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Adolescent Conflict and Young Adult Couple Relationships: Directionality of Violence

Relaciones conflictivas en parejas de adolescentes y jóvenes: direccionalidad de la violencia

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Abstract.

The objective of this research was to study victimization and aggression in adolescent and young couple relationships, as well as to identify the directionality of violence perpetration in a sample of 984 people between 15 and 31 years of age, of which 58.2% were women and 41.8% were men. Regarding the educational level of the population under study, 26% were students of junior high school, senior high school, or vocational training and 56.5% were college students. The research design followed the nonprobability purposive sampling method and used the DVQ-R questionnaire. The results suggest that violence is 65.2% bidirectional and 14.30% unidirectional, being bidirectionality more frequent in psychological violence and decreasing when physical violence occurs. The results reveal the need to integrate the different modalities of dating violence (unidirectional and bidirectional) and unperceived violence –that gives rise to *technical abuse*– into the different prevention programs addressed to adolescents and youth.

Resumen.

El objetivo de esta investigación ha sido estudiar la victimización y la agresión en las relaciones de parejas adolescentes y jóvenes, así como comprobar la direccionalidad de la violencia perpetrada a través del estudio de 984 personas. Las edades están comprendidas entre los 15 y los 31 años de edad. En cuanto a la distribución de los sexos, el 58.2% son mujeres y el 41.8% restante hombres. Respecto al nivel educativo de la muestra, el 56.5% son universitarios y el 26% tienen estudios secundarios, bachillerato o formación profesional. El diseño de la investigación ha sido de tipo no probabilístico intencional. Se utilizó el Cuestionario Cuvino-R (Rodríguez-Díaz et al., 2017). Los resultados indican que la violencia se muestra bidireccional en un 65,2% y unidireccional en un 14,30%, siendo la bidireccionalidad más frecuente en la violencia psicológica, y disminuyendo cuando se agrava la conducta con violencia física. Con base en estos resultados, se debería discutir la necesidad de integrar las diferentes modalidades de violencia en la relación (Unidireccional o Bidireccional) y la violencia no percibida que da lugar al *maltrato técnico* en los diferentes campos de la prevención con adolescentes y jóvenes.

Keywords.

Dating Violence; Adolescents; Youth; Victimization; Perpetration; Bidirectional Violence; Unidirectional Violence.

Palabras Clave.

Violencia en el Noviazgo; Adolescentes; Jóvenes; Victimización; Perpetración; Violencia Bidireccional; Violencia Unidireccional.

1. Introduction

Adolescent and young couple relationships pose problems that sometimes lead to serious physical and psychological health consequences (Alarcón et al., 2018; Teten et al., 2009). Intimate partner violence is a worldwide social and public health problem (Ferrer-Pérez & Bosch-Fiol, 2019; García-Díaz et al., 2018; Hébert et al., 2017; Heyman et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Franco et al., 2017). It is a heterogeneous, universal, and growing phenomenon in society (Muñoz & Echeburúa, 2016; Rodríguez-Biezma, 2007), in which violent psychological, physical, or sexual behaviors occur (McLaughlin et al., 2012; World Health Organization, 2018) at any time of the relationship, increasingly at earlier ages (Loinaz et al., 2011) and in both sexes (Rodríguez-Biezma, 2007).

According to the last results of the Spanish National Statistics Institute (National Statistics Institute, 2019), the number of young people reported for gender violence, compared with the previous year, increased by 14.1% at ages 18 to 19 and by 11.9% at ages 25 to 29. Therefore, studies are focusing on the youngest couples because, in this stage, risky behaviors prevail (Borrás et al., 2017) and, in consequence, violent dynamics increase and start to be considered acceptable (Kidman & Kohler, 2020). Dating violence develops differently than adult intimate partner violence. Most of the relationships occur during youth, including the first dating experiences, which have an impact on the development and well-being of individuals and, unfortunately, constitute a clear indicator of intimate partner violence in the adult stage (Exner-Cortnes, 2014; López-Cepero et al., 2014; Van de Bongardt et al., 2015), since an early dysfunctional relationship could have negative consequences for the health of individuals (Exner-Cortnes, 2014; Shorey et al., 2012). Thus, adolescence and youth are considered risk factors for relationships, given the prevalence of violence in these stages, which is even higher than in marital relationships (Rubio-Garay et al., 2019).

It is worth noting that, when studying dating violence, there may be differences between adolescent couples and young couples. In fact, numerous studies focus on the violence that occurs in both types of couples (Cortés-Ayala et al., 2015; de la Villa et al., 2017; Pazos et al., 2014; Rubio-Garay et al., 2019); in young couples only (García-Carpintero et al., 2018; López-Cepero et al., 2015); and in adolescent couples only (Aizpitarte et al., 2017; Aizpitarte & Rojas-Solís, 2019; Zamora-Damián et al., 2018). In this sense, the relation between age and educational level should be taken into account; namely, as a general rule, adolescents are in the final phase of junior high school and in senior high school, and young people pursue higher education (college) courses. In addition, it is clear that the level of maturity is not the same at the beginning of adolescence as that at the end of youth. Some authors suggest a higher rate of

violence in adolescents and a reduction as they grow older (Jackson et al., 2000); however, other authors find no difference in this regard (Rubio-Garay et al., 2019). Even so, this problem exhibits many similarities in terms of violence.

Currently, several studies related to violence in young dating relationships state that men and women equally perpetrate violence. (Alegría & Rodríguez, 2015; Archer, 2000; Arnosó et al., 2017; Chen & Chan, 2019; Graña & Cuenca, 2014; Rojas-Solís et al., 2017; Straus, 2009). In Spain, judicial evidence shows that men usually exercise this phenomenon; nevertheless, community samples indicate that both sexes have the same predisposition to perpetrate violence (Graña & Cuenca, 2014). Furthermore, *bidirectional* violence (in which both partners are victim and aggressor in the same relationship) is more frequent (9%) than *unidirectional* violence (2%) (Alegría & Rodríguez, 2017; Archer, 2000; Arnosó et al., 2017; Graña & Cuenca, 2014; W. L. Johnson et al., 2015; Melander et al., 2010; Rojas-Solís et al., 2017; Rubio-Garay et al., 2019; Rubio-Garay et al., 2012; Straus, 2009; Zamora-Damián et al., 2018). In relationships, young people state that they have been mostly victims and aggressors at the same time (81.9% boys and 93% girls) rather than only aggressors (3.6% boys and 3.7% girls) (Rodríguez, 2015). Bidirectionality prevails in psychological aggressions by 80% compared to 25% of physical violence (Graña & Cuenca, 2014). Likewise, some findings reveal that women mainly perpetrate mild psychological and physical violence, but men, mostly physical violence (Chen & Chan, 2019; Graña & Cuenca, 2014; M. P. Johnson, 2011; Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2007; Rubio-Garay et al., 2017; Rubio-Garay et al., 2012; Straus, 2008).

Based on the above, both partners exercise and experience aggressions to similar extents (Riesgo González et al., 2019), although women are more frequently perceived as victims if the seriousness of the attacks is considered. Consequently, the use of inappropriate strategies for conflict resolution (poor communication, confrontations, reproaches, and criticism) is normalized among young people, exacerbating the levels of violence. (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001; Muñoz & Echeburúa, 2016; Rubio-Garay et al., 2019; Rubio-Garay et al., 2012; Trujano et al., 2010).

M. P. Johnson (2006, 2008, 2011) calls *situational violence* the type of violence that is visible in an episodic or reactive way during conflict contexts in which the two partners enter a spiral of violence. This is the most common form of intimate partner violence (Muñoz & Echeburúa, 2016); men and women exercise it at equal rates, with no intention of controlling or coercing the partner and rarely causing harm. Unlike *intimate terrorism* or coercive *controlling violence*, situational violence consists of situations of tension in which one or both partners resort to violent aggressions (Ferrer-Pérez & Bosch-Fiol, 2019).

Studies available on conflicts in adolescent and young couple relationships should have a real impact on society by contributing to it. Thus, this research is conducted with the purpose of formulating and solving questions whose answers help to find solutions to the problem, both from the theoretical and practical perspectives.

In summary, violence in adolescent and young couple relationships is frequent, since those couples with dysfunctional relationship dynamics resort to violence as a means of communication and conflict management, entering an escalation of violence, leading to stressful situations, and, as a result, causing adverse health effects (Exner-Cortnes, 2014; Muñoz & Echeburúa, 2016; Rojas-Solís et al., 2019). In addition, recent studies point out that these dysfunctional relationship dynamics are normalized, which leads young people to have low perception of abuse, even under high levels of dating violence victimization; this is what the Andalusian Institute for Women calls *technical abuse*. Therefore, it is important and necessary to address the individuals' awareness of being afraid of their partners or feeling mistreated in their dating relationships (López-Cepero et al., 2015; Riesgo González et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Franco et al., 2012).

Violence is not natural; individuals learn it (Echeburúa, 2019; Ibabe et al., 2020) intentionally, as well as to harm others. Saying that violence is only exercised by men means perpetuating traditional gender roles and denying the other side of violence, which currently occurs in most dating relationships (Riesgo González et al., 2019; Trujano et al., 2010). In this way, assuming that men are aggressors and women are victims should be ruled out, since not all cases are male intimate violence situations (Zamora-Damián et al., 2018). Therefore, the general objective of this research is to analyze the prevalence of victimization and violence perpetration in adolescent and young couples, identify the directionality of violence, and thus contribute to the intervention approach to favor healthy and satisfactory relationships.

The following specific exploratory objectives are proposed based on the general objective:

1. To analyze the prevalence of victimization and violence perpetration in couple relationships according to sex and age.
2. To determine the perception of abuse (mistreated/non-mistreated) of adolescent and young individuals and, therefore, contrast the existence or not of technical abuse.
3. To examine the unidirectionality or bidirectionality of dating violence based on victimization and on violence perpetration.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The sample consisted of 984 students from the Spanish provinces of Huelva, Seville, and Oviedo: 411 (41.8%) were men and 573 (58.2%) were women; all of them met the condition of having dated someone for at least 1 month. The ages were between 15 and 31 years and they were divided into the following groups: 15-19 (16.4%) and 20-31 (69.7%). The average duration of the dating relationship was 32.02 months (SD = 30.57). Namely, 25.7% had a short relationship (up to 6 months); 45.9%, a medium relationship (from 6 months to 3 years); and 28.4%, a long relationship (more than 3 years). Regarding the educational level, 256 individuals (26%) were students of junior high school, senior high school, and vocational training, and 556 (56.5%) college students. Only 15.8% indicated that they were working, compared to 51.2% who reported that they had no job at the time. As for the religious beliefs, 21.7% considered themselves not at all religious; 26.5%, moderately religious; and 16.6% very religious. As the percentages show, some of the participants did not answer all the items. Table 1 displays the complete sociodemographic profile.

2.2 Procedure

In the first place, authorization was requested to develop the research in both the compulsory secondary education institutions and the colleges of the different provinces. In addition, the purpose of the study was explained stating that it mainly aimed at getting to know the relationship dynamics of the adolescent and youth populations. Subsequently, the individuals were asked to take part in the study as voluntary and anonymous participants and they were provided with the instructions, the main objectives, and the usefulness of the study. If the individuals had dated more than once, they had to choose only one relationship to complete the questionnaire. With regard to the ethical criteria, given that there were underage participants, consent was requested to the principals of the institutions and the protection of personal data was ensured. The same procedure applied to the participants of legal age.

This research was conducted based on surveys applied to a non-probability, purposive or judgment sample, according to the necessary requirements to meet the objectives.

2.3 Assessment instruments

2.3.1 Sociodemographic characteristics

The sociodemographic information on the participants and their partners was collected. The requested data were sex, age, current educational level, approximate family income, job, and religious beliefs.

2.3.2 Dating violence

Dating Violence Questionnaire revised (DVQ-R) (Rodríguez-Díaz et al., 2017). This 20-item instrument collects in-

Table 1

Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample

Characteristics		Total (n = 984)	Women (n = 573)	Men (n = 411)
Age	15–31	\bar{x} 22.10	\bar{x} 21.48	\bar{x} 23.01
		n(%)	n(%)	n(%)
Education	Junior high school			
	Senior high school			
	Vocational training	256(26%)	115(20.1%)	141(34.3%)
	College	556(56.5%)	374(65.3%)	182(44.33%)
		n(%)	n(%)	n(%)
Family income	+2.500€	148(15%)	84(14.7%)	64(15.6%)
	2.500–900€	438(44.5%)	273(47.6%)	165(40.1%)
	-900€	123(12.5%)	71(12.4%)	52(12.7%)
		n(%)	n(%)	n(%)
Job	Yes	155(15.8%)	73(12.7%)	82(20%)
	No	504(51.2%)	337(58.8%)	167(40.6%)
		n(%)	n(%)	n(%)
Religious beliefs	Not at all religious	214(21.7%)	115(20.1%)	99(24.1%)
	Moderately religious	261(26.5%)	169(29.5%)	92(22.4%)
	Very religious	164(16.6%)	116(20.2%)	48(11.6%)

formation on victimization and perpetration, including abusive behaviors or situations that can occur in the relationship, and indicates the frequency using a Likert scale with five answer options: from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*all of the time*). By homogenizing the scores, the DVQ-R offers five differentiated forms of dating violence: *alienation*, *humiliation*, *coercion*, *physical violence*, and *sexual violence*. The internal consistency found in the sample and analyzed for the five scales ranges from .50 to .76 (Cronbach's alpha) and for the total scale $\alpha = .88$. This instrument has numerous adaptations and validations in different countries; its internal consistency for the five scales ranges from .64 to .74 (Cronbach's alpha) and for the total scale $\alpha = .85$. (López-Cepero et al., 2016; Presaghi et al., 2015; Rodríguez-Díaz et al., 2017).

2.3.3 Perception of mistreatment

Besides the previous questionnaire, three yes/no questions were formulated: *Are you or have you ever been afraid of your partner?*, *Do you feel or have you ever felt trapped in the relationship?*, *Have you ever felt mistreated in the relationship?* A Cronbach's alpha of .57 was obtained for all three items.

2.4 Statistical analysis

For the analysis of the data, the IBM SPSS statistical software, version 25, was used and the descriptive statistics of the relevant variables of the study were developed.

2.4.1 Prevalence of dating violence

First, the descriptive chi-square (χ^2) statistic was used to analyze the prevalence of victimization and violence perpetration.

This favored the definition of two groups for analysis, transforming the five factors of intimate violence (alienation, humiliation, coercion, sexual violence, and physical violence) into dichotomous variables (0 = there is no violence and 1 = there is violence) of *violence victimization*, *violence perpetration*, *total violence victimization*, and *total violence perpetration*. Subsequently, a classification tree was prepared, in which sex was the predictor variable and mistreatment factors, the criterion variables. The exhaustive CHAID procedure was intended to determine the most relevant predictors of both victimization and perpetration.

2.4.2 Perception of abuse

Two items of the questionnaire were selected: *Are you or have you ever been afraid of your partner?* and *Have you ever felt mistreated in the relationship?* In this way, two groups were created: the individuals who answered negatively the two questions were assigned the group of non-mistreated and those who answered affirmatively to one or both questions, the group of mistreated. Furthermore, on the one hand, we observed what the Andalusian Institute for Women defines as technical abuse, that is, those individuals who, even displaying indicators of experiencing an abusive relationship, have no perception of being mistreated. On the other hand, we considered this fear of the partners as an abuse indicator, as recommended by the UN in its last official macrosurvey on violence against women conducted in Spain (2015) and verified in subsequent empirical studies (Rodríguez-Franco et al., 2017).

2.4.3 Directionality of dating violence

The direction of violence was determined through the individuals who were assigned the abovementioned groups manifesting victimization and perpetration. Three groups were established to learn the directionality of violence in the couples: “Unidirectional violence” was understood as violence in which one partner is the victim and the other is the aggressor; “bidirectional violence” was defined as violence in which both partners act as victims and aggressors; and “healthy or positive relationship” was described as one in which neither partner claims to be a victim or an aggressor. Finally, an analysis for independent samples (Students *t*) was performed and the effect size (Cohens *d*) was calculated to identify the differences in the management of the five violence factors according to the unidirectionality or bidirectionality of violence.

3. Results

3.1 Prevalence of dating violence

Firstly, with the purpose of studying the prevalence of victimization and violence perpetration, the analysis of the chi-square statistic (χ^2) shown in Tables 2 and 3 was conducted. These results demonstrate significant differences concerning violence between men and women for victimization related to alienation, that is, stopping talking, ignoring the feelings of the partner, and even disappearing (61-39%; $\chi^2 = 3.410, p < .05$), as well as for physical violence (46.1-53.9%; $\chi^2 = 12.074, p < .001$) (Table 2). As it can be seen, the other variables were not significant, but both men and women manifest high prevalence of victimization. Furthermore, in our sample, physical violence and alienation are the factors with the highest percentage in men and in women, respectively. Lastly, overall, victimization (total victimization) was not significant, although the highest percentage occurred in women (58.1-41.9%; $\chi^2 = .019; p > .05$).

Table 2

Prevalence of violence victimization in women and men

Factors of violence	Victimization Women (%)	Men (%)	χ^2
Total victimization	58.1%	41.9%	.019
Alienation	61%	39%	3.410*
Humiliation	55.8%	44.2%	1.797
Coercion	55.9%	44.1%	1.982
Sexual	60.6%	39.4%	.676
Physical	46.1%	53.9%	12.074***

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 3 shows the prevalence of violence perpetration reported by women and men, where women perpetrate (total perpetration) more intimate dating violence (59.9-40.1%; $\chi^2 = 2.439; p > .05$). Specifically, coercion

(63.2-36.8%; $\chi^2 = 7.754, p < .001$), sexual violence (36.6-63.4%; $\chi^2 = 32.863, p < .001$), and physical violence (65.9-34.1%; $\chi^2 = 3.581, p < .05$) were significant. Indices of factors of violence perpetration range between 34% and 66%. In addition, it can be stated that women present higher percentages of perpetrated psychological violence; specifically, related to coercion, control, or retention of the partner, followed by alienation and humiliation of the partner. However, men show higher levels of sexual violence perpetration.

Table 3

Prevalence of violence perpetration in women and men

Factors of violence	Perpretation Women (%)	Men (%)	χ^2
Total perpetration	59.9%	40.1%	2.439
Alienation	57.2%	42.8%	.460*
Humiliation	57%	43%	.373
Coercion	63.2%	36.8%	7.754***
Sexual	36.6%	63.4%	32.863***
Physical	65.9%	34.1%	3.581*

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

In order to be more specific about the type of violence experienced and exercised by the young people in our sample, we have created two decision trees (Figure 1 and Figure 2) using sex as the predictor variable (independent variable) and, as criterion variables (dependent variables), the factors related to dating violence victimization (Figure 1) and dating violence perpetration (Figure 2).

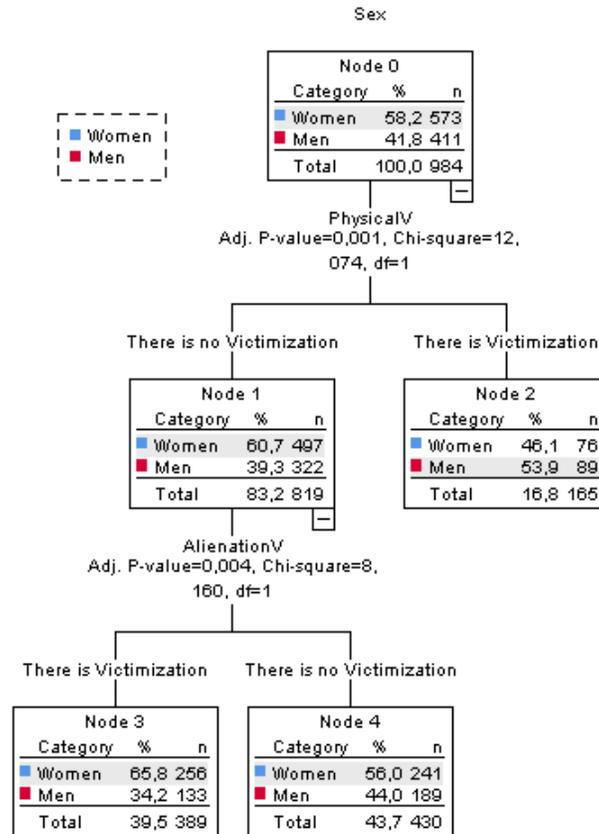
We studied the association between the sex variable and victimization in the different factors of abuse. To this end, a classification tree was created using the exhaustive CHAID approach, which performs chi-square automatic interaction detection by choosing in each step the predictor variable that displays the strongest interaction with the dependent variable; and the cross-validation option was chosen to evaluate the behavior of the model created to generalize the results to larger samples.

Focusing on the classification tree (Figure 1), it can be affirmed that there is a higher percentage of physical victimization in men (53.9%), highlighting a corrected *p*-value = .001; and, when this victimization does not exist, women present a higher victimization related to alienation (65.8%) compared to men, with a corrected *p*-value = .004. The overall specificity for the model has been 59.6%; however, it should be noted that the correct percentage for women reaches 86.7%, while for men it only amounts to 21.7%. Therefore, the risk estimate is 40%.

In the classification tree shown above, the relationships between sex and perpetration of the different factors of abuse were analyzed. The exhaustive CHAID procedure was performed again with cross-validation.

Figure 1

Classification tree of victimization according to sex



For this model, the overall specificity has been a little higher (62.2%), showing again a very remarkable difference between the correct percentage displayed by men (22.4%) and women (90.8%), as well as a lower risk estimate (below 38%).

In this case, the results obtained indicate that the percentage of sexual perpetration of men (63.4%) is higher than that of women (36.6%) (Figure 2). This result has a corrected p -value = .000 that, since it is lower than .05, is considered significant. The following node suggests that when there is no sexual perpetration, coercive perpetration occurs in 71.7% of women with a corrected p -value = .000. Finally, out of that percentage of women, 82.5% also perpetrates physical violence with a corrected p -value = .032.

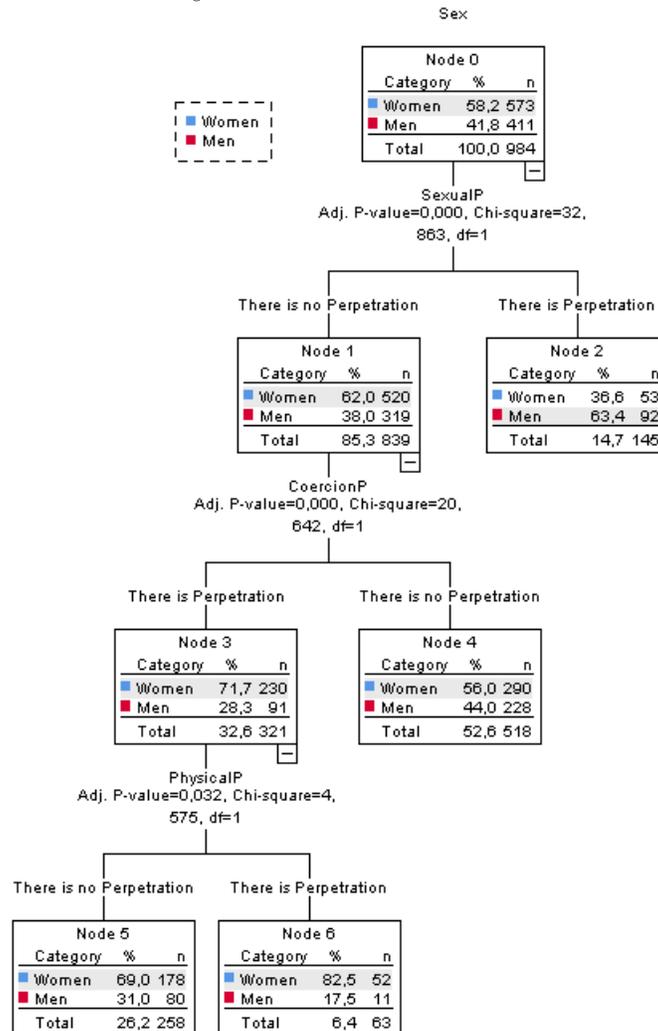
Victimization and perpetration were also studied from the age perspective; to this end, the sample was divided into two groups: adolescents (15-19 years) and young adults (20-29 years). An analysis of the chi-square statistic (χ^2) was conducted and the results are shown in Table 4. Regarding victimization, the results suggest that there are significant differences between violence related to alienation (59.6-49.3%; $\chi^2 = 5.597, p < .05$) and violence related to coercion (52.2-43.4%; $\chi^2 = 4.017, p < .05$).

As for perpetration, no significant differences were identified between adolescents and young people. Despite the few significant differences found, data demonstrate that adolescents have the highest rates of both victimization and perpetration. However, these data should be approached with caution, given that the group of adolescents is much smaller than that of young adults and, if it were expanded, it would probably go in the same direction.

Subsequently, each sample was analyzed separately aiming at identifying possible differences regarding sex. The results indicate that, in the sample of adolescents, there were differences in physical victimization (12.8-31.8%; %; $\chi^2 = 7.814, p < .05$), being boys the ones with the highest rates of victimization, and in sexual perpetration (8.5-22.7%; %; $\chi^2 = 5.190, p < .05$), being boys again the ones who perpetrated this type of violence more frequently. With regard to the sample of young adults, the results were virtually the same: physical victimization (12.2-17.1%; $\chi^2 = 3.226, p < .05$), sexual perpetration (9.9-19.5%; $\chi^2 = 12.667, p < .01$), and physical perpetration (13.7-8.5%; $\chi^2 = 4.468, p < .05$). The only difference from adolescents was observed in physical perpetration, where girls had the highest percentage.

Figure 2

Classification tree of perpetration according to sex



3.2 Perception of abuse

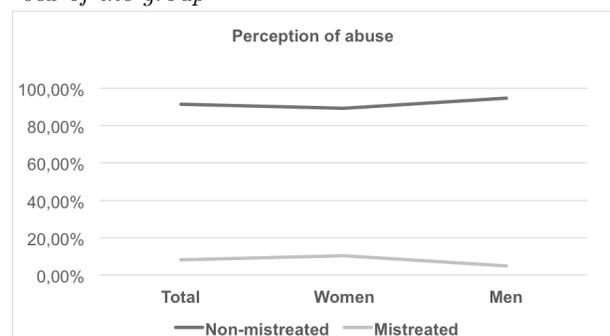
After realizing the high prevalence of violence, we analyzed participants perception of these violence indicators, which should lead them to be aware of their abusive relationships; however, the results reveal the opposite (Figure 3). Only 8.4% of the sample recognized that they were being abused in the relationship, compared to 91.6% of the participants who did not recognize that they were being victims of mistreatment. Men were the ones who least frequently identified themselves as abused with 97.9%, compared to women with 89.2%. This evidences what is considered *technical abuse*, since, in spite of having high rates of abuse indicators, they did not perceive themselves as abused.

3.3 Directionality of dating violence

Table 5 shows the directionality of violence according to sex. The highest percentage was observed in bidirectional violence, that is, 65.20% of participants reported

Figure 3

Prevalence of perception of abuse according to the sex of the group



themselves as aggressors and victims at the same time in their couple relationships, while 14.30% affirmed that they were only victims or only aggressors.

Table 4

Prevalence of violence victimization and perpetration in adolescents and young people

Factors of violence	Victimization	Adolescents (%)	Young people (%)	χ^2
Total victimization		78.3%	72.6%	2.158
	Alienation	59.6%	49.3%	3.597*
	Humiliation	42.2%	44.1%	.001
	Coercion	52.2%	43.4%	4.017*
	Sexual	21.7%	21.4%	.007
	Physical	18%	14.3%	1.421
Factors of violence	Perpetration			
Total perpetration		70.2%	67.5%	.435
	Alienation	53.4%	47.2%	1.998
	Humiliation	39.1%	38%	.065
	Coercion	45.3%	40.8%	1.099
	Sexual	12.4%	14%	.273**
	Physical	10.6%	11.5%	.119*

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 5

Directionality of dating violence

	Total (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Healthy relationship (No aggressor-No victim)	20.40%	20.10%	20.90%
Total unidirectional violence	14.30%	13.30%	15.80%
Unidirectional violence (Aggressor-No victim)	4.40%	4.90%	3.60%
Unidirectional violence (No aggressor-Victim)	10%	8.40%	12.20%
Bidirectional violence (Aggressor-Victim)	65.20%	66.70%	63.30%

The most perpetrated factors of violence, according to the directionality of violence (unidirectional or bidirectional), are shown in Table 6. Through the analysis of Students *t*, it can be observed that all factors displayed significant differences. It can also be concluded that bidirectional violence was the most frequent and that perpetration of psychological violence had the highest prevalence, being alienation ($t(683) = 2.847; p < .01$), humiliation ($t(683) = 2.969; p < .01$), and coercion ($t(683) = 4.670; p < .001$) the most common types; followed by the most aggressive factors, that is, sexual violence ($t(683) = 4.840; p < .001$) and physical violence ($t(683) = 12.696; p < .001$) the latter not being exercised when violence is unidirectional. All effect sizes were between moderate and considerable.

4. Discussion

In recent times, dating violence has become a problem of social relevance (Ferrer-Pérez & Bosch-Fiol, 2019) that affects our social and psychological well-being. For this reason, studying dating relationships at an early age is vital to identify the relational dynamics and commu-

nicative styles that begin to take shape and that will be used in subsequent relationships (Exner-Cortnes, 2014; López-Cepero et al., 2014). In consequence, the main objective of this study was to analyze victimization and violence perpetration in dating relationships and to determine the directionality of violence in our sample, in order to properly address a phenomenon that is emerging in our society and that is showing the other side of social reality.

In the first place, this work studied the prevalence of victimization and perpetration in relation to sex. Specifically, our data suggest that violence is exercised and experienced by both men and women in the same way. Women exercise more psychological and physical violence (and also experience it). Consequently, men present higher levels of physical victimization and exercise more sexual violence (Cortés-Ayala et al., 2015; García-Carpintero et al., 2018; Kidman & Kohler, 2020; Pazos et al., 2014; Rodríguez, 2015; Rubio-Garay et al., 2017). In addition, we have observed that, in the absence of physical victimization, psychological victimization occurs, mainly related to alienation, especially in women. Regarding violence perpetration, when there is no sexual violence, coercive and physical violence occurs, being, again, more commonly perpetrated by women. However, the models analyzed do not classify men properly, so it cannot be stated that there are significant differences in relation to sex. This means that both men and women exercise violence, which confirms the findings of studies with community samples that follow the line of research on the bidirectionality of violent behavior.

Our results are, therefore, consistent with research works that have demonstrated bidirectional violence recurrence in dating relationships (Alegría & Rodríguez, 2015, 2017; Arnosó et al., 2017; Chen & Chan, 2019; Graña & Cuenca, 2014; Melander et al., 2010; Rojas-

Table 6

Factors of violence perpetrated according to directionality of violence

Directionality of violence/Dating violence perpetration	Unidirectional violence \bar{x}	Bidirectional violence \bar{x}	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>d</i>
Alienation	.51	.74	2.847**	683	.51
Humiliation	.35	.57	2.969**	683	.44
Coercion	.30	.64	4.670***	683	.70
Sexual	.05	.22	4.840***	683	.41
Physical	.00	.20	12.696***	683	.51

Note. \bar{x} : Average; *t*: Student's *t*; *df*: Degrees of freedom; *d*: Cohen's *d*; * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Solís et al., 2017; Rubio-Garay et al., 2019; Rubio-Garay et al., 2017; Rubio-Garay et al., 2012; Zamora-Damián et al., 2018). In this study, the directionality of violence was studied after identifying those participants with victimization, perpetration, or both indicators in the same relationship. Data reveal that bidirectional violence occurs in a much higher percentage than unidirectional violence among the relationships of our sample. It is predominantly manifested in psychological aggressions (alienation, humiliation, and coercion) and, to a lesser extent, in sexual and physical aggressions, which agrees with the study by Chen and Chan (2019), who report that, except for sexual and serious physical violence – which are unidirectional– most violent behaviors in couples are bidirectional. Therefore, after all the analyses conducted, we can conclude that psychological violence is the most frequent among the young people in our sample. These findings are in accord with research works conducted by other authors who claim that bidirectionality can be generally found in psychological violence and that this directionality decreases when the severity of the behavior increases with physical violence (Chen & Chan, 2019; Graña & Cuenca, 2014; Rubio-Garay et al., 2012).

Another objective of the research was to approach differences in both victimization and perpetration between adolescents and young adults. With regard to adolescents, we should keep in mind that this is a critical stage when individuals start assuming responsibilities and establish their first dating relationships. It is known that adolescents' and young adults dating relationships are different from those of adult couples in terms of level of commitment, responsibility, duration, etc. In addition, violence within the couple also differs: it is usually reciprocal and less severe. Our results suggest that the youngest couples have the highest percentages in both victimization and perpetration, thus supporting the conclusions of most studies conducted with this type of population (Aizpitarte et al., 2017; Aizpitarte & Rojas-Solís, 2019; Cortés-Ayala et al., 2015; de la Villa et al., 2017; Pazos et al., 2014; Zamora-Damián et al., 2018).

It is worth highlighting that the amount of young people who do not feel mistreated in their relationships or who are not aware of being in abusive relationships

is much higher than that of individuals who do perceive themselves as being mistreated, which explains such high percentages of psychological violence. Recognizing themselves as mistreated is complicated for young populations, especially for men, who use to be socially labeled as violent (López-Cepero et al., 2015). In our study, as in many others, this is called *technical abuse*, since, despite having important indicators of violence, individuals do not perceive themselves as abused. In summary, this evidences the need to improve and increase the availability of resources to support young populations, especially in the identification of indicators that are not visible and lead to a lack of perception of abuse (López-Cepero et al., 2015; Rodríguez-Franco et al., 2012).

Finally, it is possible to draw conclusions that contribute to the development of prevention and intervention programs, modifying the approach to this social problem (Ferrer-Pérez & Bosch-Fiol, 2019). In order to help young people by means of respect-based education, we must place greater emphasis on psychological violence and on the use of strategies to deal with *situational violence*. By addressing risk factors, it is possible to solve episodic or reactive situations using positive strategies that prevent violent aggressions. For this reason, it would be useful to make progress with the study of relationship conflict resolution strategies in future studies (Rojas-Solís et al., 2019). This is a great opportunity to guide young people in healthy interpersonal relationship dynamics, since, after being immersed in a first problematic relationship, the capacity to identify inappropriate ones may increase. In this way, it is fundamental to teach them how to respond positively to conflicts and, therefore, stop those destructive patterns of communication to build solid, healthy, lasting, and respectful relationships. To this end, learning and becoming aware of psychological violence, but also of conflict coping skills and egalitarian attitudes about gender roles, are indispensable, as they could prevent wrong learning that is inevitably consolidated and transferred to subsequent relationships –as suggested by different studies– besides being a predictor of physical violence (Exner-Cortnes, 2014; Juarros-Basterretxea et al., 2019; Rubio-Garay et al., 2019; Van de Bongardt et al., 2015).

As for the main limitations of this research, we can mention, on the one hand, methodological aspects such as the sample size; therefore, it would be interesting to increase the groups in order to generalize, to a greater extent, the results about victimization and violence perpetration. In this sense, expanding the group of adolescents would also be important. On the other hand, in order to conduct a more exhaustive study on bidirectional violence, it would be interesting to determine whether violent responses are reactive.

As a proposal for future research works, the two partners are being assessed to obtain more information that can be contrasted from the two perspectives of the couple, given that the subject of the study has a great impact on society and needs attention from the different professionals who work in this field.

As a general conclusion, relationship conflicts among adolescent and young couples are bidirectional, being psychological violence (alienation, humiliation, and coercion) the most common manifestation. According to numerous studies, sexual violence is still more frequent among boys. Finally, it is worth noting that adolescents seem to be more susceptible to both perpetration and victimization.

Undoubtedly, it is necessary to highlight the clinical and social relevance of this type of research works. In particular, the clinical relevance lies in the importance of detecting cases of unperceived mistreatment in order to provide help and, of course, make the problem visible. The social relevance, for its part, tries to show that violent behaviors should never be normalized. For all these reasons, it is important to take action as soon as possible, offering the youngest couples adequate tools to solve the conflicts that may arise in their relationships and, in this way, prevent the consolidation of violent behaviors and promote healthy relationships. This would increase the efficiency of intervention programs and improve the support plans and strategies addressed to youth.

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