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ADOLESCENT DATING VIOLENCE AMONG NICARAGUAN YOUTHS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the rates of victimization and perpetration of physical, sexual, and psychological dating violence among a sample of 193 ever-partnered Nicaraguan adolescents. Findings reveal high levels of partner violence, with 20% of students experiencing physical violence, 27% experiencing sexual violence, and 45-83% experiencing different types of psychological violence. For both victimization and perpetration, physical and sexual abuse were found to be positively correlated with psychological abuse, most notably for girl victims. We analyze the gender dynamics of the findings, contextualize them in a sociocultural analysis, and provide directions for prevention and future research.

ADOLESCENT DATING VIOLENCE AMONG NICARAGUAN YOUTHS

Intimate partner violence (IPV) in adult and marital relationships has long been a topic of interest for psychologists and social science researchers. More recently, adolescent dating violence (ADV), or violence that occurs in adolescent dating relationships, has also been recognized as an issue of concern, with studies from North America showing that between 10-30% of adolescents have experienced physical ADV (Foshee et al., 1996; Coker, Smith, Bethea, King, & McKeown, 2000; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2000). Unfortunately, empirical research on ADV remains limited in the developing world, and existing research often does not focus exclusively on adolescents but also includes responses from young adults. In one such study based on WHO data from nine low and middle-income countries, the proportion of women aged 15-24 who experienced physical or sexual partner violence in the previous 12 months ranged from 8% in urban Serbia to 57% in rural Ethiopia (Stöckl, March, Pallitto, & Garcia-Moreno, 2014). Disturbingly, in eight of nine countries, adolescents and young women experienced higher levels of partner violence in the previous 12 months than women in any other age group.

A wide variety of actions and behaviors constitute partner violence, and abusive actions are commonly placed into one of three categories: physical, sexual, or emotional/psychological. Psychological abuse is the broadest of these categories and is often used as an umbrella term for narrower categories of nonphysical abuse, such as verbal abuse, emotional manipulation, and controlling behavior (Teten, Ball, Valle, Noonan, & Rosenbluth, 2009). Physical and sexual IPV have more often been the focus of researchers' attention and media reports due to assumptions that they result in greater trauma for victims, although research has challenged this assumption. In a study of abused women in the United States, 72% reported that the psychological abuse

affected them more severely than the physical abuse (Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990). Additionally, psychological violence has been shown to precede physical violence in relationships and to occur at higher rates than physical violence (Sackett & Saunders, 1999; Bonomi et al., 2012). Despite the body of research outlining the gravity of psychological abuse, scales used in IPV research often emphasize physical violence while ignoring or misrepresenting psychological violence – thus failing to capture the full complexity of partner violence (Strauchler et al., 2004).

The health consequences of partner violence are extensive and well documented; adult victims are more likely to experience depression, chronic pain, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other health-related difficulties (Coker et al., 2002; Campbell, 2002), and the health consequences of psychological violence are at least as severe as those of physical or sexual violence (Yoshihama, Horrocks, & Kamano, 2009). In fact, some research shows that women who experience psychological violence report higher rates of PTSD and depression than women who experience physical violence alone (Tiwari et al., 2008; Pico-Alfonso, 2005). Although research on the health consequences of ADV is much more limited, existing research suggests that they do not differ significantly from those of IPV (Ackard, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007). In addition, ADV and IPV victimization do not exist independently of each other; girls who experience ADV are significantly more likely to experience IPV in adulthood (Humphrey & White, 2000; Smith, White, & Holland, 2003).

Thus far, this review has focused on the consequences of partner violence for women and girls; however, the extent to which IPV and ADV are gendered phenomena is a controversial topic among academics. A large body of research has shown symmetry of physical violence perpetration by gender, which seems to contradict feminist theory and the oft-repeated narrative

of men as the aggressors, leading some scholars to claim that IPV is ‘gender balanced’ (Straus, 1993; Currie, 1999). However, this analysis is extremely limited in that it only recognizes gender as an individual characteristic; first, it fails to explain the differences *among* individuals within a gender (Anderson, 2005), and second, it ignores the concept of gender as a social structure that influences the way we interact with others and the opportunities and constraints we experience on the basis of our gender (Risman, 2004).

Removing the act of violence from the social context in which it occurs leads to flawed assumptions about its causes and effects – first, that similar rates of perpetration signify that IPV/ADV negatively affects the health men/boys to the same extent as women/girls; and second, that the root cause of the behavior is similar for men/boys and women/girls (Reed, Raj, Miller, & Silverman, 2010). The first assumption is simply not consistent with the vast majority of IPV research – women victims experience more severe and longer-lasting physical and mental health consequences than men victims (Caldwell, Swan, & Woodbrown, 2012) and perceive partner violence as more serious and threatening than men do (Petrosky et al., 2017). Additionally, some forms of IPV, such as sexual violence and homicide, are notably gender-asymmetric (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Molidor & Tolman, 1998; Petrosky et al., 2017).

The second assumption, that the root causes of IPV/ADV perpetration are similar for men and women, neglects to consider the complex ways gender plays a role in motivations to commit violence (Anderson, 2005). In the context of relationships, gender is often the determining factor in how partners divide authority and responsibilities (Anderson & Umberson, 2001). Traditional gender roles, rooted in historically unequal power relations between men and women, place men at the head of the household and, as a result, imply that they can/should exercise control over their female partners. If we consider gender as a ‘performance’ we undertake in our interactions

with others (Butler, 2004; Risman, 2009), we see how traditional gender norms influence those performances and how they differ by gender. In many cultures, violence in men is perceived and encouraged as an important way men ‘perform’ masculinity (Anderson, 2005). When men feel their masculinity is being challenged, they are encouraged by society to respond aggressively, lest they be considered ‘emasculated.’ Indeed, the very idea behind the word ‘emasculate’ (that one’s masculinity, or identity as man, can be taken away from him) reflects the idea that masculinity must be defended. On the other hand, women are often discouraged from participating in violence, both institutionally (e.g., violent sports, military service) and socially (e.g., engaging in physical fights). Though the ways we perform gender are infinitely complex and beyond the scope of this article, it is clear that the motivations for men and women to commit violence are strongly influenced by the social construction of gender.

In Nicaragua, cultural context encourages the use of controlling behavior in relationships for both women and men. As in other Latin American countries, the act of men performing gender is referred to as *machismo*. *Machismo* in Nicaragua has been defined as “a heady mixture of paternalism, aggression, systematic subordination of women, fetishism of women’s bodies, and idolization of their reproductive and nurturing capacities, coupled with a rejection of homosexuality” (Sternberg, 2000, p. 91). The partner of *machismo* is *marianismo*, a hyper-feminine portrayal of women based on ideals of sexual purity, morality, and nurturing/mothering capabilities (Stevens, 1973). While clearly an oversimplification and generalization of the roles women and men play in Nicaraguan society, the ideals of *marianismo* and *machismo* encourage the use of control and continue to be reflected in the rigid gender norms of society. In a focus group of Nicaraguan men, participants perceived fidelity in a relationship to be the female partner’s responsibility to monitor, as men’s sexuality was seen as less controllable; inversely,

they felt motivated to control their partner because female infidelity was seen as a reflection of her male partner's inability to control her or to meet her sexual needs (Sternberg, 2000). Clearly, controlling behavior is far from harmless; it is a form of psychological abuse that can have devastating consequences. In interviews with abused women in León, Nicaragua, Ellsberg and colleagues (2000) found that extreme jealousy and control were “constant features of the abusive relationship” (2000, p. 1602), with one-third of abused women identifying their partner's jealousy as the principal cause of violence. Similarly, a study conducted among rural Nicaraguan women on the role of power and control in partner violence found that higher levels of male control within a relationship was predictive of significantly higher levels of physical, sexual, and psychological violence against their female partner (Grose & Grabe, 2014).

Additionally, these sociocultural narratives encourage and normalize sexually abusive behavior. First, the ideals of *marianismo* serve to place women into two categories – those who live up to the ideals, and thus deserve respect, and those who don't, and thus deserve ridicule, humiliation, and/or abuse. Second, defining men's sexuality as less controllable minimizes the responsibility of the perpetrator and promotes victim-blaming attitudes that paint the female victim as the ‘provocateur’ (Sable, Danis, Mauzy, & Gallagher, 2006), leading to shame, stigma, and self-blame that often prevent the self-reporting of sexual assault (Weiss, 2010). Third, the ideals of *machismo* that demand men/boys to be strong, dominant, and hypersexual are likely to deter them from reporting abuse from their female partners.

Research is limited on the extent of gender-based violence in Nicaragua. Some studies are available on IPV, however, information on the rates varies significantly by source. In two regionally representative studies of women, Ellsberg and colleagues (2001) found a lifetime prevalence rate for physical IPV victimization of 69% in Managua and 52% in León, the largest

two cities in the country. Official statistics from the national health survey place the figure much lower, at a 27% lifetime prevalence rate among women for physical IPV victimization (INIDE, 2008). Methodological factors (such as the type of analysis used and the number of questions regarding IPV included on the survey) and underreporting (and the measures taken/not taken to minimize it) can lead to very different estimated rates of prevalence among researchers.

Whereas some information is available on IPV, to our knowledge, no data exists on the prevalence of ADV in Nicaragua. From this vantage point, our empirical study on partner violence among adolescents in 5 schools of Managua and León starts filling the empirical gap. Besides challenging the idea that partner violence is an adult phenomenon, our study also highlights boys' ADV victimization and girls' ADV perpetration, which is somehow counter to the ruling gender identities in Nicaragua. While we focus on heterosexual dating relationships, we acknowledge that adolescents with gender identities that are different from their biological sex might face even higher rates of violence. As previous studies (see e.g. Haglund, Belknap, Edwards, Tassara, Van Hoven & Woda, 2019) have highlighted the importance of controlling behavior in contexts of strong 'machismo ideology', we pay specific attention to psychological abuse and the interrelationship with physical and sexual abuse.

METHODS

Participants

This study was conducted among high school students in Managua and León – the first and second largest cities in the country respectively – and includes survey responses of 193 students. The initial sample consisted of 325 students, but a portion of students were excluded from the analysis for the following reasons: failing to identify their gender ($n=5$), being over the

age of 20 ($n=24$), never having been in a dating relationship ($n=83$), and not responding to the section on ADV perpetration/victimization ($n=20$).

Participants were chosen using convenience sampling, as the survey was conducted only in schools that received approval from the school director. In total, five high schools participated in the study, all located in urban or suburban areas. Three schools were located in the capital city of Managua, and two were in the city of León. By chance, the participating schools in Managua were public schools, and those in León were private schools. Five additional private schools were contacted but did not agree to participate in the study. Significant difficulties were encountered in requesting authorization from public schools, as contact information for administrative staff is not generally available online, and many schools lack any means of contact, such as phone lines or work email addresses. Access to all five participating schools was only made possible through the assistance of key local contacts such as NGO staff.

Managua and León are the two largest cities in Nicaragua respectively. As both are highly urban environments, we believe the more important variable is school type (public or private), as it is often associated with income level and socio-economic status (Gutierrez & Tanaka, 2009), variables which are themselves often correlated with levels of violence (Flood & Pease, 2009).

Prior to distributing the survey, students were informed of its purpose and content, as well as its anonymous and voluntary nature. For privacy, students were provided with envelopes in which to seal the completed surveys. After all surveys had been collected, students received a brief lecture on the severity of relationship violence and abuse and were informed of local ADV resources in their communities, such as NGOs, that could provide them with assistance.

Terminology and scope

Studies that examine IPV/ADV often differ in terminology and scope of violence. In this article, the terms *violence* and *abuse* will be used interchangeably. There is no agreed-upon convention on scope; some studies instruct participants to only report instances of violence in the previous 12 months, others instruct them to only consider their most significant or worst relationship, while others use lifetime perpetration rates. This survey measured lifetime experiences with partner violence for two reasons – first, underreporting is a common challenge associated with collecting data on IPV/ADV and using a narrow time frame could further underestimate the problem; second, the physical and emotional effects of violence can last far longer than 12 months and thus deserve recognition (Ellsberg, Heise, Pena, Agurto, & Winkvist, 2001).

Measures

The survey used in this study consisted of 11 demographic questions and 21 questions regarding ADV. The ADV questions were selected (and some modified) from two validated questionnaires – the Dating Violence Questionnaire (DVQ) and a more recent, shorter version by the same authors (DVQ-R), both of which were developed for and validated among native Spanish-speaking adolescents (García-Cueto et al., 2015; Rodriguez-Diaz et al., 2017). This survey used the same five categories of abuse as the DVQ-R (listed further in this section) and included a similar number of questions per category of abuse. Questions were selected from the DVQ and DVQ-R based on length considerations and relevance to dating relationships in Nicaragua.

The demographic section contained questions on the following characteristics: age, gender, parents living in the home, highest education level completed by mother and father, civil

status, whether they had children, experience in a dating relationship, and the floor material of their house (as a proxy variable for income).

In the second section, five categories of abuse were measured: physical, sexual, detachment, humiliation, and coercion; the final three categories are more broadly considered as psychological abuse. Students were presented with abusive actions and asked to identify how often each action had been committed against them (victimization), and how often they had committed each action against their partner (perpetration). Students responded to each statement using a 5-point Likert scale of frequency, from 'Never' to 'Always'.

Results were calculated and analyzed in two ways: as a dichotomous variable (yes/no answer, displayed as a percentage) and an interval variable (a scale of frequency of abuse, displayed as a numeric score). For ADV as an interval scale, each response was assigned a value from zero to four based on frequency (zero for 'Never' to four for 'Always'). The responses for each category of abuse were then summed to create an interval scale. Including the frequency of abuse in the analysis provided insight that would otherwise have been unrecognized by only examining rates of prevalence. While this method is open to criticism (e.g., the subjective distance between 'a few times' and 'sometimes'; Jamieson, 2004; higher likelihood of committing a type I error because of multiple testing; Miller, 1981), summing abusive instances is conventional in research assessing violence and "brings some consistency and manageability to the study of violence" (Margolin et al., 2009, p. 40). Throughout this article, abuse as a dichotomous variable will be mainly referred to as 'prevalence', while abuse as an interval variable will be referred to as 'frequency.'

RESULTS

Demographic characteristics

The responses of 193 ever-partnered students between the ages of 13 and 20 were included in this study. 47% of respondents were girls, and 53% were boys (see Table 1). The boy-to-girl ratio was slightly higher in private schools than in public schools, although differences are not statistically significant. The majority of respondents attended public schools (70.5%).

As expected, notable differences were found in income level between public and private school students, measured through a proxy variable of floor material. In the survey, students were asked to select the floor material in their homes from a list of five materials of differing quality and price – the same materials as those used to estimate income in a national survey by the Central Bank of Nicaragua (2007). The homes of private school students had significantly higher quality floor material compared to the homes of public school students ($p=.00$), and not a single private school student reported living in a home with a dirt floor, compared to 17.9% of public school students.

Prevalence of ADV victimization

93.8% of students in this sample reported experiencing at least one type of abuse from a dating partner. Physical violence was the least prevalent category, affecting just over 20% of students (see Table 2). The most prevalent form of abuse was coercion (controlling behavior), experienced by a striking 82.9% of students. As seen in Table 3, public school students had significantly lower odds of experiencing sexual violence than private school students. Gender was not significantly associated with greater odds of experiencing physical or sexual violence.

On average, girls experienced more dating violence in all categories, although humiliation was the only category in which the difference by gender was statistically significant, in both the overall population and among public school students (Table 2). Among private school

students, the difference was large at 13.1%, but not statistically significant. Interestingly, among the latter group of students, physical and sexual violence as well as detachment was higher (although not statistically significant) among boys than girls (Table 2). Upon further analysis, the latter difference can be primarily contributed to one private school, from which 60% of boys (9 of 15) reported sexual abuse and 33.3% (5 of 15) reported physical abuse, compared to 33.3% and 22.2% of girls respectively. For the other private school, rates of violence among boys were similar to or lower than levels experienced by girls in the same school (but still considerably higher than rates experienced by their public school peers). Comparing rates of violence between public and private school students in general highlights that prevalence is higher among the latter for all types of violence.

Frequency of ADV Victimization

While ‘prevalence’ examines the number of students who experience each type of violence (without considering the number of occurrences), ‘frequency’ examines how often each type of abuse occurred. Consistent with findings in Table 2 above, private school students experienced more frequent abuse than public school students in almost every category (see Table 4).

However, a few important differences emerged among private school students. First, frequency rates of physical and sexual abuse among private school students look remarkably different than in the prevalence data above. Private school girls reported a slightly higher frequency of sexual abuse in Table 4 below, a notable reversal from the findings in Table 2 that showed a much higher prevalence rate of sexual abuse among private school boys. In Table 4, the frequency of physical abuse is nearly equal between private school girls and boys, despite a difference of 8 percentage points in Table 2.

Second, the category of coercion stands out for being remarkably high. In Table 2, coercion was also the most prevalent type of abuse, experienced by 13% more students than the second most prevalent category (detachment). However, the difference between coercion and detachment is much more significant in Table 4 – students experienced coercion *140%* more often than they experienced detachment.

Prevalence of ADV Perpetration

The prevalence of abuse perpetration shows additional differences between girls and boys. Girls committed significantly more physical abuse, and boys committed significantly more sexual abuse (Table 5). Similarly, girls had significantly greater odds of committing physical abuse, and boys had significantly greater odds of committing sexual abuse (Table 6).

Similar to rates of victimization, private school students reported committing more abuse in all categories. This difference was statistically significant for sexual abuse ($p<.01$), humiliation ($p<.05$), and coercion ($p<.01$). As seen in Table 6, private school students also had significantly greater odds of committing sexual abuse.

Frequency of ADV Perpetration

Consistent with rates of prevalence, rates of frequency in Table 7 show a significantly higher frequency of physical abuse perpetration among girls, and a significantly higher frequency of sexual abuse perpetration among boys. Again, we see that all students (particularly private school students) use coercive behavior with their partners much more frequently than any other type of abusive behavior.

Interrelationships among types of abuse

Multiple types of abuse often occur simultaneously in relationships. For girls, a positive correlation was found between physical abuse victimization and sexual abuse victimization ($r_s =$

.3061, $p = .0032$), and girls who had experienced physical abuse also reported *five times* more sexual abuse than their female peers ($p < .05$). No correlation between physical and sexual abuse was found for boys.

Strong correlations were also found between physical/sexual abuse and psychological abuse. As mentioned previously, psychological abuse has been found to precede physical abuse in relationships (Sackett & Saunders, 1999). While this study did not determine the chronology of abusive incidents, very few students who had experienced physical or sexual abuse reported low rates of psychological abuse.

As seen in Table 8, for girls, experiencing humiliation and coercion were significantly associated with increased odds of experiencing both physical and sexual abuse. Boys had significantly greater odds of experiencing physical abuse with higher levels of coercion, and significantly greater odds of experiencing sexual abuse with higher levels of all three types of psychological abuse.

These findings were consistent for rates of perpetration; students who perpetrated physical or sexual abuse also committed significantly more psychological abuse. As seen in Table 9, girls had significantly higher odds of perpetrating sexual abuse with increased perpetration levels of all three types of psychological abuse. Boys had significantly greater odds of committing physical abuse with increased levels of coercion and significantly greater odds of committing sexual abuse with increased levels of coercion and detachment.

DISCUSSION

Two surprising findings emerged from our data on the prevalence of ADV victimization. First, in many categories, rates of violence were higher among private school students than public school students, in contradiction to IPV research that has often found an association

between lower socioeconomic status and higher rates of violence (Flood & Pease, 2009). Second, while our study generally supports previous research showing women and girls to be disproportionately the victims of IPV (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), we also found that some private school boys reported higher rates (but not statistically significant) of sexual and physical abuse victimization as compared to their female counterparts (Table 2). Our findings also highlighted different types of abuse committed by boys and girls, with prevalence and frequency of physical violence being (statistically significantly) higher among the latter than the former while the reverse holds for sexual abuse (Tables 5 and 7).

Psychological violence was extremely common among all respondents in this study, with almost all relationships featuring some form of psychological abuse. Considering the extensive physical and mental health consequences attributed to psychological abuse, such high rates of psychological violence are by themselves a considerable cause for concern.

However, the severity of these results is magnified by correlations between psychological abuse and physical and sexual abuse. As seen in Table 8, higher levels of psychological abuse were significantly associated with increased odds of physical and sexual abuse victimization. These associations were also found to be significant with perpetration (Table 9). Previous longitudinal research has found psychological abuse to precede physical abuse (Sackett & Saunders, 1999; O'Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994). Although this study was not longitudinal, physical or sexual abuse was consistently accompanied by recurring psychological abuse, while a high level of psychological abuse was not necessarily accompanied by physical or sexual abuse.

Importantly, girls' and boys' experiences with abuse differed in a few notable ways, including the frequency and type of abuse. In particular, humiliation emerged as a category of

abuse experienced much more frequently by girls. As mentioned previously, the category of humiliation includes insults, criticism, ridicule, and degradation of one's being. This type of abuse is damaging – in a previous study of six types of psychological abuse, respondents felt most negatively impacted by ridicule (Follingstad et al., 1990); another study found that among four types of psychological abuse, ridiculing of traits was significantly related to lower self-esteem and the most strongly related to fear (Sackett and Saunders, 1999). Psychological abuse, particularly breaking down the victim's self-esteem and creating feelings of worthlessness, serves to keep the victim in the cycle of abuse and make it more difficult to leave the abusive relationship (Follingstad et al., 1990). Among the survey population, experiencing humiliation was significantly more prevalent among girls (see Table 2) and occurred much more frequently than among boys ($p=.0543$; see Table 4). Among victims of physical abuse, girls also experienced significantly more humiliation than boys ($p<.05$). In fact, boys who experienced physical violence from partners did not experience significantly more incidents of humiliation than boys who did not experience physical violence. This is notable for two reasons – first, it suggests that girls' motivations for being physically violent less often involve using physical abuse as a tool for abusive dominance and control; second, it suggests fundamental differences between physical abuse and sexual abuse, particularly when experienced by boys.

Coercion, or controlling behavior, was almost ubiquitous in this sample population and demands further analysis. Coercive behavior was significantly associated with physical and sexual abuse for both boys and girls and happened more than twice as often as any other type of abuse. As noted in the Introduction, controlling behavior is a common feature of relationships in Nicaragua, and its normalization contributes to the minimization and lack of awareness of its harmful consequences.

Unlike previous research showing associations between lower socioeconomic status and increased rates of violence, private school students in this study experienced and committed higher rates of all types of violence. Despite this overall trend, income level (measured through floor material of students' houses) was not found to be significantly correlated with ADV victimization or perpetration. While the explanation behind these aberrant findings is unclear, they may serve as a reminder that violence occurs in all socioeconomic groups, and that sociocultural factors other than socioeconomic status may be more relevant in understanding and preventing partner violence.

This study had several key limitations. First, as to distinguish between prevalence and frequency of abuse we used a dichotomous and interval variable which might have increased the likelihood of a 'false positive' (type I error). Second, we did not attempt to identify respondents' perception of violent incidents. As research has shown that men tend to perceive women's violence against them as much less threatening/severe than women perceive men's violence (Petrosky et al., 2017), the incidences of violence reported by respondents may differ greatly in context. However, the questions used in this survey were worded in the language of active nonconsent (i.e., many questions included phrases such as "against the partner's wishes" or "without the partner's knowledge/consent" to clarify the nonconsensual nature of the situation). Third, this study did not investigate the motivations behind violence perpetration. Violence may be committed against a partner for a variety of reasons, one of which is self-defense (Johnson, 2010); one large-scale ADV survey among American high school students found that 36% of girls who had experienced physical violence reported they "fought back" in response, likely inflating the victimization rates reported by boys (Molidor & Tolman, 1998, p. 186). Unfortunately, this survey did not differentiate between unprovoked violence and self-defense.

Fourth, this study did not consider the effects of violence on victims or differentiate by severity of violence. For example, a respondent may affirm his/her use of physical violence against a partner for the statement “I hit my partner”, but the severity of that violence (i.e., smacking or punching) is not distinguishable in the respondent’s answer. Another useful addition to the study might have been to record whether students attended a previous training on IPV as previous research has demonstrated that this might significantly reduce its prevalence (Keller et al., 2017; Vives-Cases et al., 2019). Finally, the results of this study should not be extrapolated beyond heterosexual dating relationships and are not representative of any larger population due to the use of convenience sampling and the urban and semi-urban location of all participating schools.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Adolescent dating violence among Nicaraguan youths is clearly a public health concern that demands further research and attention. Local NGOs have long been involved in partner violence awareness and prevention efforts, but those efforts can only go so far without reliable data proving the existence of ADV as a widespread problem in Nicaraguan society. High-quality quantitative studies (preferably representative of the adolescent population) are needed to accurately determine the rate of prevalence of ADV in Nicaragua, and high-quality qualitative studies are needed to contextualize the quantitative data. The causes of ADV and effective strategies to prevent it cannot be understood from rates of violence alone; violence must always be examined in the sociocultural context in which it occurs. Given the highly heteronormative culture and strong *machismo* ideology, studies that specifically focus on ADV in the context of same-sex relationships as well as involving adolescents with gender identities that are different from their biological sex are important and much needed.

Our findings add to the body of research showing both the prevalence of ADV and the severity of psychological abuse. Future research on partner violence in both adult and adolescent relationships should not minimize or neglect to examine the impact of psychological violence by using scales that overemphasize physical violence at the expense of psychological violence. Just as we cannot separate societal levels of violence from their sociocultural context, we also cannot separate individual violence from the context of the relationship in which it occurs. Partner violence is often part of a larger pattern of control and dominance, and the level of psychological violence in a relationship is often an identifying factor in relationships that feature abusive patterns. Analyzing this context includes examining victims' perceptions of violence, the severity of violence, and the context in which it occurs (i.e., unprovoked or in self-defense). Additionally, researchers should differentiate between different types of psychological violence, as there is a wide range of psychologically abusive behaviors, and we cannot assume that they are equal in terms of causes, consequences, and prevalence.

The findings also have implications for intervention. Educational interventions should be targeted at the school and family levels. At the school level, discussion groups and workshops should educate students on all types of partner violence and critically challenge the normality of *machismo*. While physical and sexual violence should always be discussed, it is important not to overlook psychological abuse. It is crucial to educate students about the various forms of psychological abuse and how psychological violence could be a warning sign for future physical and sexual violence. Providing clear examples of healthy and unhealthy/abusive behaviors in dating relationships will hopefully empower adolescents to identify and reject abusive behaviors in their own relationships.

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TABLES

Table 1. Demographics

	Population n=193		Public school n=136		Private school n=57	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender						
Girls	91	47.2	66	48.5	25	43.9
Boys	102	52.9	70	51.5	32	56.1
Age groups						
13-14	24	12.4	23	16.9	1	1.8
15- 16	91	47.2	58	42.6	33	57.9
17-18	77	39.9	54	39.7	23	40.4
19-20	1	00.5	1	0.07	0	0.0
Housing floor material						
Brick, cement, ceramic, mosaic	93	48.2	42	30.9	51	89.5
Tiling, concrete	49	25.4	43	31.6	6	10.5
Clay brick	15	7.8	10	7.4	5	8.8
Wood	7	3.6	6	4.4	1	1.8
Earth	24	12.4	24	17.6	0	0.0
Civil status						
Single	155	80.3	108	79.4	47	82.5
Engaged	26	13.5	19	14.0	7	12.3
Married	3	1.6	2	1.5	1	1.8
No answer	9	4.7	2	1.5	7	12.3

Table 2: Prevalence of victimization

	Total (%)	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Difference * by gender (%)	<i>p</i> -value
Total population					
Physical	20.2	23.1	17.7	5.4	0.353
Sexual	26.9	28.6	25.5	3.1	0.633
Detachment	73.1	74.7	71.6	3.2	0.623
Humiliation	45.1	54.9	36.3	18.7	0.009
Coercion	82.9	85.7	80.4	5.3	0.326
Public school					
Physical	18.4	24.2	12.9	11.4	0.090
Sexual	22.1	27.3	17.1	10.1	0.159
Detachment	71.3	75.8	67.1	8.6	0.269
Humiliation	41.9	53.0	31.4	21.6	0.011
Coercion	80.2	83.3	77.1	6.2	0.368
Private school					
Physical	24.6	20.0	28.1	8.1	0.482
Sexual	38.6	32.0	43.8	11.8	0.372
Detachment	77.2	72.0	81.3	9.3	0.427
Humiliation	52.6	60.0	46.9	13.1	0.333
Coercion	89.5	92.0	87.5	4.5	0.582

*Vertical bars in this table denote absolute value.

Table 3. Odds ratios for physical and sexual abuse victimization by demographic variables

	Unadjusted OR	95% confidence interval		<i>p</i>
Physical abuse victimization				
Gender				
Girls	1.40	0.69	2.83	0.350
Boys				
School type				
Public	0.69	0.33	1.78	0.331
Private				
Sexual abuse victimization				
Gender				
Girls	1.17	0.62	2.21	0.630
Boys				
School type				
Public	0.45	0.23	0.88	0.020
Private				

Table 4. Frequency of victimization

	Total	Girls	Boys	Difference * by gender	<i>p</i> -value
Total population					
Physical	0.40	0.53	0.28	0.24	0.167
Sexual	0.64	0.70	0.58	0.12	0.571
Detachment	1.75	1.93	1.58	0.36	0.119
Humiliation	1.21	1.52	0.93	0.59	0.054
Coercion	4.26	4.38	4.16	0.23	0.691
Public school					
Physical	0.41	0.59	0.24	0.35	0.130
Sexual	0.57	0.65	0.49	0.17	0.534
Detachment	1.67	1.92	1.43	0.49	0.062
Humiliation	1.15	1.65	0.67	0.98	0.008
Coercion	3.65	3.98	3.34	0.64	0.289
Private school					
Physical	0.37	0.36	0.38	0.02	0.945
Sexual	0.81	0.84	0.78	0.06	0.883
Detachment	1.93	1.96	1.91	0.05	0.906
Humiliation	1.35	1.16	1.50	0.34	0.501
Coercion	5.72	5.44	5.94	0.50	0.688

*Vertical bars denote absolute value.

Table 5. Prevalence of perpetration

	Total (%)	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Difference * by gender (%)	<i>p</i> -value
Total population					
Physical	19.7	29.7	10.8	18.9	0.001
Sexual	23.8	14.3	32.4	18.1	0.003
Detachment	72.5	71.4	73.5	2.1	0.746
Humiliation	37.8	44.0	32.4	11.6	0.099
Coercion	78.2	76.9	79.4	2.5	0.678
Public school					
Physical	18.4	31.8	5.7	26.1	0.000
Sexual	18.4	10.6	25.7	15.1	0.022
Detachment	69.9	71.2	68.6	2.6	0.739
Humiliation	33.1	40.9	25.7	15.2	0.062
Coercion	72.8	72.7	72.9	1.2	0.987
Private school					
Physical	22.8	24.0	21.9	2.1	0.854
Sexual	36.8	24.0	46.9	22.9	0.073
Detachment	79.0	72.0	84.4	12.4	0.277
Humiliation	49.1	52.0	46.9	5.1	0.707
Coercion	91.2	88.0	93.8	5.8	0.472

*Vertical bars denote absolute value.

Table 6. Odds ratios for physical and sexual abuse perpetration by demographic variables

	Unadjusted OR	95% confidence interval		<i>p</i>
Physical abuse perpetration				
Gender				
Girls	3.49	1.62	7.54	<i>0.001</i>
Boys				
School type				
Public	0.76	0.36	1.62	0.481
Private				
Sexual abuse perpetration				
Gender				
Girls	0.35	0.17	0.72	<i>0.004</i>
Boys				
School type				
Public	0.39	0.19	0.77	<i>0.007</i>
Private				

Table 7. Frequency of perpetration

	Total	Girls	Boys	Difference * by gender	<i>p</i> -value
Total population					
Physical	0.44	0.74	0.15	<i>0.58</i>	<i>0.001</i>
Sexual	0.59	0.34	0.80	<i>0.46</i>	<i>0.012</i>
Detachment	1.74	1.80	1.69	0.12	0.632
Humiliation	0.95	1.16	0.76	0.40	0.125
Coercion	3.68	3.64	3.71	0.06	0.909
Public school					
Physical	0.44	0.80	0.10	<i>0.70</i>	<i>0.000</i>
Sexual	0.49	0.26	0.71	<i>0.46</i>	<i>0.040</i>
Detachment	1.63	1.80	1.47	0.33	0.238
Humiliation	0.81	1.12	0.51	<i>0.61</i>	<i>0.035</i>
Coercion	3.04	2.86	3.21	0.35	0.502
Private school					
Physical	0.42	0.60	0.28	0.32	0.256
Sexual	0.81	0.56	1.00	0.44	0.219
Detachment	2.00	1.80	2.16	0.36	0.450
Humiliation	1.30	1.28	1.31	0.03	0.951
Coercion	5.19	5.72	4.78	0.94	0.370

*Vertical bars denote absolute value.

Table 8. Odds ratios for physical and sexual abuse victimization by level of psychological abuse victimization

		Unadjusted OR	95% confidence interval		<i>p</i>
Physical abuse victimization					
Humiliation					
	Girls	1.68	1.25	2.26	<i>0.001</i>
	Boys	1.18	0.91	1.53	<i>0.217</i>
Coercion					
	Girls	1.19	1.05	1.34	<i>0.005</i>
	Boys	1.18	1.03	1.36	<i>0.018</i>
Detachment					
	Girls	1.25	0.94	1.66	<i>0.129</i>
	Boys	1.27	0.90	1.78	<i>0.174</i>
Sexual abuse victimization					
Humiliation					
	Girls	1.49	1.15	1.92	<i>0.002</i>
	Boys	1.43	1.09	1.89	<i>0.010</i>
Coercion					
	Girls	1.28	1.11	1.47	<i>0.000</i>
	Boys	1.23	1.07	1.40	<i>0.003</i>
Detachment					
	Girls	1.09	0.84	1.43	<i>0.515</i>
	Boys	1.60	1.16	2.21	<i>0.004</i>

Table 9. Odds ratios for physical and sexual abuse perpetration by level of psychological abuse perpetration

		Unadjusted OR	95% confidence interval		<i>p</i>
Physical abuse perpetration					
Humiliation					
	Girls	1.23	0.97	1.57	0.085
	Boys	0.98	0.66	1.46	0.936
Coercion					
	Girls	1.10	0.97	1.24	0.135
	Boys	1.26	1.06	1.50	0.009
Detachment					
	Girls	1.25	0.97	1.62	0.084
	Boys	1.10	0.76	1.59	0.625
Sexual abuse perpetration					
Humiliation					
	Girls	1.69	1.21	2.37	0.002
	Boys	1.30	0.98	1.72	0.070
Coercion					
	Girls	1.32	1.12	1.56	0.001
	Boys	1.17	1.03	1.34	0.018
Detachment					
	Girls	1.36	0.99	1.85	0.054
	Boys	1.35	1.04	1.76	0.026

BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENTS

Kelly Litz is a monitoring and evaluation specialist and consultant in the development sector. Her areas of interest and expertise include gender equality, gender-based violence prevention, results-based management and reporting, education, and gender mainstreaming. She holds master's degrees from the University of Antwerp and the University of Kentucky.

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