30)	93 (40.6%)	21 (24.7%)	45 (31%)	
Adult (30–50)	67 (29.4%)	37 (43.5%)	67 (46.2%)	
Old (over 51)	62 (27.1%)	8 (9.4%)	32 (22.1%)	
Missing data	7 (3.1%)	19 (22.4%)	1 (0.7%)	

questionnaire respondents were part of the qualitative component of the project. This was to enable us to link directly the quantitative analysis and the results of the qualitative research at a later date. In order to increase the sample size, participants in the qualitative part of the research in Brazil and Mexico were asked to nominate other community members to answer the questionnaire. In Nigeria, the research team chose to select individuals from the local community where research took place, but who were not necessarily part of the qualitative research. None of the samples chosen was representative of their community, region or country. In order to facilitate trust among those being interviewed, interviewers were mainly

members of the community. In the Jamaica case, the interviewers and interviewees were children. Table 1 shows gender and age distributions of respondents across the four countries.

### 3 Perceptions of violence in four communities

The experimental design of the research itself, not least the combining of quantitative and qualitative methods, presented many challenges, and lessons from the research process make a valuable contribution to micro-level research on violence. Unsurprisingly, our greatest challenge was the presence of missing values, due to respondents electing not to respond to particular questions or sections of the questionnaire. This was for reasons of security, fear and reluctance in

**Table 2 Community relationships and unsafe places**

	Brazil	Mexico	Nigeria
<b>Do you have good relationships with other community members?</b>			
Yes	221 (96.5%)	49 (57.7%)	126 (87%)
No	7 (3.1%)	5 (5.9%)	15 (10.3%)
Missing data	1 (0.4%)	31 (36.5%)	4 (2.8%)
<b>Have you ever had any quarrels/disagreements with other community members?*</b>			
Yes	50 (21.8%)	31 (36.5%)	33 (22.8%)
No	177 (77.3%)	39 (45.9%)	108 (74.8%)
Missing data	2 (0.9%)	15 (17.7%)	4 (2.8%)
<b>Are there any places in the community where you feel unsafe?</b>			
Yes	86 (37.6%)	24 (28.2%)	54 (37.2%)
No	138 (60.3%)	4 (4.7%)	79 (54.5%)
Missing data	5 (2.2%)	57 (67.1%)	12 (8.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>145</b>

\* For Mexico this question is slightly different: 'Are there places in the community where there are problems of violence?'

**Table 3 School relationships and unsafe places**

	Jamaica
<b>Do you have friends at school?</b>	
Yes	181 (96.8%)
No	3 (1.6%)
Missing data	3 (1.6%)
<b>Do you feel safe at school?</b>	
Yes	82 (43.9%)
Not all the time, but generally	69 (36.9%)
No	32 (17.1%)
Missing data	4 (2.1%)
<b>Do you feel safe in your community?*</b>	
Yes	90 (48.1%)
Not all the time, but generally	36 (19.3%)
No (or rarely)	31 (16.6%)
Missing data	30 (16%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>

\*We added the category 'Rarely' (only 3 answers) to the category 'No' (28 answers).

revisiting traumatic events. Nonetheless, the response rate was relatively high (see Tables 2–8), giving us a rich dataset that provides valuable insights into experiences of living with violence in the study communities.

One of the most notable findings, shown in Table 2, is the fact that in general, respondents across the four communities felt they have good relations with their neighbours and other community members. This is not to say that

**Table 4 Episodes of violence in the community**

	Brazil	Mexico	Nigeria
<b>Do you remember at least one episode of violence?</b>			
Yes	158 (69%)	37 (43.5%)	138 (95.2%)
No	41 (17.9%)	4 (4.7%)	7 (4.8%)
Missing data	30 (13.1%)	44 (51.8%)	0
<b>Were you affected by that episode of violence/conflict?</b>			
Yes	110 (48%)	16 (18.8%)	53 (36.6%)
No	27 (11.8%)	33 (38.8%)	84 (57.9%)
Missing data	92 (40.2%)	36 (42.4%)	8 (5.5%)
<b>Do you think violence is a problem in your community?</b>			
Yes	105 (45.9%)	47 (55.3%)	70 (48.3%) <sup>2</sup>
No	116 (50.7%)	11 (12.9%)	49 (33.8%)
Missing data	8 (3.5%)	27 (31.8%)	26 (17.9%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>145</b>

1 For Mexico the possible answers were 'no, sometimes, often, always'. We grouped 'sometimes, often and always' in the groups 'yes'. For Nigeria, the question is qualitative, not like the others which require a 'yes' or 'no' answer, asking 'How much of a problem is violence in this community?'

2 In this case, we considered as 'No' all the answers of 'not much of a problem' or 'not any more'. This variable is based on our personal interpretation of the answers, as in some cases we had to make decisions about whether to consider the answer a 'Yes' or 'No'. Many of those interviewed answer 'not any more' or 'less than before' so it is not always easy to understand whether violence is still a problem (or is just less than in the past) or if it is not a problem any more.

**Table 5 Children's attitudes towards and involvement in violence – Jamaica**

	Yes	No	Missing data
Do you think that it is sometimes necessary to be violent?	57 (30.5%)	96 (51.3%)	34 (18.2%)
Has anyone who lives in your house been a victim of violence?	56 (30%)	99 (52.9%)	31 (17.1%)
Has any member of your family died as a result of violence?	50 (26.7%)	107 (57.2%)	30 (16%)
Have any of your close friends died as a result of violence?	48 (25.7%)	109 (58.3%)	30 (16%)
Have you ever been involved in a fight?	93 (49.7%)	63 (33.7%)	31 (16.6%)
– with a weapon	26 (13.9%)		
– without a weapon	67 (35.8%)		

violence is not felt acutely by people or that community relations are not affected by outbreaks of violence. In line with other studies (Lederman *et al.* 1999; Colletta and Cullen 2000; Chatterji and Mehta 2007), we found that social

cohesion is negatively affected by violence: people feel unsafe in many areas of the community and perceive violence to be a real problem in their daily lives. But our strongest finding is that in general people seem to draw

**Table 6 Violence in Nigerian communities, by region and religious affiliation**

	Total	Region			Religion	
		Kaduna	Kano	Plateau	Muslim	Christian
<b>Have you been affected by episodes of violence?</b>						
Yes	53 (36.6%)	24 (52.2%)	8 (16%)	21 (42.9%)	22 (28.6%)	30 (44.8%)
No	84 (57.9%)	19 (41.3%)	37 (74%)	28 (57.1%)	50 (64.9%)	34 (50.7%)
Missing data	8 (5.5%)	3 (6.5%)	5 (10%)	0	5 (6.5%)	3 (4.5%)
<b>Were you directly affected?</b>						
Yes	43 (29.7%)	22 (47.8%)	5 (10%)	16 (32.7%)	17 (22.1%)	25 (37.3%)
No	81 (55.9%)	22 (47.8%)	26 (52%)	33 (67.4%)	49 (63.6%)	32 (47.8%)
Missing data	21 (14.5%)	2 (4.4%)	19 (38%)	0	11 (14.3%)	10 (14.9%)
<b>Were you injured due to the violent events?</b>						
Yes	9 (6.2%)	3 (6.5%)	1 (2%)	5 (10.2%)	3 (3.9%)	6 (9%)
No	106 (73.1%)	37 (80.4%)	25 (50%)	44 (89.8%)	57 (74%)	48 (71.6%)
Missing data	30 (20.7%)	6 (13%)	24 (48%)	0	17 (22.1%)	13 (19.4%)
<b>Did you lose any work/earnings/assets due to the violent events?</b>						
Yes	55 (37.9%)	24 (52.2%)	7 (14%)	24 (49%)	25 (32.5%)	29 (43.3%)
No	34 (23.5%)	6 (13%)	5 (10%)	23 (46.9%)	20 (26%)	14 (20.9%)
Missing data	56 (38.6%)	16 (34.8%)	38 (76%)	2 (4.1%)	32 (41.6%)	24 (35.8%)
<b>Has any member of your household been directly involved in any other type of violent event?</b>						
Yes	33 (22.8%)	16 (34.8%)	3 (6%)	14 (28.6%)	15 (19.8%)	18 (26.9%)
No	85 (58.6%)	20 (43.5%)	30 (60%)	35 (71.4%)	48 (62.4%)	36 (53.7%)
Missing data	27 (18.6%)	10 (21.7%)	17 (34%)	0	14 (18.2%)	13 (19.4%)
<b>Do you foresee violence again?</b>						
Yes	44 (30.3%)	20 (43.5%)	12 (24%)	12 (24.5%)	11 (14.3%)	33 (49.3%)
No	88 (60.7%)	18 (39.1%)	33 (66%)	37 (75.5%)	59 (76.6%)	28 (41.8%)
Missing data	13 (9%)	8 (17.4%)	5 (10%)	0	7 (9.1%)	6 (9%)
<b>Can there be lasting peace in this community?</b>						
Yes	116 (80%)	36 (78.3%)	41 (82%)	39 (79.6%)	61 (79.2%)	54 (80.6%)
No	14 (9.7%)	6 (13%)	4 (8%)	4 (8.2%)	6 (7.8%)	8 (11.9%)
Missing data	15 (10.3%)	4 (8.7%)	5 (10%)	6 (12.2%)	10 (13%)	5 (7.5%)

**Table 7 Violence in Brazilian and Mexican communities**

	Yes	No	Missing data
<b>Mexico</b>			
Did you have violent episodes in your family?	24 (28.2%)	59 (69.4%)	2 (2.4%)
Is there any problem related to alcohol consumption in your family?	31 (36.5%)	44 (51.8%)	10 (11.8%)
<b>Brazil</b>			
Did you have to escape from here for any reason?	24 (10.5%)	196 (85.6%)	9 (3.9%)
Have you been directly involved in a violent episode?	8 (3.5%)	131 (57.2%)	90 (39.3%)
Has anyone in your family been involved in any violent episode?	11 (4.8%)	184 (80.4%)	34 (14.9%)

solace and strength from their community relations.

The Brazil, Nigeria and Mexico surveys reveal similar patterns in terms of respondents' relations with their fellow community members, with sometimes large majorities rating them as 'good'. The Mexican survey exhibited a large number of missing values, but once these were taken into account, of those who did respond, 91 per cent felt their relationships with fellow community members were good. The analogous question in the Jamaican survey was whether or not the respondent had friends at school – with 97 per cent stating that they did (Table 3).

In terms of feuding and conflict with other community members, 22 per cent of Brazilian respondents, 23 per cent of Nigerian respondents and a slightly higher 37 per cent of Mexican respondents reported arguments with their neighbours. These estimates vary across different gender and age groups. In Brazil and Nigeria, a higher proportion of women and young people than men reported quarrelling with other community members, whereas for Mexico, the figures showed a higher percentage for men and those over 30 years old.<sup>4</sup>

Community-level violence is widespread. Table 2 shows that many people feel unsafe in some parts of their community; in all cases, the majority of those feeling unsafe are women and young people under the age of 30. By contrast, of the Jamaican children who were interviewed, girls seem to feel safer than boys at school.<sup>5</sup> In addition, as Table 4 shows, 95 per cent of Nigerian respondents and 69 per cent of Brazilian individuals can remember at least one

violent episode in their community. Almost half of Brazilian and Nigerian respondents perceived violence to be a problem in their community, while more than 50 per cent of Mexican respondents felt this to be so. The percentage of women reporting to have memories of episodes of violence is higher than for men in Brazil, Mexico and Nigeria. A similar pattern is found for the linked question, which asks whether the respondent was affected by the episode of violence. More women report having been affected by violent events, with the exception of Mexico, where the percentage is slightly higher for men. The age variation is small.<sup>6</sup>

The picture of community violence coming out of the Jamaican questionnaires, shown in Tables 3 and 5, is perhaps the most striking of the four surveys. An alarmingly high proportion of children felt unsafe – either always, or some of the time – both at school and in the community. Only 44 per cent felt safe at school and 48 per cent in their community. The number of relatives that respondents report as having died because of violent episodes is very high and some of the responses to the violence questions are rather unsettling. Very high numbers of people lost relatives and friends who were involved in fights, and many of these respondents stated that they think violence is sometimes necessary. Almost half of the children interviewed had been involved in fights, of which more than one-quarter had involved a weapon.

In the Nigerian communities, violence and conflict seem connected to religious factors and events, for example the implementation of *Sharia*, and to elections. As Table 6 shows, there are also regional patterns. Violence appears to

affect slightly more Christians than Muslims – almost half of Christians and 29 per cent of Muslims had been affected by episodes of violence, and a greater proportion of Christians were also ‘directly’ affected – 37 per cent compared with 22 per cent of Muslims. Despite their apparent greater involvement in violence, Christian respondents are relatively more hopeful of a ‘lasting peace’ in their community. Regionally, Kaduna exhibits the greatest proportion of respondents affected by episodes of violence, while Kano region has by far the lowest incidence of reported violence. Not surprisingly, Kaduna residents are also far more likely to foresee violence again (44 per cent compared with 24 per cent in both Kano and Plateau Regions), although this does not seem to diminish their optimism for the future. They are just as likely as Plateau residents to consider lasting peace in their community to be a possibility despite their relatively higher levels of experience of violence.

Findings from Brazil, in Table 4, show that 110 respondents have been affected by violence. We believe that the higher level of positive answers to this question in the Brazil case is partly due to the type of violence prevalent, with some of the neighbourhoods surveyed being severely affected by street violence and drug-traffic (Wheeler, this *IDS Bulletin*). It is clear from the Brazilian questionnaires that violence is a problem in these communities, and people were quite afraid of talking about it. This came through quite strongly in the responses to the more qualitative questions. The violence in these areas is street violence, mainly driven by drug trafficking, and this appears to have a big impact, acting as a constraint on lifestyle and everyday life. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 7, in only 3.5 per cent of cases did respondents state that they had been directly involved in episodes of violence. Just 5 per cent reported that at least one household member was involved in any type of violence. However, in these few cases, respondents explained neither the episode nor the role of the household member in the episode.

From the qualitative answers to some of the survey questions, we were able to identify two main causes of violence in Mexico: domestic violence and political violence. Violence seems to be quite widespread in the domestic environment, with 28 per cent of respondents

**Table 8 Satisfaction with community living**

**Brazil**

**How do you feel about living here?**

Like it	113 (49.3%)
Don't like it	18 (7.9%)
More or less likes	59 (25.8%)
Like it a lot	35 (15.3%)
Other	2 (0.9%)
Missing data	2 (0.9%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>229</b>

**Mexico**

**Are you happy to live in this community?**

Yes	77 (90.6%)
No	3 (3.5%)
Missing data	5 (5.9%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>

**Nigeria**

**How do you rate living in this community?**

Like it a lot	105 (72.4%)
Don't like it	24 (16.6%)
Indifferent	9 (6.2%)
Missing data	7 (4.8%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>

**Jamaica**

**How do you rate living in your community?**

Like it a lot	52 (27.8%)
OK, not a bad place to live	67 (35.8%)
Don't like it most of the time	32 (17.1%)
Hate living here	14 (7.5%)
Missing data	22 (11.8%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>

reporting violent episodes in the family, often linked to problems of alcohol consumption (Table 7). From the qualitative answers in the questionnaire, we can infer that politics appear to play an important role in the life of those interviewed and this is also often linked with violent episodes in the community.

Despite contextual differences in levels and intensity of violence, on the whole, people across the four communities are happy to live in their community. Questions on satisfaction with living in one's community were worded differently according to location but with remarkably similar

results, shown in Table 8. Mexican respondents were asked whether they were happy to live in this community: 91 per cent responded 'Yes'. Both Nigerian and Jamaican respondents were asked to rate living in their community: 72 per cent of Nigerian respondents 'like it a lot', compared with just 28 per cent of Jamaicans, although a further 36 per cent of Jamaican respondents considered their community to be 'OK, not a bad place to live'. When asked how they felt about living in their community, a total of 90 per cent of Brazilian respondents answered positively to the question: 49 per cent like to live in their community, 15 per cent 'like it a lot' to live in their community and 26 per cent 'more or less like' to live in the community.

#### 4 Methodological lessons

The research undertaken in the four case studies has revealed some important advantages in combining different methods of analysis to understand contexts of violence. The researchers obtained a high response rate from respondents and the implementation of the various questionnaires was overall quite smooth. The precision of some of the answers was however affected by a variety of factors, mainly related to the sensitive nature of the material. Understandably, research on violence will always be met with reluctance in addressing more personal questions. This problem was lessened to

some extent by the fact that the interviewers were local members of the community, known to the respondents. It was also mitigated by applying questionnaires within the context of qualitative or participatory processes, and within the framework of relationships that these processes had already established.

Despite these caveats, we feel we have obtained enough quantitative information to richly supplement the qualitative results. In particular, emerging themes identified above indicate some important issues for future social research on communities repeatedly exposed to violence. Notably, the quantitative results suggest that daily violence does not necessarily reflect upon, or at least impinge on, community relations. Even if they do not feel completely safe, people carry on with their lives and continue engaging in relations with their neighbours, friends and relatives. Recent research on urban violence has suggested that civic engagement may be a powerful counteraction to the outbreak of violence in communities prone to conflict (Varshney 2002). Our results show that high levels of social interactions and community goodwill can coexist with different levels and intensity of violence. This opens very interesting research paths on the links between citizenship and violence that deserve further exploration.

#### Notes

- 1 For more details on the research of Violence Citizenship and Participation thematic group of the Development Research Centre, see Pearce, this *IDS Bulletin*.
- 2 For contextual information on violence in these four communities, see Wheeler, Cortez, Moncrieffe and Abah *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*.
- 3 This is of course not exclusive to individuals in violent contexts. All forms of private and

- sensitive information are difficult to research. This is discussed more extensively by Nleya and Thompson, this *IDS Bulletin*.
- 4 Data available from the authors.
- 5 Data available from the authors.
- 6 Data disaggregated by age and gender is not presented due to space constraints but is available from the authors.

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