



Articles

Forms of Violence in the Affective-Sexual Relationships of Adolescents

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Abstract

Violence in the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents is a theme that has been highlighted by the literature as a result of its high rates of prevalence. It has different characteristics, while many factors are shown to be associated with its occurrence. The present study investigated the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents, focusing on the experiences as perpetrators and victims of different types of violence between partners. We conducted a quantitative study with a descriptive, comparative and correlational design, with 124 heterosexual adolescents, aged 15 to 18 years ($M = 15.94$, $SD = 0.65$). As measurement instruments we used a sociodemographic questionnaire, the Family Background Questionnaire (FBQ), and the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI). The results showed percentages of violence that ranged from 14.7% for relational abuse committed to 97% for verbal/emotional violence suffered. We identified significant gender differences in the dimensions of threatening behavior ($t = -3.172$, $p = 0.002$) and physical violence ($t = -3.037$, $p = 0.003$) perpetrated by the participant, indicating that it is the girls who report that they practice this type of violence more often. No significant correlation was observed between experiences of violence in the family of origin and in the relationship with the partner ($p > 0.05$). However, there was an association between the occurrence of violence in the relationships of the adolescents and the presence of violence in the affective-sexual relationships of friends ($p < 0.05$). We highlight the importance of expanding the field of theory regarding this phenomenon, in order to assist with future interventions.

Keywords: dating violence, interpersonal violence, adolescent affective-sexual relationships

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Introduction

Adolescence is a period in which the contact between peers is amplified and marks the beginning of affective and sexual experiences. It is a phase of experimentation and learning in terms of one's love life, which includes numerous forms of relationships. According to Oliveira, Gomes, Marques, and Thiengo (2007), the modalities of affective and sexual relationships of adolescents include fidelity and feelings, but may also be momentary and shallow. Dating is no longer the only form of a relationship, as the "hooking up" phenomenon has become common among young people of late, which displays the plasticity of their affective experiences (Matos, Féres-Carneiro, & Jablonski, 2005; Owen, Quirk, & Fincham, 2014; Roberson, Olmstead, & Fincham, 2015).

Hook ups can be defined as encounters that can include a variety of sexual behaviors (kissing to intercourse) with no expectation of committed relationship (Roberson, Olmstead, & Fincham, 2015). Whereas dating would be when the relationship takes the form of having greater commitment and being official before the family and

society (Oliveira et al., 2007). In this study, we chose to use the term affective-sexual relationships to refer to different forms of involvement of adolescents, such as in the case of dating and "hooking up".

These arrangements represent explicit and implicit rules, while adolescents experience feelings and new experiences when being with a partner. Feelings of jealousy, mistrust and fear of betrayal, as well as young age and inexperience in relationships are factors that may point to the beginning of quarrels and misunderstandings (Fernández-Fuertes & Fuertes, 2010, Oliveira et al., 2011, Ribeiro, Avanci, Carvalho, Gomes, & Pires, 2011). Being aware of the problem, many studies address the conflict in the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents, as well as the way it is handled. Among them, the occurrence of violence is predominant, which is demonstrated as being frequent among adolescent couples (Barreira, Lima, & Avanci, 2013; Rey-Anacona, 2013).

The physical, sexual and psychological forms of violence, are among the most studied. According Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon, and Shelley (2002) and Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, and Sugarman (1996), physical violence can be defined as any behavior that impacts the physical integrity of another. This includes but is not limited to: scratching, pushing, throwing objects, biting, choking, hair pulling, beating, burning and using weapons or physical force against another. Sexual coercion is intentional sexual contact against the will of the partner or other conduct that negatively affects their sexuality. Psychological or emotional aggression is characterized by acts, threats or coercive tactics practiced by the partner, whether it be by humiliation, control, prohibitions, ridicule, attacks on self-esteem, among other situations that cause damages to the emotional state and / or self-esteem of the subjects. In addition, Straus et al. (1996) describes injury for the occurrence of twist, bruise, contusion, breaking some bone or other kind of physical damage after a fight.

In the review of articles published from 2000 to 2011 on the theme, Leen et al. (2013) suggested a tendency that indicated that the prevalence of psychological violence is always greater than that of physical and sexual violence, being demonstrated as the kind of abuse that appears most frequently among teenage couples. In regards to the physical violence, most studies analyzed by the authors identified similar percentages for boys and girls, although some related that boys are more victimized. On the other hand, evidence demonstrated a high prevalence of girls who suffer sexual violence, as compared to boys.

These data corroborate similar results, as in the study from South Africa which pointed out that a significantly higher proportion of female adolescents reported having already physically assaulted their partner (Fisher, Myer, Mèrais, Lombard, & Reddy, 2007). In Mexico, of the 7960 participants, 27.88% of the girls and 46.43% of the boys were victims of physical and / or psychological violence committed by a partner. However, the authors urge caution in interpreting the data, because many work with the hypothesis that the attacks made by women would be lighter, while men tend to opt for serious physical violence (Bonomi et al., 2012). Often, the violence committed by women is seen as a joke, however, kidding around that involves aggressive acts can escalate to aggression (Reeves & Orpinas, 2012).

In the investigations on the topic, ways of measuring violence vary, as well as the respective definitions, which hinders the uniformity of the data presented. However, the published indexes of violence are shown to be elevated in a variety of selected samples. A research study conducted in the United States with 7500 young people, aged 12 to 21 years, identified 32% of participants reporting experiences of physical or psychological violence in intimate relationships (Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, & Kupper, 2001). In Canada, Sears, Byers, and Price (2007) reported that of the 633 participants, 51% of the female adolescents and 43% of male adolescents reported that they used some form of aggression against the partner. The standard used by most of the boys was psychological violence,

while girls applied this in combination with physical abuse. Between 980 American adolescents, 11-19 years old, 9.5% reported having already committed physical violence and 6.1% sexual coercion. The rates of perpetration of physical abuse among boys and girls were similar, however, a significant majority of boys practiced sexual coercion (Banyard, Cross, & Modecki, 2006). In Brazil, a study conducted in ten state capitals found violence rates ranging from 8.9% to 85.3% for the dimensions analyzed, with the most frequent type being verbal violence (Oliveira et al., 2011).

One fact that stands out is the strong correlation between perpetration and victimization for both genders, leading to the idea that, in some types of violence, it most commonly occurs in a bidirectional manner in this age group (Fernández-Fuertes & Fuertes, 2010; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012; Rivera-Rivera, Allen-Leigh, Rodríguez-Ortega, Chávez-Ayala, & Lazcano-Ponce, 2007). In a sample of 519 female students, 30% reported being in a relationship that included physical abuse, with 53% reporting that it occurred in a mutual manner (Chiodo et al., 2012). Among Brazilians, it was found that 76.6% are at the same time, perpetrators and victims of violence in the different manifestations (Oliveira et al., 2011). Testa, Hoffman, and Leonard (2011) reinforce these findings, asserting that the aggressive acts are more frequent when the other partner is also aggressive, suggesting that this reciprocity contributes to the escalation and continuation of violence.

Leen et al. (2013) found that, among the risk factors found to be more robust for the occurrence of violence in teenage couples, the influence of peers has been shown to be relevant, i.e., the presence of friends involved in violent relationships or violence in the group of friends. In fact, there are many studies that show this association (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012; Shorey, Cornelius, & Bell, 2008; Walton et al., 2009). Foshee et al. (2013) stress the importance of the role of peers in adolescence and report that there are positive or negative impacts on the affective-sexual relationships. Accordingly, to investigate adolescents living on the streets in Porto Alegre (Brazil), Antônio, Koller, and Hokoda (2012) observed that the proximity of friends who abused their partners was a factor that influenced the occurrence of violence between boyfriends and girlfriends. In this manner, peers can play an important role in stopping violence by helping his or her friend to realize that the romantic relationship is not healthy (Stephenson, Martsolf, & Draucker, 2013).

It is important to reiterate the results in which there is an association between violence in the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents and previous experiences of violence, whether it be as a victim or as a spectator. The literature has already provided evidence of the impact of experiences in the family of origin on the health of children and their future relationships, contributing to the intergenerational transmission of violence (Marasca, Colossi, & Falcke, 2013). Being exposed to interparental conflict ends up providing a model for relationships, being that the children observe the forms of anger management and how parents resolve their conflicts (Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004). The studies identify that teens who see aggressive scenes between parents were more likely to perceive the violence as something justifiable in a loving relationship, a belief that predicts the perpetration of aggression against partners (Clarey, Hokoda, & Ulloa, 2010; Rey-Anacona, 2011; Temple, Shorey, Fite, Stuart, & Le, 2013).

Based on the literature reviewed, it was noted that the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents have their peculiarities, both in the form as well as how they are established, along with how the conflicts are handled and how the violence manifests. It is not possible to apply the same investigative assumptions to marital violence; as marriage or a stable relationship between adults has its own characteristics, such as greater family, financial and legal commitments, which brings about other implications. Adolescents go through a phase of intense involvement with peers along with experimentation with affection, which impacts the way in which they relate with others.

Nevertheless, even though the inexperience could present a potential risk for violence, precisely because they are at an early stage of relationship development, this point in time provides an opportunity for interventions, as they are also more open to constructive learning tactics that function to manage interpersonal conflicts. In this manner, the exploration of the theme tends to provide support for future actions carried out by health and education professionals, in an effort to disseminate throughout the variety of healthcare areas.

Objectives

General objective — To investigate the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents regarding the presence of violence.

Specific objectives — Identify the presence of perpetration and victimization of violence in the physical, sexual, verbal /emotional, relational and threatening forms among adolescents.

Compare the violence in the affective-sexual relationships according to the adolescents' gender.

To investigate possible associations between violence in the family of origin and violence in the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents.

To correlate violence in the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents with the perception of violence in the affective-sexual relationships of friends.

Method

Design

This is a study of quantitative nature, with a descriptive, comparative and correlational design.

Participants

The sample consisted of 124 heterosexual adolescents, selected using the convenience sample criterion. Participants were from an institution that operates in the field of basic social protection in the city of Porto Alegre (Brazil), which receives young people facing a situation of social or personal vulnerability, that are students from public schools. All adolescents from the institution were invited to participate. Among the respondents, 60.2% were girls. Their ages ranged from 15 to 18 years ($M = 15.94$, $SD = 0.65$) and 89.4% were attending high school, while 10.6% were in elementary school.

Instruments

The instrument used comprised four parts:

1. Sociodemographic questionnaire, comprised of 22 questions which are intended for obtaining personal information such as age and education, as well as information about the affective-sexual relationships, among them the number of partners and length of relationship.
2. Subscales of the *Family Background Questionnaire - FBQ* (Melchert, 1998): this is a questionnaire of 179 items to be answered on a Likert scale of five points. It has 15 subscales that encompass several variables that have been identified as potentially important in child development, that is, it makes it possible for the memories that the subjects have about the experiences in their families of origin to be evaluated. It was translated into Portuguese, and it obtained good levels of reliability - 0.9902 for the total scale and between

0.40 and 0.95 for the subscales (Falcke, 2003). In this study, the subscales of physical neglect, paternal and maternal physical abuse, sexual abuse and parental alliance were utilized.

3. *Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory - CADRI* (Wolfe et al., 2001): 70-item scale designed to identify the presence of violence in the relationships of adolescent couples. The participants were instructed to answer about things that happened in last year during a fight with their current partner. The items refer to verbal/emotional (10 items, e.g. I insulted her/him with put downs), physical (4 items, e.g. I kicked, hit, or punched her/him) and sexual violence (4 items, e.g. I forced her/him to have sex when she/he didn't want to) along with relational abuse (3 items, e.g. I tried to turn her/him friends against her/him) as well as threatening behavior (4 items, e.g. I threatened to hurt her/him), along with other questions that allude to positive behaviors for resolving conflicts (10 items), which are not included in the analysis. The questions are duplicated, asking about the perpetration and victimization by violence, and are answered on a four-point Likert scale (never, seldom, sometimes, often). The instrument was adapted to Portuguese by Minayo, Assis, and Njaine (2011) and obtained *alphas* ranging from 0.509 to 0.887 for the subscales. In this study, the alphas for subscales were: verbal/emotional (boys = 0.863; girls = 0.892; total = 0.885), physical (boys = 0.839; girls = 0.841; total = 0.851), sexual (boys = 0.642; girls = 0.657; total = 0.641), relational (boys = 0.804; girls = 0.651; total = 0.738) and threatening behavior (boys = 0.836; girls = 0.810; total = 0.824).
4. Three closed questions built by researchers to verify the perception of the occurrence of violence in the sexual-affective relationships of their friends. Participants were asked to answer about the violence that they had already observed in their friends dating or "hooking up" relationships (physical, psychological or sexual).

Procedures for Data Collection and Ethical Research Procedures

Initially, we made contact with the institution in which the collection of data would be conducted, for the analysis of the research project. With the letter of approval, the project was submitted to the Ethics in Research Committee of the Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos (UNISINOS) where it was approved (Official Opinion 13/012). In sequence, the teens were contacted during class hours in the institution and invited to participate in the study. In observance of the regulations proposed by the Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council (*Conselho Nacional de Saúde*), all received the Written Consent Form (WCF) to be delivered to their parents indicating the study objectives, research procedures and regarding the confidentiality and secrecy of the data obtained, as well as the freedom to accept participation in the study or not, as well as the possibility of cancellation at any time.

Once the Written Consent Forms were signed by the parents and returned, the adolescents were asked to fill out the instrument, which was administered during class time at the institution. The application took place in small groups, while each participant responded to the questionnaire individually. When collecting the responses, the ethical and research procedures were informed and the adolescents signed the WCF.

Procedures for Data Analysis

After data collection, the information was tabulated in a database using SPSS 20.0 (*Statistical Package for Social Science* 20.0). Initially, a descriptive analysis (*M*, *SD*, percentages) of the overall results was performed. For inferential statistics, the criteria for parametric assumptions were analyzed beforehand (variable type, sample size, normality). The associations between variables were analyzed using Pearson's correlation and comparisons

between groups were analyzed by way of t test for independent samples. All results with $p < 0.05$ were considered significant.

Results

The descriptive analyses indicate a profile of the participants and reveal information about their affective-sexual experiences, shown in Table 1. Data shows that the majority of participants are female, students from High School and living with both biological parents. Furthermore, most of adolescents have already had sexual intercourse and had no children.

Table 1

Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	%	<i>M (SD), Range</i>
Age	n/a	15.94 years (0.65), 15-18 years
Sex		
Female	60.2	n/a
Male	39.8	n/a
Education		
Elementary	10.6	n/a
High School	89.4	n/a
Living with both biological parents		
Yes	54.6	n/a
No	45.4	n/a
Length of longest relationship	n/a	1.07 year (0.8), 1 month - 4 years
Has had sex		
Yes	80.2	n/a
No	19.8	n/a
Children		
Yes	0.9	n/a
No	99.1	n/a

Table 2 reports the measures of the central tendency of the number of partners. This proved to be widespread whether it be among those who are dating or "hooking up". It is possible to consider that with maximum numbers so high, they could be, in certain terms, unrealistic, however, it also seems to reflect how the relationships function, to the extent that it is not possible to measure the amount of people who are "hooking up". Considering the high number recorded by some adolescents, it was decided to include data from the median and the mode so that a better identification of the behavior of the variables would be possible.

Table 2

Number of Partners

No. of partners	Average	Standard		Mode	Minimum	Maximum
		Deviation	Median			
Dating	2.34	1.63	2	1	1	10
Hooking up	23.40	108.42	6	10	1	1000

The descriptive analyses of CADRI showed the percentage of different types of violence that the subject reports suffering from, on behalf of the partner and commits in the relationship. Considering any positive answers about the occurrence of violence (seldom, sometimes, often), Figure 1 shows these data, with the genders separated.

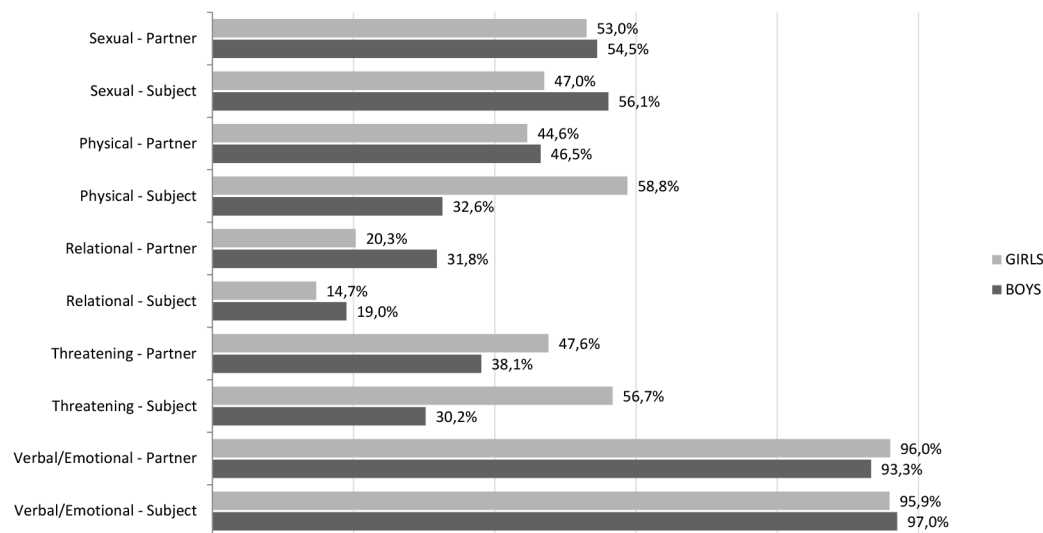


Figure 1. Percentages of violence experienced and perpetrated by girls and boys in the sexual-affective relationships.

It is noticed that verbal violence, a form of psychological violence is what occurs most in the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents, which includes such acts as provoking jealousy in the partner, saying things to make the partner angry, speak using a voice with a hostile tone, ridiculing the partner in front of others and insulting him or her. We also observed high levels of physical violence, which refers to aggression such as hitting, kicking and throwing a punch, throwing something at the partner, pushing, slapping and hair pulling, as well as sexual violence, defined by issues such as touching the partner sexually when it was not wanted, threatening behavior and forcing to have sex and kissing against the will of the partner. In the threatening behavior dimension, another form of psychological violence, including threatening to frighten, injure, hit or destroy something valuable to the partner; we identified greater perpetration by the girls. The relational abuse, term used to describe acts or attempts of demoralization of the partner in front of others, such as trying to turn friends against the partner and spreading rumors about the partner, presented the lowest occurrence.

We identified a significant gender difference in the dimensions of threatening behavior ($t = -3.172$, $df = 108$, $p = 0.002$) and physical violence ($t = -3.037$, $df = 109$, $p = 0.003$) committed by the participant. Considering that the CADRI score ranges from 1 indicating "often" to 4 indicating "never", the lower averages of the girls (threatening behavior = 13.91; Physical violence = 13.16) in relation to the boys (threatening behavior = 15.30; physical violence

= 14.86) demonstrates that they report perpetrating these types of violence significantly more than boys. In the other dimensions, no significant differences were observed between the genders. Age and length of relationship did not have any association with the dimensions of violence analyzed ($p > 0.05$).

The experiences in the family of origin, measured by way of the FBQ, indicated the presence of direct experiences as victims of violence and exposure to inter-parental violence. It was found that 23.1% of the respondents reported having experienced physical punishment committed by the father more than once, while 37.1% indicated that this type of punishment was carried out by the mother. The mothers were also more physically violent towards their children, with 32.2% reporting the occurrence of more than one episode, compared to 14.4% of the violence committed by the fathers. The abandonment by the father was indicated by 31.8% of adolescents, occurring at least once. The rate of maternal abandonment was lowest, reported by 14.2%. There was no experience of sexual abuse by a parent, however, four (3.3%) reported having been sexually abused by relatives and three participants (2.5%) suffered this abuse on the behalf of other individuals.

Regarding the perception of the adolescents regarding the relationship of the parents, 57.5% reported the occurrence of ugly fights more than once a year. Threats of violence on behalf of the father aimed at the mother already happened at least once in 29.2% of the cases and behalf of the mother against the father in 34.9%. The percentage of inter-parental violence committed at least once by the father was 27.3%, while physical abuse committed by the mother was 22.7%. It was also identified that 25.9% of the participants perceived dissatisfaction and unhappiness on the part of their parents in their marital relationships.

Despite the considerable percentages of violence suffered in the family of origin, there was no significant correlation between the occurrence of violence in the family of origin and violence in the affective-sexual relationships of the adolescents ($p > 0.05$). However, there are significant correlations among the dimensions of violence in the family of origin, as well as between the types of violence in the affective-sexual relationship, suggesting that different forms of aggression do not occur in isolation, but rather simultaneously within the families and between the partners.

Participants also responded to items related to the presence of violence in the affective-sexual relationships in the group of friends, with an occurrence of 60.1%. The adolescents believe that the types of violence that they most often observe among couples that are friends, are psychological (65.4%) and physical violence (24.3%). We identified a significant correlation between the violence in the affective-sexual relationships of the adolescents and the violence in affective-sexual relationships of friends, in the dimensions physical violence committed by the subject ($r = -0.265$, $p < 0.01$), threatening committed by the subject ($r = -0.213$, $p < 0.05$), verbal violence committed by the subject ($r = -0.257$, $p < 0.05$) and inflicted by the partner ($r = -0.270$, $p < 0.01$). These results suggest an influence of peers on the occurrence of violence in the affective-sexual relationships of the adolescents.

Discussion

The results indicate the presence of violence in the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents with numbers higher than that which is presented by international studies (Banyard et al., 2006; Barreira et al., 2013; Bonomi et al., 2012; Chiodo et al., 2012; Coker et al., 2000; Fernández-Fuertes & Fuertes, 2010; Halpern et al., 2001; Sears et al., 2007; Walton et al., 2009), which refers fees varying between 9.5% and 30% for physical violence, 5% and 15% for sexual violence and 16.2% and 96.3% for psychological violence. There are different measures

of violence in adolescent's affective-sexual relationships which might alter prevalence rates. CTS2 (Straus et al., 1996) is the most used in researches with adult couples while CADRI is more specific for adolescent relationships.

The indexes for the same dimensions of violence in the CADRI were similar or higher when compared to the sample from Porto Alegre (sexual = 44.1%; physical = 29.6%; relational = 14%; threatening behavior = 29.7%; verbal/emotional = 84.1%) and other Brazilian capitals (sexual = 38.9%; physical = 24.1%; relational = 8.9%; threatening behavior = 29.2%; verbal/emotional = 85.3%) from the study developed by Oliveira et al. (2011). These data confirm the urgency for attention directed toward this kind of situation, as the evidence demonstrates it to be a frequent phenomenon among the young people studied, emphasizing the fragility of the strategies in handling conflict in adolescents.

As expected, psychological violence registered a higher percentage as compared to the other forms of aggression (Leen et al., 2013). The data for verbal violence were very similar to those found in Spain, by Fernández-Fuertes and Fuertes (2010), who used the same instrument for measurement, identifying that more than 90% of the sample reported suffering from and/or perpetrating this type of aggression. Other dimensions which comprise psychological violence - threatening behavior and relational abuse - showed slightly lower numbers. Although it is often trivialized in studies which have a qualitative approach, the adolescents emphasize that the psychological violence can bring lasting and more severe effects than other forms of violence, as a result of the damage to the self-esteem of the subject (Oliveira et al., 2011; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012). In addition, despite often being described as a type of violence that is typically perpetrated by the female (Gomes, 2003), the percentages of victimization and perpetration of verbal violence were very close for both boys and girls, indicating that it seems to be produced in a bidirectional manner in the relationship.

The frequency found for sexual violence was also higher compared to other studies (Banyard et al., 2006; Leen et al., 2013; Sears et al., 2007). As in the investigation of Oliveira et al. (2011), the item with the highest occurrence was the act of kissing when the partner does not want to, which was responsible for the large increase in the percentage for this dimension. According to the authors, the forced kiss is discussed quite often in the "hooking up" relationships, having as a common scenario the parties that attract young audiences. The authors emphasize that, although a "stolen kiss" may be part of the stage of discovering adolescents, the boundary is blurred between experimentation and violent and coercive practices. The literature emphasizes that boys represent the greatest numbers of perpetrators of sexual violence (Moraes, Cabral, & Heilborn, 2006; Rey-Anacona, 2013), in this study no significant difference in the sexual perpetration or victimization was observed in terms of gender. In a qualitative study by Minayo, Assis, and Njaine (2011), young respondents also considered that sexual violence is primarily committed by men. However, the boys recognize that sometimes there is pressure from a partner to have sex when they do not want to, and humiliation may possibly occur if they refuse; despite the fact that they do not consider this as a form of aggression. It is clear, from this information, that the girls may be enjoying a greater sexual freedom and taking on a more sexually active role, as there also seems to be a minimization of sexual violence committed by the female partners.

In the same manner, the physical violence showed higher values, in comparison with previous studies, besides having significantly higher perpetration being observed by the girls. There is a strong tendency in the literature on violence between partners to consider women as victims, when applying a gender based perspective (Howard, Debnam, & Wang, 2013; Straus, 2010). Contrary to this position, a finding that stands out in studies on violence in affective-sexual relationships of adolescents and young adults is that the girls demonstrate similar or higher

levels of committing physical abuse, as well as other types of violence (Straus, 2004; Straus & Ramirez, 2007; Flisher et al., 2007; Glass et al., 2003). This condition implies rethinking how we understand aggression in affective-sexual relationships and interventions targeted toward these cases.

Along the same lines, Giordano et al. (2010) pointed out that mutual violence appears to be more common than one-sided violence in the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents. Testa et al. (2011) reiterate that the aggressive acts are more frequent when the other partner is also aggressive, suggesting that this reciprocity contributes to the escalation and continuation of violence. Despite the fact that in this study, the girls reported greater perpetration of violence in two dimensions, no differences were observed between perceived victimization of boys and girls in any of the dimensions analyzed, which seems to indicate that boys avoid recognizing themselves as victims of violence. It is possible to hypothesize that many aggressive acts committed by women end up not being considered violence by them because, according to Leadbeater, Banister, Ellis, and Yeung (2008), for adolescents, violence coming from girls can be seen as a joke or a gesture of affection. However, Reeves and Orpinas (2012) point out that female aggression can provoke aggression in the man, just as behaviors that begin as jokes are able to escalate to aggression.

Another perspective on this aspect are the cultural issues involved in violence against the man. A study conducted by Drijber, Reijnders, and Ceelen (2013) found that male victims of violence committed by the female partner report not filing a complaint for fear of not being taken seriously, shame and fear that the violence would worsen. There have also been cases reported where there was refusal of police assistance when the situation was reported, reinforcing the stereotypes of masculine strength and lesser severity or probability of violence committed by women. Concepts like these can permeate the rationale for the difficulty the adolescents had in identifying the violence suffered or the choice not to admit it.

In relation to the experiences of family of origin, the results revealed a significant number of adolescents who reported victimization by way of violence perpetrated by the father and/or mother, as well as exposure to inter-parental violence. However, these experiences were not correlated with the violence in the affective-sexual relationships of the adolescents. This finding contradicts several studies that claim that experiences of aggression in the family of origin, either as a victim or witness, are strong predictors for the recurrence of this pattern of interaction in intimate relationships (Chiodo et al., 2012; Makin-Byrd & Bierman, 2013; Rivera-Rivera et al., 2007). Although this is considered to be one of the principle factors for the occurrence of violence between partners, some exceptions are cited in the literature. In the study of Kinsfogel and Grych (2004), exposure to parental conflict was a predictor of aggression in dating for boys, but not for girls. One of the hypotheses developed by the authors is that girls who witness parental conflict are more sensitive to the situation, perceiving it as a damage to the relationship. Gagné, Lavoie, and Hébert (2005), in a survey of data with 917 female adolescents, they reported that violence experienced outside the family was established as a stronger risk variable for re-victimization in romantic relationships than family violence, insofar as it presented itself as a moderating variable between experiences of violence in the family of origin and the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents.

Leen et al. (2013) point to the influence of the peers as the strongest risk factor for the occurrence of aggression in adolescent couples. According to the studies reviewed by the authors, the relationships between peers may even overlap with the parental influences by way of the strong role they play in adolescence, in terms of the beliefs and expectations about the affective-sexual relationships. For Foshee et al. (2013), friendships with pro-social beliefs reduce the risk of violence in loving relationships, while the presence of aggression between couples of

friends increases this chance. Stephenson et al. (2013) identify that peer influence occurs in several ways, such as by encouraging the act of aggression against partners, providing damaging information about partners or by minimizing the importance of aggression. They can, however, contribute to the stopping of violence in advising the termination of the relationship when realizing that this is not healthy.

In the present study, we investigated the influence of peers through the perception of respondents about the presence of violence in sexual-affective relationships of friends and there was a significant association observed with the violence in the affective-sexual relationships of the adolescent respondents, as emphasized in previous results (Antônio et al., 2012; Glass et al., 2003; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012). Much of the literature identifies the role of peers as a weighting factor, validating the findings presented here, as well as pointing out the need to broaden the focus of attention in the case of violence in the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents beyond the family circle, evaluating the relationship with friends, as well as the context in which they are inserted.

Final Considerations

Based on the data presented, there was a strong presence of violence among the adolescent couples, in various forms of occurrence, indicating the urgency of technical and scientific attention oriented towards the episodes of aggression in this age group. The results also emphasized the role played by the girls in the affective-sexual relationships, which demonstrated themselves as being perpetrators of violence (physical and threatening behavior) more often than boys. In addition, the findings furthermore stress the bidirectional violence as a phenomenon, the overlap of the types of violence and the influence of the peer group in these situations. The identification of these characteristics reinforces the need to amplify the knowledge on the subject, both in terms of the investigation of individual factors as well as the contextual; not being limited to gender issues, but evaluating violence as a multifaceted phenomenon of relationships.

The utilization of the CADRI, an instrument which is often used in national and international studies on violence in affective-sexual relationships of adolescents, provided an opportunity to investigate different types of violence through the perception of the respondents about the aggression that he or she suffers from or commits, based on questions prepared for this stage of development, considering its particularities. Moreover, one should take into account that the instrument appears to be quite sensitive to the occurrence of violence, which generates very high levels in the respective dimensions, for example, to consider the stolen kiss as a form of sexual violence. Considering that the majority of studies geared towards evaluating the affective-sexual violence in adolescent relationships utilize a quantitative methodology, we suggest for future studies, approaching the theme in a subjective and qualitative manner in order to understand the phenomenon in depth.

We stress the importance of professionals from various fields of knowledge to be observant of the signs of the occurrence of violence and not to discard as unimportant certain aggressive behaviors. We point out the challenge of handling the cases where violence is already installed and often is not visible, but directly affects the individuals involved. In this manner, we stress the importance of preventive actions, aimed at developing healthier relationships between young people and stimulating the seeking of help in situations in which adolescents have difficulty managing, preventing a dysfunctional model for resolving conflict from being established.

Considering the data obtained, it is noticed that the expression of violence in affective-sexual relationships in adolescence does not present unique and simplified characteristics. Therefore, the issue is not resolved, requiring

greater investment and attention on different levels, so that the adolescent who experiences violent experiences will be able to overcome this adversity, with adequate support and care.

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Competing Interests

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