

Tolerance towards dating violence in Spanish adolescents

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The study of intimate partner violence among adolescent and young couples in Spain remains unattended, although such abuses are well known and more frequent than in adulthood. The aim of this study is, on the one hand, to provide epidemiological information on dating relationships, and on the other hand, to identify attitudes towards violence. 2205 women enrolled in schools in diverse provinces of Spain, participated in the study. Average age was near 19 years (SD= 2.25). The Dating Violence Questionnaire (DVQ, in Spanish, CUVINO), a questionnaire that assesses both frequency and distress associated with violent behavior, was used. The DVQ allowed differentiating between groups of women self-labeled as abused and not abused on the basis of the frequency of sustained violence, although the levels of distress in the face of violence were statistically similar in both groups. Implications for future research and prevention programs are discussed.

Tolerancia ante la violencia en el noviazgo adolescente en España. El análisis de la violencia entre parejas adolescentes y jóvenes en España no ha sido estudiado, a pesar de que este tipo de abusos han sido bien documentados y pueden llegar a ser más frecuentes que en la edad adulta. El objetivo del estudio es ofrecer datos epidemiológicos sobre los comportamientos violentos en las relaciones de noviazgo adolescente, así como identificar las actitudes de tolerancia que se muestran hacia ellos. La muestra la constituyen 2.205 mujeres, escolarizadas en diversos puntos de España, con una edad media de 19 años (DT= 2,25). Se utilizó el Cuestionario de Violencia de Novios (CUVINO), que evalúa tanto la frecuencia de conductas violentas como los niveles de molestia asociados a ellas. El CUVINO permitió diferenciar entre mujeres autoclasificadas como maltratadas y no maltratadas en función de las frecuencias de las conductas de abuso, sin bien los niveles de molestia ante estas conductas abusivas fueron estadísticamente no significativos. Son discutidas las implicaciones de estos resultados para futuras investigaciones y programas preventivos.

Violence in adolescent dating relationships is a phenomenon that has been studied in the literature for the last several decades (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). However, attention paid to teenage dating violence has been considerably lower than that paid to adult domestic violence. (Rodríguez-Franco, López-Cepero, & Rodríguez-Díaz, 2009). Although estimates on the prevalence of this phenomenon vary, its existence is well-documented – it is estimated that one third of young people experience at least one violent dating relationship (Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, & Kupper, 2001; Jones & Gardner, 2002; Kaestle & Halpern, 2005). Further, preliminary data from our research on young Spanish women indicates the existence of abusive behavior in university-age couples; an even greater prevalence of this conduct is observed in secondary schools (figures range from 3-6%). In addition, more than 60% of the respondents claim to know adolescent couples in which violence is constant (Rodríguez-Franco, Antuña, Rodríguez

Díaz, Herrero, & Nieves, 2007). Murder cases have also been documented (Spanish *Instituto de la Mujer*, 2006).

We should keep in mind that adolescent and juvenile dating relationships fall in line with certain characteristics (level of maturity, age, inexperience, stereotypes, and expectations of relationships, among others) which influence the way violence is expressed (Arriaga, 2002; Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; González & Santana, 2001; Moya & Expósito, 2001), allowing the appearance of types of abuse which are different from those in adults (Expósito & Herrera, 2009; Harrison & Abrishami, 2004; Marcus, 2007; Ruiz, Expósito, & Bonache, 2010).

For this reason, the use of evaluation instruments developed and validated specifically for this segment of the population seems justified. Nevertheless, evaluating violence in adolescent and young couples is often performed by adapting instruments created for adults (chiefly, some version of *Conflict Tactics Scales* by Straus, 1979 or *Index of Spouse Abuse* by Hudson and McIntosh, 1981). A review of the literature shows that few instruments have been specifically developed for this non-adult population. Only two validated instruments are currently available (López-Cepero, 2011): the *Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory* (CADRI) (Wolfe, Scott, Reitzel-Jaffe, Wekerle, Grasley, and Straatman, 2001) and the *Dating Violence Questionnaire* (DVQ; Cuestionario

de Violencia de Novios-CUVINO in Spanish) (Rodríguez-Franco, López-Cepero, Rodríguez-Díaz, Bringas et al., 2010).

The first one evaluates the frequency with which 35 indicators appear in adolescent dating relationships. It differentiates between victimization and perpetuation and offers 5 factors or types of violence. On the other hand, the DVQ focuses uniquely on the experience of the victim, but it is able to collect data on 42 behavioral indicators (grouped together in 8 factors or types of violence) and to offer two simultaneous measures: the frequency of victimization and the level of bother (inverse for tolerance attitudes) upheld by the victim.

Putting together both frequency and tolerance data has a main importance, as well as their relationship has been widely documented. Henton, Cate, Koval and Lloyd and Christopher (1983) found that, in a sample of young Americans, increased tolerance towards violence was correlated with increased probability of getting involved in it (whether as aggressor or as victim). Similar conclusions have been offered by McDonell, Ott and Mitchell (2010) in a sample of Americans, by Conolly, Friedlander, Pepler, Craig and Laporte (2010) in a sample of young Canadians, and by Trujano and Mata (2002) in a sample of Mexicans. O'Keefe (1998) also refers to such a connection, although conclusions are limited to males only. Analyzing separately the actors in a violent relationship, Fincham, Cui, Braithwaite and Pasley (2008) observed a connection in young women (with an average age of 19) between permissiveness towards violence and greater victimization. Similarly, the connection between permissiveness towards violence and greater perpetuation is also supported empirically (Bryant & Spencer, 2003; Gracia, Herrero, Lila, & Fuente, 2009; Henning, Jones, & Holdford, 2005; Machado, Caridade, & Martins, 2010; Recio, Cuadrado, & Ramos, 2007).

In light of these findings, the objective of this research is two-fold. First, it seeks to identify the most frequent violent behaviors suffered by young and adolescent Spanish women. And second, it looks to establish the degree of acceptance or tolerance in the female partner towards each of these abusive behaviors and so identify the attitudes that sustain them. This information will be analyzed together with the respondents' perception of abuse in order to contrast the relationship between tolerance and labeling in the relationship itself.

Method

Participants

The sample studied was made up of young women, secondary school students, and university students in the provinces of Seville, the Principality of Asturias, Pontevedra, Huelva, and A Coruña (Spain). The only requirement to participate in the survey was to have been in a dating relationship for more than one month. The total number of participants meeting this criterion was 2205. Their ages ranged from 15 to 25 years old (average of 18.7 years old; $SD= 2.25$). Regarding their level of studies, 989 (45%) studied at secondary schools, while 1208 (55%) studied at university. The average age of the male partners was 20.6 years old ($SD= 3.33$).

Instruments

Dating Violence Questionnaire (DVQ) was administered (Rodríguez-Franco, López-Cepero, Rodríguez-Díaz, Bringas et

al., 2010). This instrument included 42 behavioral indicators of abuse in dating relationships, collecting two types of answers for each item through Likert scales with five levels of response each (between 0 and 4): the first, the frequency of appearance of each behavior; and the second, the degree of bother provoked by the behavior (Rodríguez-Franco, Antuña, López-Cepero Rodríguez-Díaz, Herrero et al., 2008).

DVQ had two previous validation studies for Spanish-speaking adolescents and young adults when the present study was conducted. The first one (Rodríguez-Franco, Antuña, Rodríguez-Díaz, Herrero et al., 2007;) used data gathered from 709 young and adolescent Spanish women (average age of 18.5 years; $SD= 1.55$). An exploratory factor analysis was carried out on an initial set of 63 items, emerging 8 factors after a Varimax rotation (eigenvalues greater than 1 and a minimum of 4% explained variance, with 44.7% total explained variance). 8 types of violence were isolated (detachment, humiliation, sexual, coercion, physical, gender-based, emotional punishment and instrumental; alphas ranging from 0.69 to 0.82) with a total set of 42 questions included. The second exploratory study kept the same structure of 8 factors, using a sample of 5170 students of both sexes with an average age of 19.03 years ($SD= 2.46$) from Spain, Mexico, and Argentina (Rodríguez-Franco et al., 2010). The 42 items were retained with saturation values of 0.35 or greater. Index of internal consistency for the total set surpassed 0.900, showing a strong consistency, while seven factors obtained alphas ranging from 0.818 to 0.681 (instrumental violence factor showed a value of 0.588). In the present study, the alpha index for the whole questionnaire reached a value of 0.926, while seven of the factor alphas oscillated between 0.677 and 0.807 (again, the instrumental violence subscale remained distanced from these registers with an alpha value of 0.511).

Additionally, the DVQ gathers information on general perceptions (labeling or self-classification) through a series of questions such as: *Have you ever felt abused in your relationship?*, *Do you feel or have you ever felt afraid of your partner?*, or *Do you feel or have you ever felt trapped in your relationship?* In the present study, the first of these questions was used to distinguish two sample subgroups, as it matched the same criteria used in Spanish polls (Spanish *Instituto de la Mujer*, 2006).

Procedure

A list was made of all the secondary and higher education centers (both public and private) in those regions – A Coruña, Asturias, Huelva, Seville, and Vigo (Spain) – where the research team worked in conjunction with a professional collaborator. Two strategies were implemented to assure conformity to the samples according to level of studies. At the secondary education level, letters were sent to all the centers requesting their participation, explaining the main aims of the study, time necessary to perform the evaluation (less than one hour in each class), and offering contact information (e-mail address) in order to respond any questions that could arise. As compensation, a 1 hour session to raise awareness against dating violence was offered for each of the participating classes. One class per educational level was requested for the ages of 15 to 26 years old. At University centers, data collection was performed during lecture hours by the collaborating researchers themselves, who contacted their colleagues to request the necessary time. A total of 29 centers participated in the study.

Data was collected by a collaborating researcher who shown up in each participating center in order to administer hard copies of a battery of instruments (which included DVQ). They were later entered into a database created specifically for this study with the statistics software SPSS 18.0.

Regarding the performed statistical analyses, descriptive procedures (mean, standard deviation *SD*, contingency coefficient, etc.), a calculation of bivariate correlation, and a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were included. Level of significance was established in values $p < 0.05$.

Results

Counting the answers to the question *Have you ever felt abused in your relationship?* indicated that 125 women (5.7% of the total) had. Table 1 shows the contingencies between the two conditions of this variable and the level of studies (coefficient $C = 0.024$; $p = 0.258$).

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to compare the means for each item between the two self-labeled groups: abused women ($N = 125$) and non-abused women ($N = 2054$). Statistically significant differences ($p < 0.001$) were found

for all 42 behavioral items; averages always greater in the abused women group. Table 2 shows the 10 behavioral indicators with greater frequency for the entire sample. In the factor structure proposed by Rodríguez-Franco et al. (2010), these indicators are assigned to factors of detachment (1, 2, 4, 6, 10), coercion (3, 7, 9), gender (5), and humiliation (8) violence.

The same procedure was performed to analyze the items of bother provoked by each of these behaviors. Here, 3 out of the 42 items presented significant differences in the MANOVA comparison for abused and non-abused groups (*threatens to leave you*, *criticizes your sexuality*, and *forces you to undress*), none of which are found among the 10 most frequent. These differences remained distant from the level of significance $p < 0.05$. Means were also practically identical from the descriptive point of view (see Table 3).

In order to perform a more detailed analysis of these results, distributions for the discomfort responses in the 10 most frequently occurring items were obtained. The research team included 6 additional items in the analysis selected for their importance and clarity. Table 4 presents the count and percentage of participants that rated these items as causing *no* or *little* bother (Table 4).

Finally, correlation analysis was carried out for values of bother and frequency in each of these 16 items. Eight items showed a significant correlation in the whole sample, with coefficients that did not surpass the value of 0.200 in seven of the eight cases. Same procedure was performed on two self-labeled groups (abused and non-abused women), showing significant connections chiefly in the non-abused group, where a negative relationship was found for all but one item. On the other hand, correlations for the self-perceived abused group were positive, although little of these relationships were significant. Table 5 represents all the data gathered.

Table 1
Perception of abuse according to level of studies (N= 2179)

	Secondary school	University	Total
Abused	050 (5.1%)	0075 (6.2%)	0125 (5.7%)
Non-abused	928 (45.2%)	1126 (54.8%)	2054 (94.3%)
Total	978 (44.9%)	1201 (55.1%)	

Table 2
Frequency mean, standard deviation (in parenthesis), and P values for the variance analysis/MANOVA of the behavioral indicators (extracts) with greater frequency of appearance. *** $p < 0.001$

	Total (N= 2179)	Non-abused (N= 2054)	Abused (N= 125)	F
1. Is a good student, but is always late at meetings, does not fulfil his/her promises, and is irresponsible	0.68 (0.90)	0.64 (0.85)	1.18 (1.36)	043.22***
2. Has ignored your feelings	0.57 (0.79)	0.52 (0.73)	1.36 (1.20)	133.77***
3. Has physically kept you from leaving	0.54 (0.86)	0.51 (0.80)	1.12 (1.39)	060.48***
4. Imposes rules on the relationship (days, times, types of outings), at his/her exclusive convenience	0.49 (0.84)	0.45 (0.77)	1.17 (1.35)	091.33***
5. Mocks women in general	0.45 (0.69)	0.43 (0.65)	0.89 (1.16)	053.70***
6. Does not acknowledge any responsibility regarding the couple relationship or what happens to both of you	0.43 (0.83)	0.40 (0.79)	0.99 (1.32)	059.52***
7. Talks to you about relationships he/she imagines you have	0.40 (0.76)	0.36 (0.70)	1.10 (1.30)	113.80***
8. Criticizes, insults you, or yells at you	0.36 (0.69)	0.31 (0.59)	1.20 (1.31)	218.14***
9. You feel you can't argue with him/her because he/she is almost always annoyed with you	0.36 (0.78)	0.31 (0.69)	1.11 (1.37)	136.17***
10. Stops talking to you or disappears for several days, without any explanation, to show their annoyance	0.36 (0.74)	0.33 (0.70)	0.73 (1.06)	035.61***

Table 3

Bother mean, standard deviation (in parenthesis), and P values for the variance analysis/MANOVA of the behavioral indicators (extracts) with greater frequency of appearance

	Total (N= 2179)	Non-abused (N= 2054)	Abused (N= 125)	F
1. Is a good student, but is always late at meetings, does not fulfil his/her promises, and is irresponsible	2.94 (1.03)	2.93 (1.02)	3.06 (1.03)	1.87
2. Has ignored your feelings	3.56 (0.81)	3.56 (0.81)	3.61 (0.74)	0.46
3. Has physically kept you from leaving	2.73 (1.30)	2.73 (1.30)	2.79 (1.31)	0.22
4. Imposes rules on the relationship (days, times, types of outings), at his/her exclusive convenience	3.21 (1.01)	3.22 (1.00)	3.17 (1.10)	0.29
5. Mocks women in general	2.85 (1.18)	2.85 (1.17)	2.93 (1.28)	0.58
6. Does not acknowledge any responsibility regarding the couple relationship or what happens to both of you	3.37 (0.95)	3.37 (0.95)	3.42 (0.95)	0.33
7. Talks to you about relationships he/she imagines you have	2.98 (1.15)	2.97 (1.15)	3.12 (1.10)	2.07
8. Criticizes, insults you, or yells at you	3.57 (0.86)	3.57 (0.86)	3.56 (0.87)	0.04
9. You feel you can't argue with him/her because he/she is almost always annoyed with you	3.36 (0.95)	3.36 (0.94)	3.42 (0.99)	0.48
10. Stops talking to you or disappears for several days, without any explanation, to show their annoyance	3.50 (0.94)	3.51 (0.94)	3.44 (1.11)	0.63

Table 4

Count and percentage of women declaring little or no bother from the more frequent items (1-10) and 6 items of special interest (a-f) (Extracts)

	Total (N= 2179)	Abused (N= 125)	Non-abused (N= 2054)
1. Is a good student, but is always late at meetings, does not fulfil his/her promises, and is irresponsible	200 (9.2%)	10 (8.0%)	190 (9.5%)
2. Has ignored your feelings	70 (3.2%)	4 (3.2%)	66 (3.3%)
3. Has physically kept you from leaving	396 (18.2%)	25 (20.7%)	371 (18.7%)
4. Imposes rules on the relationship (days, times, types of outings), at his/her exclusive convenience	155 (7.1%)	12 (9.6%)	143 (7.2%)
5. Mocks women in general	295 (13.5%)	18 (14.9%)	277 (14.0%)
6. Does not acknowledge any responsibility regarding the couple relationship or what happens to both of you	106 (4.9%)	6 (4.9%)	100 (5.0%)
7. Talks to you about relationships he/she imagines you have	246 (11.3%)	13 (10.7%)	233 (11.7%)
8. Criticizes, insults you, or yells at you	84 (3.9%)	5 (4.1%)	79 (4.0%)
9. You feel you can't argue with him/her because he/she is almost always annoyed with you	107 (4.9%)	9 (7.4%)	98 (5.0%)
10. Stops talking to you or disappears for several days, without any explanation, to show their annoyance	112 (5.1%)	11 (9.1%)	101 (5.1%)
a. Has beaten you	131 (6.0%)	8 (6.6%)	123 (6.3%)
b. Insists on touching you in ways and places which you don't like and don't want	154 (7.1%)	8 (6.5%)	146 (7.3%)
c. Has treated you as a sexual object	137 (6.3%)	10 (8.3%)	127 (6.4%)
d. Humiliates you in public	108 (5.0%)	6 (4.9%)	102 (5.2%)
e. Has ridiculed or insulted your beliefs, religion or social class	158 (7.3%)	11 (9.0%)	147 (7.4%)
f. Has stolen from you	135 (6.2%)	14 (11.4%)	121 (6.1%)

Table 5
Correlations between frequency and bother for the 10 most frequent items and 6 items of special interest (* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$)

	Total (r)	Non-abused (r)	Abused (r)
1. Is a good student, but is always late at meetings, does not fulfil his/her promises, and is irresponsible	-0.022	-0.040	0.188*
2. Has ignored your feelings	0.012	0.006	0.052
3. Has physically kept you from leaving	-0.326**	-0.384**	0.120
4. Imposes rules on the relationship (days, times, types of outings), at his/her exclusive convenience	-0.064**	-0.093**	0.199*
5. Mocks women in general	-0.200**	-0.249**	0.157
6. Does not acknowledge any responsibility regarding the couple relationship or what happens to both of you	-0.015	-0.029	0.117
7. Talks to you about relationships he/she imagines you have	-0.024	-0.063**	0.251**
8. Criticizes, insults you, or yells at you	-0.008	-0.053*	0.331**
9. You feel you can't argue with him/her because he/she is almost always annoyed with you	0.033	-0.006	0.306**
10. Stops talking to you or disappears for several days, without any explanation, to show their annoyance	-0.026	-0.031	0.057
a. Has beaten you	-0.177**	-0.189**	-0.136
b. Insists on touching you in ways and places which you don't like and don't want	-0.092**	-0.113**	0.092
c. Has treated you as a sexual object	-0.125**	-0.136**	-0.028
d. Humiliates you in public	-0.046*	-0.073**	0.155
e. Has ridiculed or insulted your beliefs, religion or social class	-0.074**	-0.102**	0.132
f. Has stolen from you	-0.033	-0.046*	0.018

Discussion and conclusions

The present study allows us to extract several interesting conclusions on violence in dating relationships of young couples. In the first place, it offers a percentage of youth who perceive themselves as having been abused in an intimate relationship (nearly 6%) –greater than found by the *Instituto de la Mujer* (2006) for the adult population. Variance analysis between groups defined by the labeling (perception) of abuse affirms that the general perception of women polled remains in line with the abuse received, since the group of abused women obtained higher averages in all cases (this is considered to be a result of the DVQ's greater discrimination).

Furthermore, presented data showed a similarity in the bother shown towards abusive behaviors from the groups self-labeled as abused and non-abused. Even taking into account that results do evince the lack of awareness concerning violence in dating which exists within the population of young women, means obtained in each item proved difficult to read, particularly if one tries to decide if the discomfort provoked by the abuses is relatively high or low.

Given this, classifying and counting together the *none* and *low* bother responses was the chosen strategies, in order to estimate the proportion of youth who attribute little or no discomfort to these behaviors. Results demonstrated that items such as *has physically kept you from leaving* lack importance for nearly a fifth of the sample, *he/she is always late at meetings, does not fulfil his/her promises, and is irresponsible* is not very bothersome for one out of every ten respondents, and that less than 4% (84 women) consider it of little importance that their partner *criticizes, insults, and yells* at her. Analyzing some less frequently occurring items, the perspective is not better – between 5 to 8% of the sample consider that it provokes little or no discomfort to *be hit, to be the object of unwanted touches, to be treated like as a sexual object, to be humiliated in public, to be ridiculed for beliefs, religion, or class, and to be stolen by* their partner. That these proportions

can be translated into one out of every thirteen (8%) or twenty (5%) women provides ample evidence of the need of developing new preventive policies throughout the socialization process (Fernández-Ríos & Rodríguez-Díaz, 2002; Fincham et al., 2008; Moya et al., 2001; Recio et al., 2007; Ruiz et al., 2010).

Finally, our study explored the relationship between frequency of victimization and the discomfort provoked by the more frequent and some selected items of abuse. A separate analysis of two subgroups (women perceived or not as abused) did not aid in establishing detailed interpretations beyond the weak correlation found in the comprehensive analysis of the sample, in the line of works by Harrison et al. (2004), Henning et al., (2005) and Marcus (2007).

Given the nature of correlations, it is impossible to establish a linear causality between victimization and bother, although interesting readings may still be made. In the first place, the group of women self-labeled as abused present positive correlation signs, which indicates the coincidence of high victimization and high discomfort (an opposite reading is also possible, although this first group presented greater means than the second group, making this interpretation worthless). This outcome is easy to interpret via the sensitivity arising after suffering abuses in their relationships, as describing their experience as abusive remains consistent with expressing repulsion towards these behaviors. Secondly, correlations in the group of women who do not perceive themselves as abused are inverse (greater frequency and lower discomfort, and viceversa). In this sense, it may prove interesting, following the path of studies by Arriaga (2002) and Arriaga et al., (2001), to analyze the results by dividing the sample into two new subgroups – one with women with low victimization and relatively high levels of discomfort (which leads one to understand them as a group protected against abuse) and the other with victims that have suffered frequent abuse, but with levels of bother that tend to be low (which could be called *technical* or *undetected abuse*). Here, our

data support the argument that tolerance facilitates the expression of patterns of abusive behavior in dating relationships, whereas non-tolerant attitudes (high bother) prevent the establishment of these forms of exchange, probably resulting in break-ups if they do indeed appear (Gracia, García, & Lila, 2009, 2011; Moya et al., 2001; González et al., 2001).

In this way, the context shows that as discomfort increases, the frequency of victimization decreases in the majority of the sample (those not perceiving themselves as abused). This leads us to insist, on one hand, on the importance of undertaking prevention programs focused on providing our youth with tools for the early detection of abusive behaviors and, on the other, on strengthening the connection between these behaviors and the label *abuse* in order to reduce the percentage of women who are being victims without perceiving it – those women forming a more numerous group than the women self-labeled as abused (Fernández-Ríos et al., 2002; Labrador, Rincón, Luis, & Fernández-Velasco, 2004).

Another point of interest is that the being in an abusive situation does not seem to raise awareness in or have an effect on the abused

youth themselves. This statement will require further study for confirmation, although the data in our study, in the line of González et al., (2001), induces us to highlight the *inadequate attitudes in the adolescent and young female population which does not feel abused, but which holds attitudes that may provide a favorable context for later violent romantic relationships during these ages.*

Finally, the administered questionnaire (DVQ) has proven effective in differentiating young women who label themselves as abused and non-abused, although further studies should delve into the issue further to establish and understand with greater precision why three behavioral indicators offer significant differences. In this line of further, more detailed study and analysis, it is important to highlight the fact that *violence in dating teenagers is more related to the actions of the aggressor than to the attitude of the victim.*

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