

Intimate partner violence in adolescence: an analysis of gender and generation

Violência por parceiro íntimo na adolescência: uma análise de gênero e geração

Violencia de pareja en la adolescencia: un análisis de género y generación

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze the intimate partner violence in adolescence from the perspective of gender and generation. **Method:** Quantitative, descriptive, and exploratory research. 111 adolescents participated in this study, with ages from 15 to 19 years old. **Results:** We found that 91% of participants have perpetrated and 90.1% have undergone at least one of the natures of violence. The intimate partner violence in adolescence constitutes a form of gender violence, and gender constructions have determined the suffered and perpetrated aggressions, possibly also determining the naturalization and legitimization of such aggressions. The inequality of power between generations may determine greater vulnerability of youngsters to the phenomenon. **Conclusion:** The historical and social construction of masculinity and femininity and the power inequalities set by these constructions converge with the power inequality between generations. Thus, gender and generation are determinants of intimate partner violence in adolescence, as well as of the vulnerability of adolescents to this phenomenon.

Descriptors: Adolescent Health; Gender and Health; Violence Against Women; Intimate Partner Violence; Adolescent.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Analisar a violência por parceiro íntimo na adolescência na perspectiva de gênero e geração. **Método:** Pesquisa quantitativa, descritiva e exploratória. Participaram 111 adolescentes, com idades de 15 a 19 anos. **Resultados:** Constatou-se que 91% dos participantes perpetraram e 90,1% sofreram, no mínimo, uma das naturezas de violência. A violência por parceiro íntimo na adolescência constitui uma forma de violência de gênero, e as construções de gênero determinaram as agressões sofridas e perpetradas, possivelmente determinando também a naturalização e legitimação de tais agressões. A desigualdade de poder entre as gerações pode determinar maior vulnerabilidade dos mais jovens ao fenômeno. **Conclusão:** A construção histórica e social da masculinidade e da feminilidade e as desigualdades de poder estabelecidas por essas construções confluem com a desigualdade de poder entre as gerações. Assim, gênero e geração são determinantes da violência por parceiro íntimo na adolescência, bem como da vulnerabilidade de adolescentes a esse fenômeno.

Descritores: Saúde do Adolescente; Gênero e Saúde; Violência Contra a Mulher; Violência por Parceiro Íntimo; Adolescente.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar la violencia de pareja en la adolescencia, en las perspectivas de género y generación. **Método:** investigación cuantitativa, descriptiva, exploratoria. Participaron 111 adolescentes de entre 15 y 19 años. **Resultados:** se constató que 91% de los adolescentes ejercieron y 90,1% sufrieron, al menos, una forma de violencia. La violencia de pareja en la adolescencia constituye una forma de violencia de género. Las construcciones de género determinaron las agresiones sufridas y ejercidas, posiblemente determinando también la naturalización y legitimación de tales agresiones. La desigualdad de poder entre las generaciones puede determinar mayor vulnerabilidad de los más jóvenes al fenómeno. **Conclusión:** la construcción histórica y social de masculinidad y femineidad y las desigualdades de poder establecidas por dichas construcciones confluyen con la desigualdad de poder entre generaciones. Consecuentemente, género y generación son determinantes de la violencia de pareja en la adolescencia, así como de la vulnerabilidad de adolescentes a este fenómeno.

Descriptorios: Salud del Adolescente; Género y Salud; Violencia contra la Mujer; Violencia de Pareja; Adolescente.

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INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence is defined by the World Health Organization as a “behavior by an intimate partner that causes physical, sexual, or psychological damage, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behavior”⁽¹⁾.

In this study, we chose to use the term *intimate partner violence in adolescence*, since it covers informal partnerships such as dating and casual relationships. The latter is a kind of intimate relationship characterized as attraction phase without further commitment between the partners, and can involve from kissing to sexual intercourse. However, it can also take on characteristics similar to dating, which is an intimate relationship characterized by the commitment between the partners⁽²⁾.

The intimate partner violence is common among teenagers and has been often approached in international studies, especially in North American countries, in which it is called “dating violence” or “courtship violence”. Nationally, the scientific literature on the subject is restricted. Similarly, the articulation between gender and intimate partner violence in adolescence is a little discussed topic both nationally and internationally⁽³⁾.

A Spanish study conducted with 567 adolescents revealed that 96.3% of participants have perpetrated verbal/emotional violence in intimate relationships and 95.4% have suffered verbal/emotional violence. The same study pointed out that 24.3% of adolescents have perpetrated and 21.7% have suffered physical violence in that type of relationship⁽⁴⁾. In a similar study, carried out with 3,205 adolescents from 10 Brazilian capitals, detected that 38.9% of participants have perpetrated and 43.8% have suffered sexual violence⁽²⁾.

The experience of the first intimate relationships in an androcentric society may determine greater vulnerability to experiencing and perpetrating violence. Furthermore, the power inequality between generations may also determine greater vulnerability of adolescents to the phenomenon, since at this stage of life both sexes occupy positions of social subalternity.

This study was guided by the following questions: “What are the characteristics of the violence experienced and perpetrated by adolescents in their intimate relationships?” and “How can the intimate partner violence in adolescence be understood from the perspective of gender and generation?”

OBJECTIVE

To analyze the intimate partner violence in adolescence from the perspective of gender and generation.

METHOD

Ethical aspects

The research met the requirements of the Resolution 466/2012 from the National Health Council. The research project has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Nursing at the University of São Paulo. The adolescents above 18 years old signed the Informed Consent Form.

Design, study location, and period

Cross-sectional study, conducted between October and November 2015, in a public school in the city of Curitiba, which offers courses in Technical Education and Higher Education. The city of Curitiba is the capital of the state of Paraná, in the Southern region of Brazil.

Population and sample

We used a convenience sampling, with the participation of adolescents who met the following inclusion criteria: age from 15 to 19 years old and having a casual or dating relationship, regardless of its duration.

Data collection and study protocol

The data were collected by anonymous and self-applicable instrument. The used instrument was composed by the CADRI (Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory) scale, created by Wolfe et al.⁽⁵⁾ and adapted and validated to Portuguese by Minayo, Assis, and Njaine⁽²⁾. We included closed questions, concerning the characteristics of participants and the types of intimate relationships established.

The CADRI is a scale that assesses the victimization and perpetration of physical, sexual, and psychological violence in the intimate relationship. Psychological violence was subdivided into three items: verbal/emotional violence, threats, and relational violence, which relates to spreading rumors about the partner, trying to turn friends against him or her and saying things to break the partners’ friendships⁽⁵⁾.

We conducted a pretest of the instrument with 10 participants whose characteristics resembled those of the sample studied, and we did not verify need for change in the instrument. The data collected in the pretest were not accounted in the final results. Approximately 40% of the instruments were applied in the classroom. In the higher education, because of the difficulty of getting free times for the application, there was the need to deliver the instruments for the adolescents to fill them out in a convenient moment and collect them later.

Results analysis and statistics-

The adolescents were questioned about the aggressions suffered and perpetrated in every item of the scale. For each question, we offered the possibility to reply: “never”, “rarely”, “sometimes”, and “always”, with score of, respectively, 0 to 3 for each of the response options. The data were plotted and analyzed using the SPSS® (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software, version 22. Double typing was performed by independent researchers and, later, we proceeded to the descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. We decided to calculate the results considering only valid cases, i.e., the fields filled out in the database.

The data were described by absolute and relative frequencies, and the numerical summary-measures, such as mean, median, and standard deviation were also presented. We used inferential statistical techniques to verify the association between variables. To assess the association of the “sex of the adolescent” variable with categorical variables, we used the

Chi-square test or the Fisher’s exact test. We found the association of sex with numeric variables by t-test or Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test. To verify the correlation between the CADRI scales, we used the Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient.

The variables relating to the suffered and perpetrated violence consisted of the sum of the scores of CADRI items for each type of violence. When the score of the sum of the items was zero, we considered that there was no violence in the relationship. When the sum of the scores was greater than or equal to 1, we considered that there was violence in the relationship.

The variables were analyzed based on the gender and generation categories, which constituted the theoretical framework of the research. The gender category addresses the historical and social construction of the power relations between the sexes⁽⁶⁾

[...] differentiating the biological sex from the social sex. While the first refers to the anatomical and physiological differences, therefore, biological, existing between men and women, the second relates to the expression that these differences take in different societies, in the course of history.

The gender violence subcategory allows understanding the relations of domination determined by the existing power imbalance between the sexes, in general hegemonically located in the male pole⁽⁷⁾. The generation category addresses the existing power inequalities between generations, and adults correspond to the generational category that holds greater power⁽⁶⁾. Besides, the generation category also makes it possible to understand the relation between the historical and social context and the experiences of adolescents, i.e., of subjects from the same generation⁽³⁾.

RESULTS

Characterization of the sample

111 adolescents participated in the study, being 69 female (62.2%) and 42 male (37.8%). The average age of participants was 18.2 years old. Regarding nationality, 110 adolescents were Brazilians (99.1%) and one, Japanese (0.9%). Regarding skin color, 80.2% self-declared as white, 12.6% as brown, 4.5% as black, and 2.7% as yellow or indigenous. Regarding origin, 89.2% were from the city of Curitiba, whose population is predominantly white⁽⁸⁾. Only 1 (0.9%) adolescent lived in the countryside, and the other ones (99.1%), in the urban area. Regarding religion, there was a predominance of Catholics (41.8%) or without religion (34.5%). Most lived with father and mother (63.1%). The average number of rooms in the house per person was equal to 2.3. Most participants did not work (61.3%), however, among those who worked and received remuneration (36%), the average earnings reached BRL 923.86. Regarding education of the father or male guardian, the average of years of schooling was 12 years. The average educational level of the mother or female guardian was 12.3 years.

Characterization of the types of intimate relationships

The intimate relationships established by the participants were predominantly heterosexual, according to Table 1. The average age at which adolescents began casual relationships or dating was 13.7 years. The average age of the beginning of dating was similar both for boys (13.8 years) and girls (13.6 years).

The average number of people with whom the participants had casual relationships or dated proved to be similar between the sexes and equal to 10 (X = 5) people.

Table 1 – Characteristics of intimate relationships established by adolescents, Curitiba, Brazil, 2015

Variables	Female		Male		Total		p value
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Already had casual relationships or dated people ¹							0.006*
Of the opposite sex	46	66.7	38	90.5	84	75.7	
Of the same sex and opposite sex	21	30.4	3	7.1	24	21.6	
Of the same sex	2	2.9	1	2.4	3	2.7	
Had sexual intercourse ²							0.020*
Yes	49	74.2	22	52.4	71	65.7	
No	17	25.8	20	47.6	37	34.3	
Currently has sexual intercourse with ¹							0.002*
Only one fixed partner	43	87.8	11	50	54	76.1	
Non-fixed partners	3	6.1	8	36.4	11	15.5	
One fixed partner and non-fixed partners	3	6.1	3	13.6	6	8.5	
Had sexual intercourse with people ¹							0.730
Of the opposite sex	37	75.5	19	86.4	56	78.9	
Of the same sex	6	12.2	2	9.1	8	11.3	
Both	6	12.2	1	4.5	7	9.9	

Notes: 1 = Fisher’s exact test; 2 = Chi-square test; * Statistically significant difference (p < 0.05)

Most had already had sexual intercourse. The average age of the first sexual intercourse was 16.4 years. The average age of the first sexual intercourse was similar between boys and girls: 16.2 years and 16.5 years, respectively.

Regarding the number of people with whom the adolescents have had sexual intercourse, the average was 3 people. The girls' average was 2.4 people, and the boys' average, 4.6 people. Most adolescents claimed to have sex with only one fixed and opposite sex partner.

Participants were asked to select a person with whom they had a casual relationship or dated. We observed predominance of participants who chose to respond about the person they were dating at the time of the survey (45.9%), 31.2% chose who they dated less than a year ago, 21.1% selected who they dated over a year ago, and 1.8% responded about the person they were engaged or married at the time of survey. No one responded about someone they were once engaged or married.

Regarding the selected partner's age, there was a predominance of older people, and we found statistically significant association between the partner's age and sex of the adolescent (Table 2). Most of the selected partners was of the opposite sex, revealing the predominance of heterosexual relationships (89.9%). When asked about the frequency of discussions or fights with partners, most adolescents reported discussing or fighting few times or never (Table 2).

Regarding the time of duration of the relationship, the average was 55.3 (X = 36) weeks. We found statistically significant association between sex and the duration of the relationship. Among girls, this average reached 69 (X = 48) weeks, and among boys, 31.3 (X = 20) weeks.

To verify the perceptions of adolescents about the suffered and perpetrated violences on the chosen relationship, we requested them to respond "yes" or "no" to whether they had already been victims or perpetrators of physical, sexual, and psychological violence. The violence of psychological nature was the most reported one (Table 3).

Characterization of the violence

From the 111 participants, 91% reported perpetrating at least one of the natures of violence and 90.1% (n = 100) claimed to have suffered at least one of them.

When considered the absolute and relative frequencies of perpetration of violence according to sex, 95.7% of girls and 83.3% of boys claimed to have perpetrated at least one of the natures of violence. Regarding experienced violence, 94.2% of girls and 83.3% of boys claimed to have suffered at least one of the natures of violence. The absolute and relative frequencies by CADRI subscale are presented in Table 4.

The verbal/emotional violence presented the higher frequencies of perpetration and victimization. We also highlight the high percentage of suffered and perpetrated sexual violence and threats. The suffered relational violence and perpetrated physical violence were referred to by 22.5% of participants. The suffered physical violence and perpetrated relational violence emerged as the least reported by adolescents.

In Table 5, we present the scores obtained in CADRI by subscale of perpetration and victimization. We found statistically significant association between sex and the variables of perpetrated sexual violence, perpetrated physical violence, perpetrated verbal/emotional violence, perpetrated threats, and perpetrated abusive behaviors. In the subscales of association with sex, we observed that male adolescents had higher average only in the subscale of perpetrated sexual violence. In the other subscales, the girls' averages were superior.

To verify the co-occurrence of different kinds of violence, the subscales of verbal/emotional violence, relational violence, and threats were grouped, forming the psychological violence variable. The results showed that psychological violence was the most perpetrated one, reported by

Table 2 – Characteristics of the intimate relationships selected by adolescents, Curitiba, Brazil, 2015

Variables	Female		Male		Total		p value
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Age of the selected person ¹							
He/she is or was older than you	40	58.8	8	19.0	48	43.6	<0.001*
He/she has or had the same age as you	25	36.8	17	40.5	42	38.2	
He/she is or was younger than you	3	4.4	17	40.5	20	18.2	
Frequency of discussions/fights ²							
Few times	41	61.2	15	35.7	56	51.4	0.005*
Never	9	13.4	18	42.9	27	24.8	
Many times	14	20.9	8	19.0	22	20.2	
Always	3	4.5	1	2.4	4	3.7	

Notes: 1 = Chi-square test; 2 = Fisher's exact test; * Statistically significant difference (p < 0.05).

Table 3 – Suffered and perpetrated violences in the relationship with the selected person, Curitiba, Brazil, 2015

Variables	Female		Male		Total		p value
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Were victims of physical violence ¹	2	3.0	2	4.8	4	3.7	0.641
Were perpetrators of physical violence ¹	4	6.1	1	2.4	5	4.6	0.647
Were victims of psychological violence ²	21	30.9	8	19.0	29	26.4	0.171
Were perpetrators of psychological violence ²	14	21.2	6	14.3	20	18.5	0.366
Were victims of sexual violence ¹	5	7.5	2	4.8	7	6.4	0.705
Were perpetrators of sexual violence ¹	0	0.0	1	2.4	1	0.9	0.389

Notes: 1 = Fisher's exact test; 2 = Chi-square test.

Table 4 - Perpetration and victimization of violence by *Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory* subscale, Curitiba, Brazil, 2015

Variables	Female		Male		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Perpetrated sexual violence	15	21.7	16	38.1	31	27.9
Suffered sexual violence	23	33.3	13	31.0	36	32.4
Perpetrated physical violence	21	30.4	4	9.5	25	22.5
Suffered physical violence	11	15.9	9	21.4	20	18.0
Perpetrated verbal/emotional violence	66	95.7	34	81.0	100	90.1
Suffered verbal/emotional violence	64	92.8	35	83.3	99	89.2
Perpetrated relational violence	5	7.2	4	9.5	9	8.1
Suffered relational violence	15	21.7	10	23.8	25	22.5
Perpetrated threats	20	29.0	4	9.5	24	21.6
Suffered threats	21	30.4	7	16.7	28	25.2
Perpetrated abusive behaviors	66	95.7	35	83.3	101	91.0
Suffered abusive behaviors	65	94.2	35	83.3	100	90.1

Table 5 - Scores of the *Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory* by subscale, Curitiba, Brazil, 2015

Variables	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Minimum value	Maximum value	p*
Perpetrated sexual violence	0.5	0.0	1.0	0	6	0.053 ^A
Female	0.4	0.0	0.9	0	6	
Male	0.7	0.0	1.1	0	4	
Suffered sexual violence	0.8	0.0	1.9	0	12	0.800
Female	0.9	0.0	2.2	0	12	
Male	0.6	0.0	1.0	0	4	
Perpetrated physical violence	0.5	0.0	1.3	0	8	0.009 ^{**}
Female	0.8	0.0	1.5	0	8	
Male	0.2	0.0	0.7	0	4	
Suffered physical violence	0.5	0.0	1.5	0	10	0.440
Female	0.5	0.0	1.8	0	10	
Male	0.5	0.0	1.1	0	4	
Perpetrated verbal/emotional	8.0	7.0	6.1	0	27	0.002 ^{**}
Female	9.3	9.0	6.1	0	27	
Male	5.9	4.5	5.6	0	19	
Suffered verbal/emotional	8.2	6.0	6.6	0	28	0.104
Female	8.9	8.0	6.5	0	28	
Male	7.1	6.0	6.7	0	23	
Perpetrated relational	0.2	0.0	0.9	0	8	0.598
Female	0.1	0.0	0.4	0	2	
Male	0.4	0.0	1.4	0	8	
Suffered relational violence	0.5	0.0	1.3	0	8	0.963
Female	0.5	0.0	1.4	0	8	
Male	0.5	0.0	1.3	0	8	
Perpetrated threats	0.5	0.0	1.2	0	6	0.012 ^{**}
Female	0.7	0.0	1.4	0	6	
Male	0.1	0.0	0.5	0	3	
Suffered threats	0.7	0.0	1.8	0	12	0.091
Female	0.9	0.0	2.0	0	12	
Male	0.4	0.0	1.4	0	8	
Perpetrated abusive behaviors	9.8	8.0	8.0	0	31	0.003 ^{**}
Female	11.3	9.0	8.1	0	31	
Male	7.2	5.0	7.2	0	28	
Suffered abusive behaviors	10.7	7.0	10.9	0	64	0.136
Female	11.7	8.0	11.8	0	64	
Male	9.1	6.0	9.3	0	38	

Notes: *Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test; A: marginal value (p = 0.05); ** Statistically significant difference (p < 0.05).

100 (90%) participants. The perpetration of psychological violence was accompanied by the perpetration of other violences in 39.6% of adolescents, with 19 (17.1%) reporting committing psychological and sexual violence, 14 (12.6%) psychological and physical violence, and 11 (9.9%) all kinds of violence.

From all adolescents, 50.5% said they perpetrate only psychological violence, 1 (0.9%) only sexual violence, and none only physical violence. Only 10 adolescents reported not perpetrating any of the natures of violence.

When considering the suffered violence, we observed that the psychological was the most frequent one among adolescents, reported by 89.2% of participants. The psychological violence was accompanied by other violences for 36.9% of adolescents, with 21 (18.9%) claiming to suffer psychological and sexual violence, 14 (12.6%) all kinds of violence, and 6 (5.4%) psychological and physical violence.

From the total participants, 58 (52.3%) claimed to suffer only psychological violence, 1 (0.9%) only sexual violence, and none only physical violence. Only 11 (9.9%) claimed not suffering any nature of violence.

To complement the co-occurrence analysis between the suffered and perpetrated violences by intimate partners in adolescence, we used the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. We observed that the highest correlation was found between perpetrating and suffering verbal/emotional violence (0.814), followed by suffering and perpetrating sexual violence (0.672), suffering both verbal/emotional violence and threats (0.646), perpetrating threats and physical violence (0.544), suffering and perpetrating threats (0.545).

DISCUSSION

Regarding the adolescents' living conditions, we identified strengthening potentials⁽⁹⁾, namely: living with both parents, residing in households whose number of rooms was higher than the number of inhabitants, and average years of schooling of parents

or responsible higher than the years of study required for the completion of High School in Brazil. Most participants did not work and attended the Technical or Higher Education, indicating that the family owned financial conditions that enabled the maintenance of the students at school.

These results indicate that intimate partner violence in adolescence is not a phenomenon restricted to groups with greater social vulnerability, but that pervades social classes, as pointed out by Minayo, Assis, and Njaine⁽²⁾. In a study with adolescent students from public and private schools from 10 Brazilian capitals, the authors found little differences in the prevalence of victimization and perpetration of violence in intimate relationships between public school students when compared to the ones of the private network.

When analyzing the intimate relationships, they found that most adolescents reproduced the hegemonic social constructions of sexual orientation and gender. This study differed from other researches^(2,4) in finding a larger number of participants who claimed to have dated, had casual relationships, and had homosexual or bisexual sexual intercourse. However, we observe that heterosexuality is still the prevalent sexual orientation, especially among boys. This finding may be related to the hegemonic construction of masculinity, according to which having homosexual or bisexual relations can be regarded as a betrayal, and may compromise the male supremacy⁽¹⁰⁾.

The first intimate relationships occurred in early adolescence, with great variability in the number of people with whom the participants had casual relationships or dated, indicating ephemeral relationships among adolescents. These aspects have also been found in national studies^(2,11).

Despite the short duration of the relationships, 65.7% of participants claimed to have initiated their sexual life with, in average, 16.4 years old, an average superior to that obtained by Minayo, Assis, and Njaine⁽²⁾ and similar to that found by Hugo et al.⁽¹²⁾. Although this datum has been similar for both sexes, we observed that the girls had more frequency than boys, diverging from the results obtained by Minayo, Assis, and Njaine⁽²⁾ and by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics⁽¹³⁾, which found higher percentage among boys.

We observed that the number and type of sexual partners also showed gender differences. Among girls who began sexual life, we observed fewer sexual partners than among boys. Besides, most girls (87.8%) stated that, at the time of research, they had sexual intercourse with a regular partner, thereby reinforcing the mono-partnerships for women, a socially valued aspect in the hegemonic construction of femininity⁽⁶⁾. When considering the boys' relationships, we observed the opposite. They reported greater number of partners, and only half said they had sexual intercourse with only one fixed partner. This may be related to the importance of proving manhood before the partners, which gives prestige to the boys and is socially valued in the hegemonic social construction of masculinity⁽¹⁰⁾.

The partners of most girls were older or had the same age as them, unlike boys, whose partners had the same age or were younger. Depending on the age difference between the partners, the gender inequality can converge with generation inequality, giving girls less power in the relationship and

greater vulnerability to violence⁽¹⁴⁾.

The results also showed the coexistence of lasting intimate relationships among adolescents, especially among girls. In the light of gender, we understand that, because of historical and social constructions, men and women have different ways of thinking and acting regarding love and intimate relationships⁽⁶⁾. The hegemonic construction of femininity favors the maintenance of lasting relationships by girls, since it assigns marriage and constitution of the family as values for women⁽⁶⁾. However, such constructions may also impede the exit of girls from violent relationships⁽¹⁵⁾.

Among the girls, there was more frequency of reports of fights with the partner, which highlights the experience of frequent conflicts and of situations of aggression.

On the analysis of suffered and perpetrated violences, stood out the difference observed between the frequencies of adolescents that recognized themselves as victims or perpetrators of psychological, physical, or sexual violence and the frequencies of experience and perpetration of violences obtained on CADRI, which were far superior to the first ones. Similar results were obtained in a study with 4,102 Portuguese adolescents⁽¹⁶⁾. In it, 4% of participants claimed to have suffered intimate partner violence, however, when asked about the experience of aggressions such as blackmail and negative comments about appearance, the percentages of suffered violence were referred to by up to 34.3% of the girls and 33.8% of the boys.

These findings indicate that many of the aggressions perpetrated and suffered in the intimate relationships are not recognized as violence, being denied because of the idealization of relationships as spaces of affection and love, in which violence does not take place⁽²⁾.

Studies^(11,15) also revealed that the hegemonic gender constructions determine the naturalization and legitimization of the experienced and perpetrated violence among adolescents. The speeches of adolescents of both sexes were often based on gender stereotypes about the role of men and women in intimate relationships. The suffered and perpetrated aggressions were not recognized as violence, because gender stereotypes were understood as part of an alleged female or male nature, and not as determined by the historical and social construction of power relations between the sexes.

Studies have pointed to the connection between the naturalization of intimate partner violence and the beliefs of adolescents. In a study with adolescents and young people of Recife⁽¹⁷⁾, researches observed that the participants understood violence as a demonstration of love and care. The exchange of name-calling and slaps was often considered just a joke between the partners.

Although they had not observed statistically significant association between sex and recognizing oneself as aggressor of physical, psychological, or sexual violence, male adolescents showed higher frequencies than females only on items that questioned whether the participants recognized that they had perpetrated sexual assault and had been victims of physical violence. All other frequencies were higher among girls. Such findings suggest questioning whether the girls really perpetrate more aggressions or report more the perpetrated aggressions. Considering that the hegemonic construction of masculinity encourages boys to perpetrate various forms of violence⁽⁶⁾, it

is possible that among them there is greater naturalization of these aggressions, taken as inherent in intimate relationships.

The results of this study corroborate the findings of other authors^(2,4) in revealing that intimate partner violence in adolescence is a frequent phenomenon and of high magnitude. The verbal/emotional violence was the most frequent one^(2,4), followed by sexual violence, and threats⁽²⁾. Despite these findings, this study and the one of Minayo, Assis, and Njaine⁽²⁾ point the centrality of psychological violence. The experience and perpetration of physical and sexual aggressions occur predominantly along with psychological violence, with rare cases in which there was perpetration or isolated experience of physical and sexual aggressions. There was association between suffering and perpetrating the same kind of violence, as well as between suffering and perpetrating different natures of violence. These results were similar to those of Minayo, Assis, and Njaine⁽²⁾ and Fernández-Fuertes and Fuertes⁽⁴⁾.

The results obtained in this study and in others^(2,4) also confirm that this phenomenon is characterized by the mutuality of aggressions. Although the girls have presented higher frequency of suffered violence than that of the boys, there was no statistically significant association between being female and perpetrating physical, verbal/emotional violences, and threats.

These findings seem to indicate that the power relations established by female participants with their partners have less asymmetrical characteristics than conjugal relations. We consider that intimate relationships among adolescents are not yet permeated by other iniquities that seem to increase the inequality of power in marital relations, such as financial dependence from partner, the division of housework and of care of family members, activities that historically have been attributed to women⁽¹⁸⁾.

However, female adolescents also experience gender inequalities in other social relationships, such as in the family⁽¹⁹⁾ and between the partners⁽²⁰⁾. The higher frequencies of perpetration of violence among girls may also be determined by the violence experienced by them in the domestic and public space. A review study on violence against women⁽¹⁸⁾ revealed that female participants reported the reproduction of the violence suffered previously by them, perpetrating it now against spouses, children, and other people in their social conviviality.

A Brazilian study⁽²⁾ also revealed, by speeches of adolescents, the gender determination of the aggressions suffered and perpetrated by intimate partners, referring to the social construction of male and female. Verbal violence was identified by both sexes as a "typically" feminine aggression, and the aggressive postures as "typically" masculine, even when perpetrated by girls. These distinctions are determined by the social construction that binds men to strength and to the exercise of power by domination⁽¹⁸⁾.

The high percentage of verbal/emotional violence and threats perpetrated by girls in this study also seem to reinforce the findings of other research. Some girls reported yelling with partners as an attempt not to be subjugated, or as a defense in response to suffered verbal, physical, or sexual aggressions⁽²⁾. However, such actions have negative impact on the relationship, determining perpetration and experiences of violence⁽⁴⁾.

The verbal and relational aggressions and threats of girls often involve insults about the masculinity of the partners⁽²⁾, while the aggressions of boys relate to the physical appearance and often

involve insults about the sexual behavior of the partners⁽²¹⁾.

The experience of psychological aggressions is also marked by gender differences. Girls have greater freedom to express and share the feelings of sorrow and disappointment generated by aggressions. Boys are forbidden to express those feelings, since, in androcentric societies, sensitivity is a characteristic attributed to women, being required from men constant strength demonstrations^(6,10).

Similar to the findings obtained by Minayo, Assis, and Njaine⁽²⁾, we observed that the high percentage of suffered and perpetrated sexual violence took place, above all, because of the high frequencies obtained in the item "kissing the partner when he/she did not want to". The same study found that this aggression was not always considered by participants as violence, since "stealing a kiss" is a widespread practice among adolescents and can present blurred boundaries between the trial of sexuality and the perpetration of aggression.

Boys presented higher average of perpetration of sexual violence than girls, stressing that sexual violence is based on traditional gender rules and on power inequality between the sexes, which determines that the female body has less value than the male and to be perceived as a body to the satisfaction of the desires of them⁽⁶⁾.

However, for an understanding of these relations of domination and subordination, it is necessary to move the analysis of dominated girls versus dominating boys to the historical and social construction of the inter and intra-gender power relations. A study⁽¹¹⁾ found that male teenagers are often pressured by other boys and girls to be aggressive and dominant in intimate relationships, which makes them live with the tension between corresponding to the hegemonic construction of masculinity or suffering humiliation and being a laughing stock among colleagues because of the questioned manhood.

On the other hand, girls are often pressed by other girls and boys to repress themselves in the intimate relationships, living with the tension between corresponding to the hegemonic construction of femininity or suffering insults. Female adolescents can be stigmatized based on their intimate behaviors⁽¹⁵⁾. They experience the contradiction between the existence of alleged sexual and reproductive freedoms and the maintenance of an androcentric ideology. Throughout history, they are experiencing sexuality increasingly freely, with access to contraception and prevention of sexually transmitted infections. However, these advances are still grounded in the hegemonic ideology, which determines the condition of subalternity for women.

While the results indicate that adolescents of both sexes experience sexual violence in intimate relationships, reports pointing boys as victims of these attacks are not mentioned⁽²¹⁾. A study⁽²⁾ revealed that traditional gender rules can also determine the sexual victimization of boys, although this, in most cases, is not perceived as violence or considered psychological violence. Boys reported that they often experience situations in which they would not like to relate sexually, but the fear of having their masculinity shaken by humiliations and mockery of colleagues or partner makes them surrender to the pressure and have sexual intercourse against their will. Thus, although the intimate partner violence in adolescence presents itself as one of

the experiences determined by ideology and is constantly experienced by adolescents, similar to what occurs among adults⁽⁷⁾, it remains invisible to most boys and girls⁽²⁾.

Gender constructions may also determine the legitimization of sexual violence. A study carried out with Thai female adolescents revealed that girls who had casual relationships with many boys, who wore sexy outfits, among other features punctuated by the adolescents, were blamed for the suffered sexual aggressions and disqualified by the participants⁽¹⁵⁾.

Although the results have revealed a higher frequency of perpetration of physical aggression among girls, the severe physical aggressions are higher among boys⁽²²⁾. A study⁽¹¹⁾ showed that adolescents of both sexes showed the naturalization of boys' aggressions. Aggressiveness was perceived as part of the nature of men, reinforcing the historical and social construction of masculinity and the possibilities of deconstruction of this gender stereotype.

In summary, intimate partner violence in adolescence constitutes a form of gender violence, since it involves relations of domination/subordination determined by the historical and social construction of the hegemonic masculinity and femininity. The androcentric ideology pervades the intimate relationships established between adolescents, determining the inequality of power between the sexes and the maintenance of male hegemony^(2,18).

Limitation of the study

The predominance of participants with 18 years old, age at which it is not necessary to obtain parental consent to participate in the study, made it impossible to compare the suffered and perpetrated violences in different age groups. Consequently, the knowledge about the experiences of adolescents under the age of 18 years regarding intimate partner violence was harmed.

Contributions to the field of nursing

The results revealed the relevance and need for interventions carried out since the early adolescence, aimed at the prevention and confrontation of intimate partner violence, since it is at this time of life that most participants of both sexes said experiencing the first intimate relationships, the beginning of sexual life, and the involvement in violent relationships.

In view of the role of gender in determining the suffered and perpetrated aggressions between adolescent intimate partners, as well as in the naturalization and legitimization of these aggressions, we also consider essential that the interventions address the understanding of the historical and social construction of masculinity and femininity, as well as the questioning and understanding of the prevailing ideology. The gender category and, in it, the gender violence subcategory can constitute powerful knowledge to reduce the magnitude of intimate partner violence in adolescence and broaden the recognition of suffered and perpetrated

aggressions in this context, contributing to overcome the posture of naturalization and legitimization of violence.

CONCLUSION

Intimate partner violence in adolescence is a frequent phenomenon and part of the reality of adolescents of both sexes and different social classes. It has high magnitude and severity, including the experience and perpetration of psychological, sexual, and physical violence. The experience and perpetration of sexual and physical violence occur along with the psychological aggressions. Although the results have pointed out that the girls have perpetrated more aggression than boys, we need new studies on this topic to broaden the understanding of how gender constructions may determine the naturalization of these aggressions.

We also need new researches to broaden the understanding of the relation between the gender inequalities experienced by girls both in the public and private realms and the higher frequencies of perpetration of violence by them. Besides, these aggressions can also be related to self-defense in response to the suffered aggressions, and further studies are also needed on the subject.

The results enabled us to understand that the intimate partner violence in adolescence is determined by the gender and generation categories. The aggressions are determined by the historical and social construction of male and female, with the sexual difference assuming social significance and conforming different patterns of aggression. In addition, gender constructions may also determine the naturalization and legitimization of this violence, since gender stereotypes can be understood as part of an alleged male or female nature, and not as determined by the historical and social construction of power relations between the sexes.

Regarding the generation category, although the results point that intimate partner violence in adolescence is predominantly an intragenerational phenomenon, the difference of age between partners can determine greater vulnerability of girls because of the confluence of the subalternities of gender and generation. The generation category also allowed us to understand the vulnerabilities determined by the historical and social context in which the participants are inserted. The experience of the first intimate relationships in an androcentric and adult-centered society can determine greater vulnerability to the experience and perpetration of intimate partner violence in adolescence.

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