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Intimate Partner Violence Attitudes: Who Tolerates the Most?

Actitudes hacia la violencia de pareja: ¿Quién tolera más?

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Abstract.

Aim. to identify whether demographic variables, the type and length of romantic relationships, and alcohol consumption were risk factors related to attitudes toward intimate partner violence (IPV). **Method.** 723 adults filled the IPVAS and a demographic survey. **Results.** women were less likely to accept control; participants with technical education were more likely to tolerate control and abuse; those with secondary education were at higher risk to accept physical violence, while participants aged 26-35 were at lower risk; people who were dating someone were at higher risk to tolerate control, but were at a lower risk to accept physical violence; and those who consume alcohol were more likely to accept abuse. **Conclusion.** As attitudes toward IPV may predict its future occurrence, research on variables modulating the association between attitudes and IPV execution can strengthen evidence to implement preventive actions, in which shaping attitudes towards IPV are the primary target.

Resumen.

Objetivo. Identificar si las variables sociodemográficas, el tipo, la duración de las relaciones y el consumo de alcohol son factores de riesgo asociados con las actitudes hacia la violencia de pareja (VP). **Método.** 723 adultos completaron las IPVAS y una encuesta sociodemográfica. **Resultados.** las mujeres tuvieron menor probabilidad de aceptar el control; los participantes con educación técnica toleraron más control y abuso; las personas con educación secundaria presentaron mayor riesgo de aceptar violencia física, mientras que las personas entre 26 y 35 años mostraron un riesgo menor; quienes tenían una relación tuvieron riesgo mayor para tolerar control, pero menor riesgo para aceptar violencia física; aquellos que reportaron consumir alcohol tuvieron mayor probabilidad de aceptar abuso. **Conclusión.** Las actitudes hacia la IPV pueden predecir la ejecución de esta conducta en el futuro. Por lo tanto, estudios que indaguen sobre variables que modulen esta asociación incrementarán la evidencia para implementar acciones preventivas, en las que la formación de actitudes hacia la VP sean el objetivo principal de cambio.

Keywords.

IPV, Attitudes Toward Violence, IPVAS, Education Level, Alcohol Consumption, Dating.

Palabras Clave.

Violencia de Pareja, actitudes hacia la violencia, IPVAS, Nivel educativo, consumo de alcohol, noviazgo.

1. Introduction

Compelling evidence about consequences of violence against women are increasingly known worldwide. Nevertheless, conducting research to identify predictors of domestic violence against both men and women is important alike; after all, any expression of violence endangers the respect and fulfillment of human rights (Organización Panamericana de la Salud & Organización Mundial de la Salud, 2014). Consequently, research on risk factors associated with intimate partner violence (IPV) should be sufficiently informative to design effective prevention strategies for the general population. Of note, such risk factors should be interpreted within the social context, as the dynamics of human relationships are closely related to social norms acquired in the culture to which people belong (Larsen, 2016).

In Colombia, statistics by the Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses (INMLCF) showed a decrease in IPV cases in 2020 compared with 2019, going from 49026 to about 30500. The Colombian capital city assembled the largest number of battered adults by their romantic partners, reporting 11855 cases of IPV in 2020. The cases of violence against men increased from 13.94% in 2018 and 14.23% in 2019; moreover, reported domestic violence against men in 2020 showed a decrease of 59% in comparison to 2019. In sum, these statistics become an urgent call to increase research on IPV in Colombia to understand the phenomenon and create evidence-based intervention and prevention strategies (INMLCF, 2022).

Partner violence attitudes are closely related to IPV and can help to predict future violent behaviors. For instance, high tolerance toward IPV might predict and legitimate the use of violent behaviors or justify the abuse and maintenance in abusive relationships (Fincham et al., 2008; Khawaja et al., 2008). Thus, determining attitudes toward IPV in the general population would contribute to identifying the level of acceptance in people who already have endured IPV and in those who are at higher risk of living through it.

To date, some research on attitudes towards IPV have shown their association with several factors. For instance, higher education levels correlated with less tolerance toward IPV (Wang, 2016). In terms of family dynamics, the better the family functioning is, the lower the IPV acceptance levels becomes (Alzoubi & Ali, 2021). Moreover, Gracia et al. (2010) showed that Latin Americans are more likely to accept IPV than Spanish people.

Learning about roles in romantic relationships during adolescence also influences the development of attitudes toward IPV and future violent behaviors. For example, a literature review highlighted a higher prevalence of dating violence in young people than domestic violence in older couples (Jackson et al., 2000).

Interestingly, a study conducted in Spain showed that men trained to avoid IPV showed less acceptance

towards this type of violence (Ferrer Pérez et al., 2006), which encourages the importance of identifying early risk factors in order to reduce their incidence and promote nonviolent interactions among romantic partners.

The goal of this study was to identify whether attitudes toward IPV, measured by this scale, were associated with demographics (gender, age, sexual orientation, number of children, social class, and education level), the type and length of romantic relationships, and alcohol consumption in people living in the Colombian capital city.

2. Method

This study followed a descriptive correlational cross-sectional design, establishing demographic variables (gender, age, sexual orientation, number of children, social class, and education level), the type and length of the last romantic relationship, and alcohol consumption as independent variables and attitudes toward IPV as dependent variables.

2.1 Participants

An opportunity sample of 723 individuals from the Colombian capital city was recruited, where 42.58% were men with a mean age of 30.84 years and 57.42% were women with a mean age of 31.42. No significant differences were found in age by sex ($t = .67$; $p > .05$). People who were between 18 and 60 years old and who had been in at least one romantic relationship in the last twelve months were included. People with recent psychiatric diagnoses were excluded from the study.

2.2 Instruments

Spanish version of the IPVAS was used (Garay-Quevedo et al., 2021). The instrument measures the acceptance of IPV in three dimensions, namely, Control, Abuse, and Violence. The scale comprises 23 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The higher the score, the greater the positive attitudes toward IPV. The internal reliability of this adapted version is .80 according to Cronbach's alpha, and for each scale, Cronbach's alpha is .71 for abuse, .57 for control, and .78 for physical violence.

A demographic survey was also applied to record participants' information about their age, gender, sexual orientation, social class, education level, parenthood, type of romantic relationship, length of that relationship, and alcohol consumption.

2.3 Procedure

Research assistants approached the eligible participants and invited them to participate after a brief explanation of the study. People who agreed to participate were asked to sign the consent form, where they were informed of no known risks being involved in this research. After acceptance, the participants had to an-

swer the IPVAS first and then the demographic survey. To guarantee anonymity, no names or any kind of identification was registered in the answer sheets. Research assistants were present during the application to answer any questions regarding filling out the instruments.

3. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were performed for individual variables, and the prevalence of IPV attitudes was calculated according to the three dimensions assessed by the IPVAS. Multilevel logistic regression was performed to estimate the odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) to describe the association between each dimension of attitudes toward IPV and demographics; the statistical significance was estimated for a *p* value < .05. First, a univariate raw model was fitted (model 1), and then a multivariate model was adjusted (model 2) for all the demographics, type and length of romantic relationships, and alcohol consumption measured by the survey. The data analysis was conducted with the Statistical Package R (R Core Team, 2019).

4. Results

Table 1 shows that the number of females was higher than that of the males. Nearly half of the sample was under 25 years. The middle class had the most common social status, and 44.91% of the sample had a university degree. Close to 86% of this sample were heterosexual. Dating someone and being single were the most frequent status of romantic relationships. The most frequent length of relationships was less than five years. Slightly more than 50% of participants reported to have no children, and more than 60% declared some degree of alcohol consumption. The prevalence of acceptance of control, abuse, or physical violence were 82.16%, 84.65%, and 42.32%, respectively, indicating almost twice as much the acceptance of control and abuse as of physical violence in romantic relationships.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Individual Variables

Individual variables (<i>n</i> = 723)	Frequency	%
Sex		
Man	307	42.58
Woman	414	57.42
Age		
18–25	299	41.47
26–35	212	29.40
36–47	118	16.37
> 48	92	12.76
Do you have children?		
No	354	53.56
Yes	307	46.44

Individual variables (<i>n</i> = 723)	Frequency	%
Relationship time (Years)		
< 5	435	61.44
6–15	165	23.31
> 16	108	15.25
Social class		
Lower	230	31.90
Middle	421	58.39
Upper	70	9.71
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	605	85.94
Other	99	14.06
Relationship status		
Single	201	27.88
Dating	243	33.70
Married	119	16.50
Cohabiting	158	21.91
Education level		
University	322	44.91
Technical/technological	204	28.45
Secondary school	162	22.59
Primary school	29	4.04
Alcohol consumption		
No	277	38.58
Yes	441	61.42
Dimensions of attitudes toward IPV Control		
No	129	17.84
Yes	594	82.16
Violence		
No	417	57.68
Yes	306	42.32
Abuse		
No	111	15.35
Yes	612	84.65

Table 2 shows demographic variables, type and length of relationships, and alcohol consumption associated with the attitudes toward control. The raw model depicts that being women or belonging to the middle class reduced the likelihood of acceptance toward control, whereas having a technical or a secondary education level, or consuming alcohol were risk factors for acceptance of control. The adjusted model further indicates that women were less likely to accept controlling behaviors than men, whereas its acceptance was higher in people who were dating than in single individuals, and in those having technical education level than in those having a university degree. No other statistically significant associations were found.

Table 3 presents the associations between demographic variables and attitudes toward abuse. The first model indicates that having children, having technical or secondary education level, and alcohol consumption increased the acceptance of abuse. The adjusted model also shows that positive attitudes toward abuse were higher in those who have a technical or a secondary education level, and in those reporting alcohol consumption. No other statistically significant associations were found.

Table 2

Logistic Regression of Demographics Associated with Attitudes toward Control over the Partner

Individual variables (<i>n</i> = 723)	Model 2–Adjusted			
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Sex				
Man	1		1	
Woman	.55**	[.36, .82]	.46**	[.27, .75]
Age				
18–25	1		1	
26–35	.90	[.56, 1.44]	.78	[.42, 1.45]
36–47	.81	[.47, 1.42]	.79	[.34, 1.88]
> 48	.81	[.45, 1.50]	.69	[.25, 1.94]
Do you have children?				
No	1		1	
Yes	1.07	[.71, 1.60]	1.66	[.84, 3.32]
Relationship time (Years)				
< 5	1		1	
6–15	1.13	[.70, 1.87]	1.13	[.59, 2.20]
> 16	.67	[.41, 1.12]	.70	[.29, 1.72]
Social class				
Lower	1		1	
Middle	.64*	[.41, .99]	.85	[.52, 1.39]
Upper	1.14	[.53, 2.64]	2.00	[.78, 5.90]
Sexual orientation				
Heterosexual	1		1	
Other	.72	[.43, 1.23]	.82	[.34, 2.32]
Relationship status				
Single	1		1	
Dating	1.34	[.82, 2.19]	1.90*	[1.06, 3.44]
Married	.93	[.54, 1.65]	.82	[.36, 1.89]
Cohabiting	1.26	[.74, 2.19]	1.20	[.59, 2.48]
Education level				
University	1		1	
Technical/technological	1.61*	[1.02, 2.58]	2.04*	[1.15, 3.73]
Secondary school	1.74*	[1.06, 2.96]	1.68	[.94, 3.10]
Primary school	2.50	[.85, 10.68]	2.28	[.65, 10.82]
Alcohol consumption				
No	1		1	
Yes	1.54*	[1.05, 2.27]	1.35	[.85, 2.13]

Note. The model 2 was adjusted for all the variables. * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Finally, according to the raw model showing the association between demographics and the acceptance of physical violence (see Table 4), those who were 26–35 years old and those who were dating someone were less likely to accept physical violence, whereas having a secondary education level was a risk factor. The same pattern was found in the adjusted model, and no other statistically significant associations were found.

5. Discussion

This study examined the association of demographic variables, the type and length of romantic relationships, and alcohol consumption with attitudes toward IPV in 723 people living in the Colombian capital city.

The multivariate analysis showed that women were less likely to accept controlling behaviors than men, while people who had technical education and those who were dating someone were more likely to accept control. Positive attitudes toward abuse were higher in those who had technical and secondary education levels and in those who reported alcohol consumption. Lastly, the acceptance of physical violence was lower in people who were dating someone, and people aged between 26 and 35, whereas acceptance of physical violence was higher in those with secondary education.

The percentage of acceptance toward controlling behaviors and abuse was above 80%. These results are consistent with prior findings (Moser & McIlwaine, 2006).

Table 3

Logistic Regression of Demographics Associated with Attitudes toward Partner Abuse

Individual variables (<i>n</i> = 723)	Model 2–Adjusted			
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Sex				
Man	1		1	
Woman	.87	[.57, 1.30]	.83	[.51, 1.35]
Age				
18–25	1		1	
26–35	1.01	[.63, 1.65]	.80	[.43, 1.51]
36–47	1.28	[.70, 2.46]	.99	[.39, 2.66]
> 48	.89	[.48, 1.69]	.52	[.17, 1.70]
Do you have children?				
No	1		1	
Yes	1.62*	[1.04, 2.55]	2.05	[.97, 4.47]
Relationship time (Years)				
< 5	1		1	
6–15	1.04	[.64, 1.73]	.81	[.42, 1.61]
> 16	.93	[.53, 1.68]	.77	[.28, 2.15]
Social class				
Lower	1		1	
Middle	.77	[.48, 1.20]	.97	[.57, 1.64]
Upper	.73	[.36, 1.55]	1.02	[.43, 2.53]
Sexual orientation				
Heterosexual	1		1	
Other	.63	[.38, 1.10]	1.03	[.42, 2.95]
Relationship status				
Single	1		1	
Dating	.67	[.40, 1.10]	.70	[.39, 1.25]
Married	.83	[.45, 1.57]	.68	[.27, 1.70]
Cohabiting	1.88	[.96, 3.87]	1.52	[.64, 3.83]
Education level				
University	1		1	
Technical/technological	2.51***	[1.53, 4.28]	2.87**	[1.54, 5.72]
Secondary school	4.17***	[2.23, 8.53]	3.09**	[1.55, 6.67]
Primary school	2.63	[.89, 1.13]	1.90	[.54, 9.13]
Alcohol consumption				
No	1		1	
Yes	1.53*	[1.01, 2.30]	1.69*	[1.04, 2.75]

Note. The model 2 was adjusted for all the variables. * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Attempts to explain this problem include the acceptance of using violence in Latin-Americans based on the long history of internal conflicts and dictatorial regimens, causing that population commonly identifies violence as a strategy to instill respect from others in relationships, including romantic ones (de León Escribano, 2008).

Although the prevalence of physical violence acceptance was lower than the other two dimensions, nearly half of the sample accepted at least one situation where physical threat was present. This scenario suggests that, despite its rejection, physical violence is still considered bearable and culturally accepted, which agrees with previous reports describing physical aggression between inti-

mate partners as part of romantic relationships (Machado et al., 2014), deserved for disobeying the partner (Molina & Moreno, 2015), justified when wives do not make what it is expected of them (Shakya et al., 2018), and a way to solve conflicts (Guzmán González et al., 2016). Thus, it is possible that the high acceptance of abuse, controlling interactions between partners and physical violence found in this study, reflects a bigger picture about rule enactment between romantic partners.

Education level is consistently reported as a strong factor associated with attitudes toward IPV, indicating that the more highly educated the population is, the lower the tolerance toward violence becomes (Alzoubi

Table 4

Demographics Associated with Attitudes toward Partner Physical Violence

Individual variables (<i>n</i> = 723)	Model 2–Adjusted			
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Sex				
Man	1		1	
Woman	1.11	[.82, 1.50]	1.04	[.73, 1.47]
Age				
18–25	1		1	
26–35	0.63*	[.44, .91]	.55*	[.34, .87]
36–47	.78	[.51, 1.20]	.68	[.36, 1.29]
> 48	1.18	[.74, 1.89]	.82	[.37, 1.80]
Do you have children?				
No	1		1	
Yes	1.16	[.85, 1.58]	1.10	[.65, 1.85]
Relationship time (Years)				
< 5	1		1	
6–15	1.01	[.70, 1.45]	1.06	[.66, 1.71]
> 16	1.17	[.76, 1.78]	1.00	[.49, 2.03]
Social class				
Lower	1		1	
Middle	.79	[.57, 1.09]	1.02	[.70, 1.48]
Upper	.59	[.33, 1.02]	.82	[.42, 1.58]
Sexual orientation				
Heterosexual	1		1	
Other	.84	[.54, 1.29]	1.27	[.61, 2.60]
Relationship status				
Single	1		1	
Dating	.63*	[.43, .93]	.62*	[.40, .96]
Married	.84	[.53, 1.32]	.83	[.43, 1.61]
Cohabiting	.93	[.61, 1.42]	1.07	[.62, 1.85]
Education level				
University	1		1	
Technical/technological	1.34	[.93, 1.92]	1.10	[.73, 1.67]
Secondary school	2.34***	[1.60, 3.45]	2.13***	[1.37, 3.34]
Primary school	1.75	[.81, 3.77]	.96	[.36, 2.41]
Alcohol consumption				
No	1		1	
Yes	1.10	[.81, 1.50]	1.26	[.88, 1.80]

Note. The model 2 was adjusted for all the variables. * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

& Ali, 2021; Tran et al., 2016; Wang, 2016). This study confirmed such association for the three dimensions. It is possible that higher education promotes scenarios that put beliefs and mental frameworks into question about roles that people fulfill into their own social groups, which potentially fosters cultural changes such as gender equality (Uthman et al., 2009; Wang, 2016).

This study also found that women were more reluctant to accept controlling behaviors in romantic relationships. Especially in recent years, a global effort has been made to increase women's empowerment and foster awareness about their contributions to society (Barik & Sethy, 2019). Moreover, there has been more advertis-

ing to draw attention to violence against women in order to prevent it and reduce their incidence (OMS & OPS, 2013). Likewise, some efforts have been made to lessen IPV acceptance in women and men through training (Ferrer Pérez et al., 2006). Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that some female participants had been somehow exposed to some or all those efforts that have changed their attitudes toward IPV, making them less tolerant.

Results also showed that dating someone was a risk factor for accepting controlling behaviors. This finding is similar to results reported in an Colombian sample by Rey-Anacona (2013). Some narratives about dating relationships show that people may accept controlling

behaviors from their partners because they think that love entails sacrifice, including bearing control exerted by their romantic partners (Singleton et al., 2019). Others have shown that younger women were more prone to interpret jealousy from their romantic partners as a sign of love (Power et al., 2006), or can feel flattered when their partners want to spend too much time with them (Pocock et al., 2020). Therefore, it is possible that participants who were dating someone attributed controlling behavior as a natural expression of love, thus accepting to endure or exert control over their partners.

Interestingly, dating someone was also a protective factor over tolerance toward physical violence. This was also reported by Rey-Anaconda in a Colombian sample (2013). An empirical study in 37 cultures showed that men and women express their desire to find kindness, interdependence, and a very low level of social conflicts in potential mates (Buss, 2007). Furthermore, people tend to idealize the romantic partner in a time-limited fashion (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010), especially while they are dating (Murray et al., 1996). We speculate that those who were dating were at a lower risk of tolerating physical violence because accepting that would not match with kindness, caring, and low level of conflicts expected in romantic relationships. Our results also showed higher acceptance of emotional abuse in those who reported alcohol consumption. Steele and Josephs (1990) proposed the *alcoholic myopia theory* to describe that people under effects of alcohol exhibit lower cognitive abilities, especially regarding attentional processes, thereby making them biased toward specific environmental cues and omitting relevant information to interpret the whole context. This could explain the relationship between alcohol consumption and IPV (Stappenbeck & Fromme, 2014; Watkins et al., 2015). Some studies have stated that skills of emotion regulation mediate aggressive behavior, even if a person is under the influence of alcohol (Stappenbeck & Fromme, 2014). Therefore, alcohol consumption could be interpreted as an intervening risk factor when there is a lack of emotional regulation, rather than considering it as a cause of IPV (Grigorian et al., 2020).

Finally, this study identified that people between 26 and 35 years of age were less prone to accept physical violence. This group of people who were born between 1980 and 1995, named as millennials, are characterized by seeking a high level of tolerance and respect toward others regardless of race, sexual orientation, country of origin, etc. Moreover, millennials have achieved higher education levels and have greater access to global information than previous generations (Ng & Johnson, 2015). Hence, it is possible that less acceptance of physical violence is related to an open minded mindset or critical thinking about traditional social frameworks in comparison with previous generations (Twenge & Campbell, 2012).

Great efforts were made to analyze results from a partnership perspective, to avoid gender bias interpre-

tation, and to draw attention to attitudes deemed as underlying factors or predictors of IPV. However, some limitations to interpret the results should be considered. First, an intentional non-random sample prevents findings from generalization. Second, despite voluntary and anonymous participation and precautions taken by researchers during administration of instruments, the extent to which there were biased answers due to social desirability is unknown; some participants might feel judged for reporting positive attitudes toward IPV. Third, the IPVAS is a self-reported scale, meaning that participants' misjudgments about any statement of the scale were unavoidable to some extent. Fourth, establishing causal associations between attitudes and demographics is inappropriate given the cross-sectional design used.

Further research should perform multivariate analysis including psychological variables associated with attitudes toward IPV to determine whether emotional or cognitive changes mediated by attitudes can trigger violent interactions in romantic relationships. Assessing attitudes toward IPV from a partnership perspective to explore couple dynamics is also essential to identify whether specific attitudes serve as predictors of violent behaviors toward the partner. Researchers and mental health practitioners should insist on promoting awareness of IPV as a public health problem, thereby increasing evidence-based research that supports effective implementation of public policy through strengthening access to education and programs to prevent IPV.

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