



## Adolescent males in a rural Mexican context: psychic suffering and care among peers

Varones adolescentes en un contexto rural mexicano: sufrimiento psíquico y cuidado entre pares

Hernando Hernández-Nava<sup>1</sup>, Guillermo Hernández González<sup>2</sup>, Pamela Garbus<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Master's degree in Citizenship Education. Professor, School of Psychology, Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro. Santiago de Querétaro, Mexico. ✉ [ID](#)

<sup>2</sup>Master's degree in Social Psychology. Professor, School of Psychology, Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro. Santiago de Querétaro, Mexico. ✉ [ID](#)

<sup>3</sup>Corresponding author: Full-time Professor, School of Psychology, Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro. Member of the National System of Researchers. Santiago de Querétaro, Mexico. ✉ [ID](#)

**ABSTRACT** An exploratory-descriptive study employing qualitative methods was carried out in San Antonio de la Cal, Tolimán, Querétaro, Mexico. The main purpose of the study was to analyze the forms of psychic suffering and care practices among adolescent male peers in a rural context. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted, as well as a workshop with adolescent males selected from a non-probabilistic and voluntary sample. The study showed that the main sources of psychic suffering for participants included their relationships with parents and girlfriends. They presented difficulties in identifying and expressing emotions such as sadness and anger. Care practices among peers were paradoxical, as they simultaneously constituted risk practices. We interpret this in the context of transformations taking place in the dynamics of rurality.

**KEY WORDS** Rural Population; Adolescent; Masculinity; Mental Health; Mexico.

**RESUMEN** Se trata de un estudio exploratorio-descriptivo de corte cualitativo que se llevó a cabo en San Antonio de la Cal, comunidad de Tolimán, estado de Querétaro, México. Se buscó analizar las formas de sufrimiento psíquico y las prácticas de cuidado entre pares varones adolescentes de este contexto rural. Para ello se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas y un taller con varones adolescentes a partir de una muestra no probabilística y voluntaria. El estudio mostró que, para los participantes, las principales fuentes de sufrimiento psíquico son las relaciones con sus padres y sus novias. Tienen dificultades para discriminar y expresar emociones como la tristeza y el enojo. Las prácticas de cuidado entre pares son paradójicas en tanto son, al mismo tiempo, prácticas de riesgo. Todo esto se enmarca en el proceso de transformación de la dinámica de la ruralidad.

**PALABRAS CLAVES** Población Rural; Adolescente; Masculinidad; Salud Mental; México.

## INTRODUCTION

Thinking about the category of health and the phenomena articulating around it is an invitation to go beyond the paradigms that explain the disease processes as an individual and merely biological issue. The purpose of this study is to create a perspective that accounts for the multiple relationships between the subject and the social, economic and cultural conditions that result in collective integral well-being and/or morbidity and mortality processes. To this end, it is necessary to create situated knowledge that highlights the elements that characterize the health logics. Thinking about health in rural contexts represents the intersection of cultural living conditions, public policies at different levels of organization and experiences of precariousness, inequity and lack of institutional care. This leads the individuals living in these contexts to generate collective strategies for prevention and health care that go beyond the services provided by the governments, which are often non-existent.

Particularly, addressing mental health from a collective dynamics poses understanding challenges that go beyond the psychiatric logic of intrapsychic mental illness that results in medicalization and hospitalization practices.<sup>(1)</sup> In view of this, the World Health Organization (WHO) proposes a socioeconomic perspective that relates health to the productive capacity of individuals to “contribute to their community.”<sup>(2)</sup> However, several authors have questioned this perspective<sup>(1,3,4,5)</sup>, as they consider that it invisibilizes the social, cultural and historical context. Mental health is a complex phenomenon that needs to be analyzed from a transdisciplinary approach and not only in terms of diseases and diagnoses. Focusing on the definition of mental illness limits the identification of specific conditions that are not necessarily mental disorders but a cause of suffering.<sup>(3)</sup>

This study is situated within the framework of Collective Health, whenever, according to Granda’s words, we accept “the effort to see beyond the horizon that conventional

public health has bequeathed to us”<sup>(6)</sup>; and we assume the challenge of “transforming our actions into a human endeavor that is deeply committed to life and the care of diseases”.<sup>(6)</sup> This work takes up the idea of care and distances itself from the concept of disease, re-considering instead the category of psychic suffering.<sup>(3)</sup>

From the above derives the interest in psychic suffering as a particular element of mental health, which refers to those expressions that cannot be framed within the objectivated disease; that is, the information that the subjects provide about their emotional distress, which does not find a place in positivist science and is different in its individual and collective form; therefore, in the way this suffering is experienced and named, which helps incorporate the subjective level of suffering.<sup>(3)</sup>

One of the stages of development where it is important to explore the forms of psychic suffering is adolescence, as it is a critical stage of transformation of the role of the subjects in the community. During adolescence, that is, between the ages of 13 and 19 years, a series of pathologizing and individualistic positions are usually identified. These positions are related to processes of psychic development in the normality/abnormality binomial.

At this vital stage, the family ceases to be the main referential figure for socialization and the subjects turn to peer groups and spaces of secondary socialization (school, street and community), acquiring new experiences and meanings about their personal identity, but also about the underworld of institutions.<sup>(7)</sup>

However, it is not possible to speak in general terms about the adolescent experience, as it is differentiated by multiple conditions, gender being one of them; the way in which individuals re-position themselves within the social fabric of their community will depend (initially) on the inherent mandates of being a man or a woman, generating differences in social roles and forms of socialization. Therefore, in the case of men, Hernández-Castañeda<sup>(8)</sup> highlighted the fact that relationships are closely related to spaces of socialization, which he explains from the

concept of relational nuclei, mentioning “the groups of subjects with whom they establish affectional, sentimental, social and exchange bonds.”<sup>(8)</sup> According to Vale de Almeida<sup>(9)</sup> “hegemonic masculinity is constituted and reproduced through a series of different social relationships and symbolic constructs” and – unlike femininity, which is viewed as a permanent essence related to motherhood – is always being constructed and confirmed.

Globally, the intersection between masculinity and health has gained relevance in recent years, as according to Mitchell,<sup>(10)</sup> men have higher morbidity and mortality rates, which is reflected in a shorter life expectancy. Thirty-six percent (36%) of male deaths could have been prevented compared to 19% of female deaths. The abovementioned is largely explained by differentiated practices in the consumption of substances such as alcohol and tobacco, occupational risks, violence and underutilization of health care services.

On the other hand, the Mexican Secretariat of Health,<sup>(11)</sup> reported that hospital discharges between 10 to 14 year-old men and women are not very different from each other; however, in the 15-19 year age group, a remarkable difference is observed, as women had an increased demand for health care for reasons related to sexual and reproductive health, whereas men demanded health care for trauma caused by accidents and violence, poisoning, substance intoxication and suicide attempts; that is, their morbidity and mortality is associated with social determinants that have effects on health and well-being. These factors are closely related to psychic suffering and other health spheres, especially among men; one of them being the absence of personal self-care and care practices among peers.

In view of the relationship existing between psychic suffering and other logics of health in male adolescents, the notion of care practices becomes an opportunity for analysis and intervention. For the purpose of their conceptualization, we draw on Figueroa and Flores, who define them as

...a series of practices that are performed to satisfy other people's (physical or emo-

tional) needs [...] Care must fulfill two basic characteristics: the person must be interested in the well-being of others and must perform an activity that is oriented along these lines.<sup>(12)</sup>

Consequently, the care practices in men do not occur automatically or voluntarily, as men have not been socialized for that purpose, although these practices mainly occur in exceptional and emergency situations; that is, they refer to cases in which it is essential to act in terms of care (the care of parents in extreme situations such as disability or disease, among others) and they fracture the traditional male model, in which new meanings, values and an ethics of care can be constructed in relationships and practices.<sup>(12)</sup> Thus, when exploring the care practices, we aim to highlight the importance that they have in a collective mental health project that emphasizes the bond among peer male adolescents.

As already stated, the proposal for collective mental health requires thinking about the situated knowledge that takes into account the living conditions of a community such as the rural community of San Antonio de la Cal, in the state of Querétaro, Mexico. The interest in rurality is grounded on the conditions of inequity in the access to health care services as well as on the economic, working and quality of life conditions that are typical of the rural areas and of this municipality in particular. According to Jarquín *et al.*<sup>(13)</sup> focusing on contemporary rurality requires to account for the processes of deagrarianization, in which the families stop centering their economy on local agricultural or livestock production to become part of the production logics of the secondary and tertiary sectors, which, on the one hand, bring about changes in family organization and the social fabric of the community, and, on the other hand, increases the logics of inequality, as the access to public services or institutions remains under isolation patterns<sup>(14)</sup> while the available employment may be characterized as precarious. The abovementioned is embedded in new forms of psychic suffering, as will be presented in this study.

The town of San Antonio de la Cal is one of the three delegations of the municipality of Toluacán, a municipality with low economic and social development, which is located in the central-western area of the state of Querétaro, Mexico, approximately 65.5 km away from the state capital city. The town lies next to Peña de Bernal, a rocky elevation that is an international and national tourist attraction of the state and belongs to the municipality of Ezequiel Montes. However, San Antonio is not touristically attractive, and, therefore, it does not enjoy the economic and social development conditions that tourism generates. According to the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL, for its acronym in Spanish) the community is considered to have high levels of marginalization,<sup>(15)</sup> a large part of the young and adult population of this community is employed in low-paid jobs in the tourist shops of the neighboring town, generating wealth for another municipality and perpetuating the conditions of inequity.

According to the Population and Housing Census of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography<sup>(16)</sup> (INEGI, for its acronym in Spanish) in the Municipality of Toluacán, 26,372 individuals were registered, 2,721 of whom reside in the town of San Antonio de la Cal, accounting for 10.3% of the total population of the municipality. The intercensal survey of the INEGI<sup>(17)</sup> reported that 1388 of those 2,721 individuals are women (51%) and 1,333 are men (49%). The survey focused on the male population between the ages of 15 and 19 years, representing 7.9% of the total population.

It is important to highlight that the community is part of the area with the largest indigenous population in the state of Querétaro; likewise, INEGI<sup>(16)</sup> reported that in Toluacán there are 5,752 individuals aged five years and over who speak an indigenous language, mainly hñähñú. Nevertheless, for the participants, the generation of their grandmothers is the last traditional indigenous generation, as they claim that they neither recognize themselves as indigenous nor know any words from the language of their grandmothers.

This study is framed within a research titled "Mental health care practices among peers as a necessary component for the construction of active citizenship of male adolescents: An exploratory-descriptive study" [*Prácticas de cuidado de la salud mental entre pares como un componente necesario para la construcción de ciudadanía activa de los hombres adolescentes: Un estudio exploratorio-descriptivo*],<sup>(17)</sup> which was conducted as part of the requirements to earn the Master's degree of one of the authors, which was directed by co-author Pamela Garbus, with the advice of the other coauthor. Two other works have previously been written, which can be considered parts of the thesis: a book chapter, titled *Mental health care practices among peers: a necessary component for the construction of active citizenship of male adolescent*<sup>(18)</sup>, whose aim was to know the manner in which care practices among peers could promote the exercise of active citizenship in construction process, using a mixed methodology. Moreover, a manuscript was submitted to the IX International Congress of Research and Professional Practice in Psychology, XXIV Research Sessions at the Faculty of Psychology, XIII Meeting of Researchers in Psychology of MERCOSUR, titled "*Practices of mental health care among peers in male adolescents from San Antonio de la Cal, Qro. Mex*",<sup>(19)</sup> whose purpose was to analyze the data produced by a closed questionnaire that was applied to the study population with the aim of having a first approximation to the sociodemographic characteristics of the population.

This work, specifically seeks to problematize psychic suffering from a complex perspective that accounts for the structural elements that intervene in mental health and generate problems in specific subjects, as well as to think about the potential of peer care as local and situated actions that may lessen the impact of social inequality. The purpose of this article is specifically to analyze the care practices among peers and psychic suffering in male adolescents in a rural context.

## METHODOLOGY

An exploratory-descriptive study of a qualitative nature was conducted with the purpose of going deeper into the subjective vision of psychic distress in adolescent males, as well as exploring the resources or solution attempts of the studied population. We worked with the male adolescents enrolled in the *Colegio de Bachilleres* [a public secondary education institution] located in San Antonio de la Cal, with a total population of 251 students, 104 of whom are boys.

To collect the information, voluntary and non-probability sampling was used. Two techniques of data construction were applied. The first one, which falls within the narrative methodologies, was a semi-structured interview. Between February and June, 2017, nine interviews were arranged through an open invitation made by the researchers in the classroom, emphasizing voluntary participation.

The second technique, derived from the participatory methodologies, was a diagnostic workshop conducted in an 8-hour session on June 28, 2017, which sought to problematize and assess the resonance of the elements found in the first instrument from the interaction of different males. In the workshop, and through interlocution, our aim was that the feelings, thoughts as well as the felt needs and the attempts to solve these needs of the participants were collectively constructed.

For the call and selection of the workshop participants, the list of the young students who had expressed their interest to continue collaborating with the research was taken up. The workshop was attended by seven teenage boys, between the ages of 16 and 18 years. From a series of group techniques, the needs felt about psychic suffering and the identification of its sources, the idea about the health risks for men and women, as well as the practices related to self-care and caring for others were explored based on their own life experiences.

The systematization of the data was conducted from the transcripts of the interviews and the reports of the diagnostic workshop.

Later, analytical categories were constructed using ATLAS.ti 8.3.1 software.

For developing this study, the four fundamental principles of scientific research ethics were respected: autonomy, justice, non-maleficence and beneficence. Informed consents were requested from the parents of minor participants as well as the assent of the adolescents. Moreover, we were authorized entrance to the school to request the students' participation.

## RESULTS

We present here two main analytical categories that were obtained from the assessment of the applied techniques: the sources of psychic suffering and the forms of care among peers, which are part of the purpose of this study.

The participants admitted that their psychic suffering was expressed through crying, alcohol consumption and even violence.

With regard to the sources of psychic suffering, the participants reported, on the one hand, a feeling of abandonment and emotional distance when their parents went out to work, especially and particularly, in relation to the mother. It should be mentioned that the mothers of the participants belong to the first generations that are forced to leave the community to work in a paid employment; the male adolescents complain and experience feelings of "abandonment" and "emotional distance" due to this situation, which they feel as a lack of compliance of the traditional roles assigned to women in the community (parenting, domestic work, childcare). In fact, they believe that the mothers leave home to work out of necessity or obligation; and, in most cases, it is the consequence of the prevailing economic conditions. The young students argue that the role of women continues to be the home and the role of men to be economic providers.

For many of them, the parental figure is also a source of suffering, as they perceive the father as distant, absent or threatening. The relationship that they have with their

fathers is often complex. They identify this emotional distance, and attribute it specifically to work and its effects on daily life, such as physical exhaustion, emotional strain and an apparent lack of interest in affective life.

Nevertheless, several adolescents acknowledged that their fathers have to cope with long working hours in the tertiary sector, in the nearby tourist area, or in the few factories existing around the community. These activities are relatively new in the community life, which had formerly been centered around the work at the limestone quarry (*calera*) that was located within the community. Thus, it can be observed how the changes in the rural dynamics are interwoven in the new family configurations, stirring up feelings of estrangement, distance and lack of family support.

These changes constitute another factor that adds up to the context of precariousness in which these adolescents are immersed, which is also sustained by the lack of economic resources and employment opportunities in the same community and municipality. It should be mentioned that the tourist work that creates employment for the residents of this municipality is found in the neighboring municipality; therefore, the residents of San Antonio de la Cal are the labor force of that activity, as their municipality only receives income from their wages, which are not much above the minimum wage and, in most cases, come from tips and/or commissions.

Thus, the precarious family income forces young people to transform their social role and leave their homes early and go out to work to contribute to the household income of their families, or to get ahead with their own needs, as is the case of a 19-year-old informant who is a father and supports his household financially. This fact contradicts the historical expectation of young people in urban contexts of being students and devoting themselves to socialization processes that are typical of their age: going out with friends, girlfriends, and so on. Given the new labor logics that they face – it should be emphasized that this is a rural community with few possibilities and migration intentions – most adolescents wish to stay in the community.

Relationships such as formal or casual dating, are some of the main situations that male adolescents identified as causing them psychic suffering. On the one hand, they stated that they felt the demand of their male peers to establish sexual or affective bonds with more than one partner, which represents the cultural mandate of the context; however, this situation causes them confusion, rejection and/or guilt, as, in turn, and as an example of another change that is experienced in the rural areas, the discourses about dating presented by the public institutions (education, health and youth.) is contrary to this mandate.

With regard to formal dating a tension was also identified between the ideal of relationships under the traditional gender roles in which they were socialized and the manner in which, based on their perception, young women currently behave. For example, boys claimed that girls consume as much alcohol as they do – although they do not drink in public spaces as boys do – girls swear and use foul language, have sex “at an early age” and take the initiative by inviting boys to drink. This transformation in the perception of the role of women confuses them with regard to the way they should establish loving bonds with them.

With respect to the expression of feelings, through the workshop, the participants were able to account for their inability to identify their own emotions, confusing and expressing anger and sadness indistinctly.

With regard to the other central topic of this work, inquiring about their care practices and considering that these are understood as all those testimonies that incorporate activities or actions aimed at attending to the physical or emotional needs of others,<sup>(11)</sup> in this case, another male from their group of peers, it was observed in them a need and desire to express their psychic distress or suffering. This places them in a situation of permanent contradiction, as they highlighted the bond of friendship that they have with their male peers, which is reflected in support, positive words or advice; however, in turn, they expressed difficulties in establishing closer and more intimate bonds among them that would

allow them to talk about more personal situations, specifically linked to their distress.<sup>(18)</sup>

One of the consequences of this contradiction is shown in the search for care and support in their female peers, as they perceive an inability in themselves and in their peers, as males, to be understanding while they ascribe to women qualities such as empathy, listening and interest in the others. Evidently, it is easier for them to build the necessary trust to open up and tell their personal affairs to girls rather than to their male peers, because when living in a small community, with characteristics such as those in this study, mockery and indolence by male adolescents become a constant danger, a situation that is expressed in the popular saying about the rural context, “small town, big hell.”

Frequently, the participants, faced with their own or a friend’s distress, stated that they had resorted to alcohol consumption to feel empowered to show themselves vulnerable or simply to encourage this meeting among peers: “if he is sad, I’ll buy him a chela (beer).” It is the gender mandate that determines that alcohol “makes men feel more manly” or “has disinhibiting effects that allow to speak about intimate things.”

This set of internalized beliefs based on gender socialization are present in male adolescents and, paradoxically, are determinants in trying to achieve well-being, so that alcohol consumption as a catalyst of psychic suffering, limits the alternatives to overcome the hardships of everyday life.

When male adolescents were asked about the meaning that they have of the concept of care, they immediately associated it with protection, “not to walk around or leave a friend alone”, especially in situations of risk or fighting with others. This concept is perceived as a mandate of traditional masculinity; however, in a situated manner, care as company in the event of violence is characterized by the logics of relationship among men that are typical of their context, marked by rivalries among different communities, or strife among neighborhoods within the community.

The participants stated that the dances or parties in their community often end up in

unarmed or knife fighting. However, the participants said that fighting made them feel uncomfortable and stated that they would like not to fight at all, a situation that is impossible for them if someone attacks a male peer: “if they are hitting him, there’s no way not to get involved in the fight”.

Specifically with regard to care practices, we found those related to alcohol consumption as mediator of coexistence, the protection of the other through violence as a means to resolve conflicts, the peer group using the street space as a space of secondary socialization – where fights with others considered to be rivals often occur – and, as can be observed, all these practices fall within the coordinates of risk rather than care practices. However, paradoxically they consider their care practices among peers as related to these same actions.

In summary, the practices of care among peers in the case of these adolescents, both related to protection and alcohol consumption, are at the same time risky practices, leading these young males to experience paradoxical feelings with respect to peer care.

## DISCUSSION

A study characterized by a gender perspective in a specific context must consider different variables such as age, the stage of life and the economic condition of the context.

<sup>(20)</sup> Although not all the male adolescents are from the town of San Antonio de la Cal, as they come from other communities in the municipality of Tolimán, all these communities are also rural areas with a prevalent indigenous tradition. However, it should be noted that none of the male adolescents that participated in this study identify themselves as part of the indigenous population: in fact, none of them speak *hñāhñú*.

According to Núñez Noriega<sup>(21)</sup> the relationships among peers are clearly power struggles determined by gender mandates and symbolically validated by the State. Thinking of the State as a patriarchal institution that

“feminizes”, minimizes and despises the indigenous, it is necessary to mention that the participants are students at the upper secondary level in a public, non-multicultural school – just like all the schools that exist in Mexico at this level of education – providing them training in curricular contents characterized by a globalizing imprint, incorporating, for example, English as a second language, that makes them look at themselves in their rurality and their indigenous origin from a stance of development. Considering the school as a subjectivizing institution<sup>(22)</sup> they incorporate the logic of development and progress that is contrary to the rural and the indigenous.

The traditional biparental family with children is the main family configuration in the region, although we also find a significant percentage of young people that live only with their mothers, who assume the role of head of the family<sup>(18)</sup>. In both cases, many young people have reported that their mothers have some kind of economic activity that helps them participate in the family income and that many of these jobs are precarious (sale of sweets, jellies or food). This situation leads these adolescents into conflict as they have grown up with the gender stereotype that equals males to being the sole providers of the household, and this fact establishes tension with the inability of their parents and probably of themselves to fulfill this mandate.

Burin & Meler’s contribution<sup>(23)</sup> with regard to the subjective identity of men and the psychic suffering that they generally experience, is related, precisely, to this cultural gender mandate regarding the issue of providing for the household. This mandate faces a global context, and in Latin America and more evidently in this region of Toluca, Querétaro, where work as an economic activity receives increasingly precarious incomes, and where there is an increase in unemployment rates and a context of economic crisis.

A relevant fact with respect to the economic activity conducted by the adolescents is that this economic activity occurs in the town of Bernal, which as we have said, is a town that has the largest monolith in Mexico,

making it an attractive tourist destination, and thus generating sources of employment for the young people in the region. They mainly work in restaurants as waiters and, also in general tourist services. Due to the contextual conditions that have already been mentioned, the income that they receive from their jobs lessens the burden of their family spending.

Going back to the abovementioned comments about the generational contrast that exists between these adolescents and their parents and grandparents, specifically in relation to employment and indigenous identity, it is possible to interpret this reality as an effect of the interaction with other figures from different social spaces (work, school) rather than from their former generations.<sup>(24)</sup>

Although being a provider for the family is still a fundamental part of the male configuration in San Antonio de la Cal, the forms and conditions of this mandate are changing in relation to the labor demands.<sup>(25)</sup>

The contrast that we observe is the change of activities between the fathers and sons because, while the former have learned trades that involve the use of the body and strength (masons, blacksmiths, carpenters, and limestone quarry workers), the latter carry out activities where their bodies are not necessarily exposed to the same strain and risks; moreover, these activities require other types of skills such as customer service, hygiene, and personal appearance and even the use of a computer and the English language. They also face other types of strain, such as the stress of dealing with “*difficult and demanding clients*” or strenuous work schedules.

These economic activities and conditions of the context modify the rural life of the community where they live and thus, their social life. Likewise, the gender construction of the male adolescents in the region is apparently becoming more flexible but also more contradictory: even when the traditionalist ideas and beliefs related to what a man or a woman should be or do still persist, new approaches to women’s rights and freedom are emerging, although incipiently, including the need for men to position themselves differently in the face of this new social scenario.

To a large extent, gender socialization for men, as well as age and economic conditions, constitute an element that we could analyze in terms of the category of intersectionality suggested by Mara Viveros.<sup>(26)</sup> Masculinity from the intersectional perspective recognizes that

...social class, ethnicity, life cycle or sexual orientation are differentiating factors of the generic identities; we understand masculinity as a multiple reality in terms of historical moments and these different elements.<sup>(24)</sup>

Considering knowledge as a situated practice, the aim is to resort to the aforementioned intersectionality, to avoid thinking statically about categories such as class, origin, ethnicity or age. It is necessary to account for the movement of these categories in specific subjects and their contexts for the study of the health/mental health object.

From the start, this work focused on understanding the importance that peer groups have for men, mainly during adolescence. In this regard, we acknowledged the friendship component that was exhibited during the meetings. Friendship plays an essential role in adolescent experiences, specifically in the peer group. Orcasita and Uribe<sup>(27)</sup>, and Rodríguez *et al.*<sup>(28)</sup> highlight the importance of affection and trust for the well-being of adolescents. Friendship also has a function for the development of an ethics of care among peers; therefore, it has a political and transformative character. However, for the interviewees, there is a trust limit that can only be exceeded by the shared consumption of alcohol. For studying male friendship, Gilmore – cited by Vale de Almeida,<sup>(9)</sup> – proposes the differentiation between *casual friendship*, *commitment and friendship of trust*. Casual friendship is the one that results from the interaction in a space that is considered neutral, which results in “going out and having fun”. The second type goes from the bar to the private world of the home, generating expectations of mutual support, if necessary. The friendship of trust would entail mutual

trust with respect to their mutual personal secrets, and must be based on affection and leaving aside personal interests, placing the focus on the friend’s interests. Thus, Gilmore differentiates the spaces in which interaction and the level of commitment and intimacy occur with respect to this bond. In this regard, it could be identified that for these male adolescents one thing is being classmates and getting together to do school tasks and quite another is sharing some beers by the stream with their girlfriends, this being an activity that they share with their closest male mates.

Vela de Almeida<sup>(9)</sup> takes up Papataxiarchis, who argues that the phenomenon of male friendship cannot be analyzed in economic or political terms. The author, rather than viewing this friendship as the appendix of the androcentric structure, considers it an aspect of the *antistructure*, connected with leisure and companionship – both in alcohol consumption and gambling – and characterized by the absence of economic functions.

In fact, friendship in the male adolescents of San Antonio de la Cal, is not established on an economic aspect of exchange, despite the fact that it is fundamental in the construction of male subjectivity, given the stage in their life and the rural space where they live. They distinguish between schoolmates, who they sometimes call friends, but with whom they do not have enough trust to express themselves emotionally; this expression is indeed exclusive to some bonds, at certain specific moments and circumstances. Thus, the school device allows them to meet more people, but not necessarily helps them to establish greater intimacy or proximity; that relationship will be effectively mediated by open spaces such as the stream, the street, or the house of a *compa* (mate), but always with some alcoholic drink at hand.

In fact, alcohol in these male adolescents plays a specific role for expressing affection among peers, as well as for the expression of psychic suffering. As in the case of the men studied by Vela de Almeida in the rural area of Portugal in the late 80s, for whom drinking was an activity that had to be done with other men and sharing and paying rounds of

alcohol to others was a practice of exercise and construction of an hegemonic masculinity; in our study we identified positions that reveal that, although the peers bonded by friendship can establish well-being practices associated with care, these practices have led these male adolescents to develop disruptive behaviors and risky practices, especially associated with the fact that affection in these relationships can only be expressed through traditional male behaviors<sup>(29)</sup>, such as excessive alcohol consumption. Following Gilmore, we could say that, although these adolescents mention elements that are related to a *friendship of trust*, sharing the psychic suffering with male peers is also possible through alcohol consumption, which is a facilitator of the emotional expression of peer friends. The expression of emotions can occur with alcohol as a mediator, but also the psychic distress that a friend's suffering can cause may be reduced by drinking alcohol.

Therefore, the logics of trust between men seem to be limited by hegemonic masculinity, both in their expression and in their listening, and alcohol is the only possible way within the masculinity spectrum.

Most of the statements expressed about their emotions and affective bonds were obtained as a result of the workshop technique used, but not in the case of the face-to-face interviews with a male interviewer. This suggests that the group mechanism offered possibilities that they do not have in daily life, providing elements to consider that this type of experience can lead to interventions that make it possible to reflect on masculinities with adolescent men from an intersectional perspective.

An issue that could be verified was the difficulty that male adolescents exhibit in establishing precisely these affective and intimate bonds among peers, a situation that is confirmed by several studies in different parts of the world with regard to intragender relationships<sup>(9,24,30,31,32)</sup>. The foregoing is closely related to what these authors call homosociality or peer culture whose basic mythological belief is found in homophobic machism<sup>(33)</sup> that assumes that men can only establish

relationships of complicity, companionship and cruelty, but hardly any of care, tenderness and affection, which is presented as a risk factor for the care of their suffering.<sup>(29,30)</sup>

Niobe Way<sup>(34)</sup> argues that there is intense intimacy among teenage boys during adolescence and that they share their deepest secrets and feelings with their closest male friends; however, as boys become men they lose these friendships, which leads them to feeling isolated and lonely. The author states that in late adolescence, boys feel that they must become independent and consider that vulnerable emotions and intimate friendships are for girls or homosexual boys. In the male adolescents of this study, this phenomenon seems to occur when they say that it is easier to share their feelings with girls because they consider that girls are endowed with almost natural conditions to listen, understand and care. Men can also do it, as mentioned, but only through the trust that alcohol produces in very close bonds.

With regard to the causes of psychic suffering, it is remarkable to observe that formal love relationships or casual dating are one of the main situations that male adolescents identified as causing psychic suffering. However, this suffering is mediated by the mandates of an hegemonic masculinity that requires them to bond sexually or emotionally with more than one partner; these demands being opposed to the new social demands resulting from the changes that are experienced in rural areas with the arrival of new discourses about dating through public institutions, mainly the school. Thus, having sex and engaging in love relationships represent for them the problem of the contrast of different mandates which they believe they have to obey.

We observed the challenges and limitations that the investigated population have with regard to caring for themselves and for others and we call them paradoxical, following Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, given that "the paradox can be defined as a contradiction that follows a correct deduction from consistent premises."<sup>(35)</sup> These two premises are precisely the care practices that paradoxically facilitate risky conditions for adolescents.

In the testimonies from the participants, we identified care in its ontological sense according to Boff<sup>(36)</sup> based on the expressions of concern and interest in a peer; given this context, we argue that male adolescents showed openness in caring for peer suffering, although with a lack of socio-emotional tools to deal with their own or others' psychic distress.

## CONCLUSIONS

The testimonies shared by the interviewees retrieve their own experiences and those of others with regard to psychic suffering and the care practices among peers in a rural Mexican context. Tensions are observed in the cultural representations of what a young man or woman is expected to be in that context.

As we could observe, the relationship with their mothers and/or fathers are sources of psychic suffering, especially due to the affective distance and the barriers in communication that the adolescents perceive in them and the feeling of abandonment that they experience when their mothers go out to work in the labor market outside the community.

This lack of understanding or acceptance about the changes in the role of women in the community and, particularly, in the way in which this fact affects their love relationships, is another source of psychic suffering.

The interviewees have difficulty in differentiating emotions such as sadness and anger, as well as in handling and expressing them, which lead them to consuming alcohol as a way of overcoming this situation or opening themselves up to dialogue with their peers.

Peer care is paradoxical, as their care practices often result in risky situations, such as fighting or getting drunk. On the one hand, this situation is related to the difficulty in establishing spaces of trust among male peers spontaneously, and, on the other hand, to the greater empathy, listening or interest that they attribute to their female peers.

We identified changes in rural dynamics based on the entrance of women and male adolescents into the labor market, the economic dependence on the neighboring municipality, as well as the higher educational level of the participants. All of the above facts bring to the forefront the conditions for the contempt or the invisibility of the indigenous origins of the area, as well as the precarious conditions of the residents of San Antonio de la Cal that transform the social fabric of the community.

All these situations evidence the need for building interventions that could help these male adolescents to create ways of bonding with each other based on affective-centered care logics, which may strengthen the social fabric of the community and promote the elaboration of psychic suffering and the integral development of adolescents.

Therefore, thinking in terms of collective health in the light of the results of this research work, implies accounting for the structural elements that affect community life and, hence, subjectivity. From an intersectional perspective, these subjects are recognized as male adolescents, in a rural setting, as depositaries of a patriarchal structural inequality, but also as possible agents of social transformation based on peer care.

## AGRADECIMIENTOS

Agradecemos el apoyo obtenido para la realización de este proyecto por parte del Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT), México, a través del programa Nacional de Posgrados de Calidad, por medio de la Beca de

Maestría que obtuvo el Maestro en Educación para la Ciudadanía, Hernando Hernández Nava, para la realización de sus estudios y de la tesis que dio lugar a este artículo. Asimismo, queremos agradecer el apoyo financiero obtenido por el Fondo de Proyectos Especiales de Rectoría, de la Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, México.

## REFERENCES

- Hernández MTDJ, De la Torre J, Espinoza M, Lara B, Gutiérrez S. El concepto de Salud Mental desde el Estado mexicano. *Revista Educación y Desarrollo*. 2016;(37):89-93.
- Organización Mundial de la Salud. Salud mental. [Internet]. 2013 [cited 20 Mar 2019]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/v8bdskf>.
- Augsburger AC. La inclusión del sufrimiento psíquico un desafío para la epidemiología. *Psicología & Sociedade*. 2004;16(2):71-80.
- Galende E. *Psicofármacos y salud mental: La ilusión de no ser*. Buenos Aires: Lugar Editorial; 2008.
- Menéndez EL. *Morir de alcohol: saber y hegemonía médica*. México: Alianza Editorial Mexicana; 1990.
- Granda E. ¿Qué llamamos salud colectiva hoy? *Revista Cubana de Salud Pública*. 2004;30(2):148-159.
- Cortés D, Parra G. La ética del cuidado: Hacia la construcción de nuevas ciudadanías. *Psicología desde el Caribe*. 2009;23:183-213.
- Hernández-Castañeda M. *Varones con o sin empleo la construcción de las masculinidades en Chihuahua*. [Tesis de doctorado]. Tlaquepaque, Jalisco: ITESO; 2013.
- Vale de Almeida M. *The hegemonic male. Masculinity in a Portuguese Town*. Oxford: Berghahn Books; 1996:4-5.
- Organización Panamericana de la Salud. Editorial: La importancia de abordar la masculinidad y la salud de los hombres para avanzar hacia la salud universal [Internet]. 2019 [cited 29 Mar 2020] Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/vx2d6dt>.
- Secretaría de Salud. *Perfil epidemiológico de la población adolescente en México 2010*. México: Secretaría de Salud; 2011.
- Figuroa JG, Flores N. Prácticas de cuidado y modelos emergentes en las relaciones de género: La experiencia de algunos varones mexicanos. *La ventana*. 2012;4(35):7-57.
- Jarquín NH, Castellanos JA, Sangerman-Jarquín DM. Pluriactividad y agricultura familiar: retos del desarrollo rural en México. *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Agrícolas*. 2017;8(4):949-963.
- Zamudio FJ, Corona A, López ID. Un índice de ruralidad para México. *Espiral*. 2008;14(42):179-214.
- Salazar A. Vivir entre la Peña y la marginación. *El Universal* [Internet]. 9 nov 2017 [cited 9 Nov 2017]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/t8nxptc>.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. *Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010* [Internet]. México: INEGI; 2010 [cited 9 Jun 2016] Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/us5poht>.
- Hernández-Nava H. *Prácticas de cuidado de la salud mental entre pares como un componente necesario para la construcción de ciudadanía activa de los hombres adolescentes: Un estudio exploratorio-descriptivo*. [Tesis de Maestría]. Querétaro: Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro; 2019.
- Hernández-Nava H, Garbus P. Prácticas de cuidado de la salud mental entre pares como componente necesario para la construcción de ciudadanía activa de los hombres adolescentes: análisis y propuesta de intervención. In: Diez-Martínez E, (comp.). *Aproximaciones y perspectivas actuales en educación para la ciudadanía: aportes desde la intervención y la investigación*. México: Eólica Grupo Editorial/Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro; 2019. p. 95-117.
- Hernández-Nava H, Garbus P. Prácticas de cuidado de la salud mental entre pares en hombres adolescentes de San Antonio de la Cal, Qro, Mex. IX Congreso Internacional de Investigación y Práctica Profesional en Psicología, XXIV Jornadas de Investigación de la Facultad de Psicología, XIII Encuentro de Investigadores en Psicología del MERCOSUR; diciembre 2017. Buenos Aires: Facultad de Psicología, Universidad de Buenos Aires.
- Rivas HE. ¿El varón como factor de riesgo? Masculinidad y mortalidad por accidentes y otras causas violentas en la Sierra de Sonora. *Estudios Sociales: Revista de Alimentación Contemporánea y Desarrollo Regional*. 2005;13(26):28-65.
- Núñez G. Masculinidad, ruralidad y hegemonías regionales: reflexiones desde el norte de México. *Región y Sociedad*. 2017;29(5):75-113.
- López GL, Marzolla ME, Olivarez MS. Los espacios de construcción de subjetividad en la escuela media. V Congreso Internacional de Investigación y Práctica Profesional en Psicología, XX Jornadas de Investigación, IX Encuentro de Investigadores en Psicología del MERCOSUR. Buenos Aires: Facultad de Psicología, Universidad de Buenos Aires; 2013.
- Burin M, Meler I. *Varones: género y subjetividad masculina*. Buenos Aires: Paidós; 2000.
- Castaño JA. Masculinidades y sexualidades de corteros de caña en el municipio de Candelaria-Valle. *Sociedad y Economía*. 2011;(21):221-241.

25. Viveros M. De quebradores y cumplidores: Sobre hombres, masculinidades y relaciones de género en Colombia. Colombia: Universidad Nacional de Colombia; 2002.
26. Cevallos JP. Intersecciones de género, clase, etnia y raza: Un diálogo con Mara Viveros. *Iconos: Revista de Ciencias Sociales*. 2017;(57):117-121.
27. Orcasita L, Uribe AF. La importancia del apoyo social en el bienestar de los adolescentes. *Psicología Avances de la Disciplina*. 2017;4(2):69-82.
28. Rodríguez E, Megías I, Sánchez E. Jóvenes y relaciones grupales. Madrid: INJUVE, Ancares; 2002.
29. De Keijzer B. El varón como factor de riesgo: masculinidad, salud mental y salud reproductiva. In: Tuñón E. Género y salud en el Sureste de México. México DF: El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco; 1997. p. 1-15.
30. Lomas C. Los chicos también lloran: Identidades masculinas, igualdad entre los sexos y coeducación. 3a ed. Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós Ibérica; 2011.
31. Blanco J. Hombres: La masculinidad como factor de riesgo: Una etnografía de la invisibilidad. [Tesis de Doctorado]. Sevilla: Universidad Pablo de Olavide; 2012.
32. Heilman B, Barker G, Harrison A. La caja de la masculinidad: Un estudio sobre lo que significa ser hombre joven en Estados Unidos, el Reino Unido y México. Washington DC: Promundo US, Uniliver; 2017.
33. Monsiváis C. ¿Pero hubo alguna vez once mil machos? *FEM*. 1981;(18):9-20.
34. Way N. Deep secrets: boys, friendships, and the crisis of connection. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; 2011.
35. Watzlawick P, Beavin J, Jackson DD. Teoría de la comunicación humana. Barcelona: Herder; 1991.
36. Boff L. El cuidado esencial. Madrid: Trotta; 2002.

## CITATION

Hernández-Nava H, Hernández González G, Garbus P. Adolescent males in a Mexican rural context: psychic suffering and care among peers. *Salud Colectiva*. 2020;16:e2266. doi: 10.18294/sc.2020.2266.

Received: 1 Apr 2019 | Modified: 21 Dec 2019 | Accepted: 13 Jan 2020 | Publication online: 13 Mar 2020



Content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution — you must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Noncommercial — You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

<https://doi.org/10.18294/sc.2020.2266>

This article was translated into English by María Victoria Illas.