

# CUIDADO É FUNDAMENTAL

ESCOLA DE ENFERMAGEM ALFREDO PINTO –

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## **VIOLÊNCIA NO NAMORO VIVENCIADA POR JOVENS DE UMA UNIVERSIDADE PÚBLICA NO BRASIL**

*Dating violence experienced by young people from a public university in Brazil**Violencia en el novio vivienda por jóvenes en una universidad pública en Brasil***Selma Villas Boas Teixeira<sup>1</sup>** **Beatriz Lourenço Fernandes<sup>2</sup>** **Yamê Regina Alves<sup>3</sup>** **Luíza Pereira Maia de Oliveira<sup>4</sup>** **Andressa Teoli Nunciaroni<sup>5</sup>** **Leila Rangel da Silva<sup>6</sup>** 

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** identificar a violência no namoro vivenciada por jovens universitárias e discutir as formas de violência vivenciadas.**Método:** descritivo, exploratório e qualitativo, com 50 jovens de 19 a 24 anos de uma universidade pública do Rio de Janeiro, Brasil, que afirmaram estar ou já ter estado em um relacionamento por no mínimo seis meses. As entrevistas foram semiestruturadas, entre setembro de 2019 e fevereiro de 2020, e os dados tratados pela análise temática. **Resultados:** a maioria das participantes era parda ou preta, possuía religião e heterossexuais; 39 afirmaram vivenciar alguma forma de violência no namoro perpetrada por homens.A violência psicológica foi relatada pela maioria, seguida da moral, física, sexual e patrimonial. **Considerações finais:** a violência no namoro em universitárias é uma realidade sustentada por moldes patriarcais, favorecendo repercussões negativas na saúde e vida acadêmica. É necessário promover no meio universitário, ações de prevenção e enfrentamento à violência de gênero.**DESCRITORES:** Violência de gênero; Violência por parceiro íntimo; Universidades; Estudantes; Adulto jovem.

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to identify dating violence experienced by young university students and discuss the forms of violence experienced.

**Method:** descriptive, exploratory and qualitative, with 50 young people aged 19 to 24 from a public university in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, who stated that they were or had already been in a relationship for at least six months. The interviews were semi-structured, between September 2019 and February 2020, and the data was treated using thematic analysis. **Results:** the majority of participants were brown or black, religious and heterosexual; 39 said they experienced some form of dating violence perpetrated by men. Psychological violence was reported by the majority, followed by moral, physical, sexual and property violence. **Final considerations:** dating violence among university students is a reality supported by patriarchal molds, favoring negative repercussions on health and academic life. It is necessary to promote actions to prevent and combat gender-based violence in universities.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Gender violence; Intimate partner violence; Universities; Students; Young adult.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** identificar la violencia en el noviazgo vivida por jóvenes universitarios y discutir las formas de violencia vividas. **Método:** descriptivo, exploratorio y cualitativo, con 50 jóvenes de 19 a 24 años de una universidad pública de Río de Janeiro, Brasil, que manifestaron estar o haber estado en una relación de pareja durante al menos seis meses. Las entrevistas fueron semiestructuradas, entre septiembre de 2019 y febrero de 2020, y los datos fueron tratados mediante análisis temático. **Resultados:** la mayoría de los participantes eran morenos o negros, religiosos y heterosexuales; 39 dijeron que habían experimentado alguna forma de violencia en el noviazgo perpetrada por hombres. La violencia psicológica fue la mayoritaria, seguida de la violencia moral, física, sexual y patrimonial. **Consideraciones finales:** la violencia en el noviazgo entre estudiantes universitarios es una realidad sustentada en moldes patriarcales, favoreciendo repercusiones negativas en la salud y la vida académica. Es necesario promover acciones para prevenir y combatir la violencia de género en las universidades.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Violencia de género; Violencia de pareja; Universidades; Estudiantes; Adulto joven.

## INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence against women (IPV) encompasses harmful behavior of a physical, sexual or psychological nature, and occurs within intimate relationships between two people.<sup>1</sup> It is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, representing a major challenge for public health and society on a global scale.<sup>1</sup>

This type of violence is common among adults and people with marital status, but it is also present in the lives of young adults, as it is fueled by the same ingrained gender concepts and attitudes based on inequalities that are perpetuated in the context of marriage or cohabitation.<sup>2</sup>

Dating violence refers to the action perpetrated by an intimate partner, manifesting itself through behaviors aimed at exercising control or domination over the partner, evidencing asymmetrical relationships.<sup>1</sup>

National and international studies indicate a high prevalence of dating violence among young adult university students, including situations such as bodily injury, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, depression, among others. This means that young women face numerous negative repercussions on their health, as their context is permeated by suffering and fear.<sup>3-8</sup>

There are several risk factors that increase the likelihood of experiencing this type of violence: witnessing or being a victim of violence perpetrated by parents or family members, using psychoactive substances, being economically dependent on their partner.<sup>1,5</sup> In addition, when young women enter university, they have an increased chance of experiencing dating violence, since men may feel threatened by their partner's academic status<sup>9</sup> - such a situation can compromise their physical and mental health, negatively impacting their well-being.<sup>4</sup> A study of 1,823 university students showed that 67% of young women had experienced some form of IPV in the academic environment.<sup>3</sup>

It is noteworthy that in Brazil, women occupy the majority of undergraduate and postgraduate enrollments (57.2%), and are also the majority among entrants (55.2%) and graduates (61.4%) of higher education institutions.<sup>4</sup> However, gender asymmetries that legitimize violent actions among young people still prevail in universities, revealing the lack of visibility of this problem, as well as the need to develop proposals to tackle and socially transform this phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> This study is therefore justified by the importance of understanding the elements related to dating violence experienced by university students, considering the negative repercussions on young people's health.

In view of the above, the objectives were to identify dating violence experienced by young university students and to discuss the forms of violence experienced.

## METHOD

This is a descriptive, exploratory study with a qualitative approach. The setting was a federal public university located in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Participants were selected by convenience between September 2019 and February 2020. With the aim of identifying dating violence among young university students, 50 young women were invited, who were passers-by on campus and met the following inclusion criteria: be between 19 and 24 years old; be regularly enrolled in one of the university's courses; claim to be or have been in a relationship with a man or woman for at least six months and have the physical and psychological conditions to voluntarily participate in the research. Women who were not Brazilian, married or living with their partner were excluded, as the definition of dating does not include cohabitation.<sup>2</sup>

If they accepted, the interview was scheduled, according to the participant's availability, in a private room provided by the university, and carried out in a way that ensured the participants' privacy and comfort. All participants were informed about the risks and benefits of the research, as well as their right to withdraw at any time and to sign the Free and Informed Consent Form and the Free and Informed Assent Form. The women's participation was voluntary and there was no refusal to take part in the study.

The fieldwork was conducted by two master's degree moderators (second and third authors), trained by the supervisor (first author). The interviews were recorded on a digital device, with the prior authorization of the participants, and then transcribed in full. They lasted approximately 60 minutes. In order to guarantee anonymity, identification codes were used, denoted by the letter E followed by an ordinal number in ascending order (E1 ... E50), according to the interviews. The total number of participants followed the principle of saturation by scarcity.<sup>10</sup>

Data was collected through semi-structured, individual interviews, the script for which was drawn up by the researchers, with closed and open questions about the dating relationships of the young university

students. At the end of the research, the printed transcripts and audios will be kept for five years; after this period, the texts will be incinerated and the audios deleted.

All the participants were informed about the existence of the Maria da Penha Law<sup>11</sup> and the possibility of reporting their partner if they wished and felt safe. They were also given the telephone numbers of the Women's Helpline (180) and the Women in Situations of Violence Centers in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

To analyze the data, we used thematic content analysis according to the following stages: pre-analysis, exploration of the material, treatment of the results, inference and interpretation.<sup>10</sup> Firstly, we transcribed and organized the interviews, which allowed us to explore the material and carry out the coding process, giving rise to a total of 77 thematic units related to the first three thematic axes, which referred to experiences. This led to the following category of analysis: "Experiences of young university students in dating relationships".

It should be noted that the stages of research and preparation of this article complied with the criteria of the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ), having been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro in June 2018, with a favorable opinion, having observed the required ethical standards.

## RESULTS

Fifty (100%) young university students took part in the survey. Of this total, 39 (78%) women said they had experienced some form of IPV perpetrated by men. With regard to the number of relationships they had had in their lifetime, the answers ranged from one to five.

With regard to the characterization of the participants, the majority fit the following profile: 28 (56%) of the university students were aged between 19 and 21, 21 declared themselves brown and/or black (42%), 37 lived with family members (74%) and 15 had a religion (30%). As for sexual orientation, 42 (84%) declared themselves to be heterosexual and eight (16%) bisexual.

### Experiences of gender-based violence in dating

Of the 39 participants who said they had experienced gender-based violence, with regard to the forms of IPV, the majority, i.e. 33 (66%), said that psychological violence was the most common in relationships, according to the following reports:

*He was always trying to put me down and said that his friends didn't like me because I was very antisocial. This was because I didn't want to talk to his friends [...]. (E10)*

*He made a lot of threats, saying he was going to break up if I didn't do what he wanted [...]. (E40)*

*He said that I only passed the Enem because I was entitled to the quota [...]. (E7)*

Moral violence was the second most common form of violence perpetrated by partners during relationships, reported by 29 women (58%), and can also extend after the relationship has ended.

*He called me a whore and I listened quietly [...]. (E10)*  
*His father once made up a rumor that I was on the street giving a blowjob to a boy [...]. (E16)*

With regard to physical aggression, some reports showed that 14 participants (28%) had experienced it more than once:

*Once he put the spoon on the stove and then threw it at my back. Another time, he pinched my breast [...]. (E18)*

*One day he had a jealous rage and banged my head on the wall [...]. (E21)*

Sexual violence was also present in the relationships of 13 young people (26%).

*We started kissing. I was a virgin and he ended up penetrating me before I allowed him to [...]. (E8)*

*At first I was in a lot of pain and he was pushing me too hard. Sometimes he insisted, when it was clearly uncomfortable for me [...]. (E10)*

Still in the context of sexual violence, five (38%) of them mentioned that their partner directly interfered in their use of condoms.

*I trusted him as a person, but he didn't like using condoms and would force me not to [...]. (E8)*

*We always used condoms, because I wanted to. But the last time I forgot and thought he had put it on, but he hadn't. He forced me to have sex with him. He forced me to have sex without a condom [...]. (E14)*

The following is the account of a participant who demonstrates the overlapping of physical violence followed by sexual violence:

*That day we had already had sex and I didn't want to anymore. He kept insisting, he pushed me on the floor, pulled my panties aside, without a condom and he still came inside me [...]. (E21)*

Property violence was identified in the participants' speeches (n=2; 4%):

*He broke my cell phone in a fight. When he broke his, I gave him my iPod and he never gave it back [...]. (E46)*  
*When his cell phone broke, I lent him mine and he never gave it back. (E41)*

In another statement, a participant said she had assaulted her partner, which is a case of bidirectionality, i.e. when partners assault each other:

*He has already pushed and pulled me. I've pulled and pushed him too." (E7)*

Intrafamily violence was also mentioned by 16 participants (36%):

*I have a cousin and an aunt who have suffered and still suffer partner violence and they don't realize it. My aunt split up because she caught HIV from her husband [...]. (E14)*

*I've seen my father hang my mother, and other very heavy scenes [...]. (E22)*

An increase in episodes of violence was also identified by four participants (8%) when their partners used alcohol and/or psychoactive drugs:

*The aggressions were greater when he smoked marijuana and drank. (E35)*  
*He drank a lot and when it happened, it was a lot of swearing and pushing [...]. (E37)*

## DISCUSSION

The results of the research show that the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants are similar to those of other young women who are not university students.<sup>1,4-5</sup> Based on the reports, it was observed that skin color did not interfere with the experience of gender violence. However, when analyzing IPV outside the university environment, it is considered that young black women in the 18-24 age group are more exposed to IPV.<sup>12</sup> The results reinforce that the level of education does not exempt university students from the risk of experiencing this type of violence,<sup>4,5,7</sup> since women from all educational, economic, social and cultural classes can experience it.<sup>1</sup>

As for the young women's religion, although the majority said they had one, it was clear that it was not a protective factor against IPV.

Religions, especially Catholic and Protestant, preach female submission to the male gender, which strengthens male chauvinism and favours the acceptance and naturalization of IPV by women. This is confirmed by a study carried out in Brazil which revealed that women in situations of IPV are discouraged from breaking the cycle of violence with their partner, thus legitimizing patriarchy and reaffirming male domination.<sup>13</sup>

With regard to sexual orientation, most of the young women were heterosexual. However, although the results did not show same-sex violence because they were not the specific target audience of this study, IPV can occur in these couples, since this phenomenon is based on asymmetrical relationships in dating relationships, regardless of gender.<sup>14,15</sup>

Among the participants in this study, two were bisexual and had not experienced dating violence with their partners. However, it should be noted that lesbian women are more vulnerable to suffering IPV in dating relationships due to the stress generated by the stigmas related to this population,<sup>15</sup> plus the low self-esteem caused by the oppression of patriarchal society or the family itself.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, all forms of gender-based violence are harmful to health.<sup>1</sup>

As for the forms of violence perpetrated by boyfriends, psychological violence was the most cited among the participants. This form of violence includes threats, humiliation, isolation, stalking, among others,<sup>11</sup> which cause mental health problems and have repercussions on low self-esteem, depression, insecurity, social withdrawal and post-traumatic stress, significantly influencing women's quality of life.<sup>1,8</sup> In the case of young university students, the risk of IPV compromising academic performance, causing frustration with one's education or leading to dropping out of the course is not zero.<sup>4</sup>

Moral violence was the second most common form of violence reported by the participants. The young women were called names and slandered.<sup>11</sup> This situation humiliates them, denigrates their image and certainly has a negative impact on their self-esteem and quality of life. A study carried out in Portugal with 3,547 women revealed that 13% of the young women interviewed had been slandered by their boyfriend.<sup>17</sup> It is worth pointing out that the internet is a vast field for psychological and moral violence, since the perpetrator uses technology to target the woman, exposing her through videos, photos or personal accounts, with the aim of damaging her reputation.<sup>18</sup> Another study carried out in Spain showed that young women are more exposed to this type of crime than men, who are considered to be more aggressive and perpetrators of violence.<sup>19</sup>

Another study, carried out by the Patrícia Galvão Institute with young university students, revealed that men do not recognize the various forms of violence practiced against women, especially psychological and moral violence. They claim that it is a natural consequence of a woman's behavior, or that they joke about it without intending to offend or intimidate.<sup>3</sup>

Physical violence, which includes any conduct that offends women's bodily integrity or health,<sup>11</sup> was cited as the third most common form of gender-based violence experienced by young women. The participants mentioned slapping, pinching, pushing, hair pulling, among other expressions of violence. It should be noted that this type of aggression can have repercussions on physical and mental health, and can even progress to femicide.<sup>1,12</sup> A study conducted in Goiás showed that physical violence perpetrated against young women occurred less frequently than other forms of violence, as it is more easily recognized by university students as inappropriate and aggressive behavior.<sup>20</sup>

Some young women said that sexual violence was part of their relationships, since it is characterized by unwanted sexual intercourse, non-consensual sexual practices, preventing the use of contraceptives, non-use of condoms by the partner, among other behaviors that can lead to unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted infections or depression, unlike common sense, when many think that it is characterized only by penetration.<sup>8, 11,18,20</sup>

Studies show that this type of violence can also be preceded by psychological and/or physical violence, or simultaneous to them, with an overlapping of violent forms.<sup>1,12</sup> In addition, research carried out with uni-

versity students in South Korea shows that psychological and/or physical violence precedes sexual violence.<sup>2</sup>

Property violence, experienced by some participants in their relationships, takes the form of theft, retention or damage to material goods, resources or documents.<sup>11</sup> This form of violence, like psychological and moral violence, is sometimes not perceived by women and tends to become silent pain.<sup>12</sup>

Violence in dating relationships must be understood in the context of historical and social aspects, especially those relating to gender relations, as it is based on the common sense of romantic love, in which the man controls the relationship and the woman is responsible for trusting her partner - attitudes that are culturally accepted as natural, but which lead to the exemption of male responsibility, leading, for example, to sexual relations without the woman's consent and desire.<sup>2,20</sup>

The data indicates that any form of violence has an adverse impact on women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health, as well as negatively affecting their academic performance.<sup>1,5,7,15,20</sup>

In addition to having experienced various forms of gender-based violence from their partners, the young women found that the consumption of alcohol or psychoactive drugs increased the chances of aggressive episodes. The use of these substances is recognized as a conflict-enhancing factor, since the individual can adopt hostile behavior, which creates an environment conducive to arguments, offenses and, in more serious cases, physical and sexual aggression.<sup>1,4-6</sup>

In response to the controlling behaviour of their partners, some participants reported that they had assaulted their boyfriends, characterizing the bidirectionality of violence.<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that not all women are submissive, just as certainly not all men are dominant, since relationships should be thought of from a relational perspective, in which each person holds shares of power, even if they are unequal.<sup>2</sup>

Some participants experienced violence within the family during childhood and adolescence. These daily aggressions in the domestic sphere, which highlight gender inequality, contribute to the repetition of models of submission or perpetration of violence, making young women vulnerable to experiencing this phenomenon in future relationships, such as dating and marriage.<sup>1,2,4</sup>

Based on this data, it emerged that young university students are not immune to experiencing gender violence in dating relationships. This highlights the need to debunk myths and stereotypes, especially those that suggest that the dating period is the most positive phase in a couple's life. It is crucial to promote information campaigns in the university environment to raise awareness of this phenomenon, thus seeking to foster gender equality.

It is important to include the subject in university curricula in order to promote reflection on the different types and forms of gender-based violence and to sensitize future professionals to a welcoming, egalitarian and humane approach, awakening them to the different ways of life and care.<sup>22-23</sup>

The limitation of this research was the small sample of participants, so further research is needed to complement the study.

## FINAL CONSIDERATION

The data from this study corroborated other studies in finding that IPV against young university students in dating relationships is a reality, based on patriarchal molds. From a public health point of view, this situation represents a worrying social problem, since it can be perpetuated throughout the relationship between young people, becoming chronic in marital relationships.

It is essential to integrate initiatives to prevent and combat gender-based violence from elementary school to university, with the aim of demystifying myths and stereotypes and fostering a culture of peace. These strategies can be implemented through policies and dialogues that address healthy and emancipatory behaviors.

The role of the university goes beyond training young people

for the job market and must prepare them with a critical sense for a society in continuous transformation. The contribution of this study is that it recognizes the existence of IPV in the university space, given the urgent need to promote actions to prevent and combat gender violence. Furthermore, it is recommended that the subject of gender-based violence against women be included in the curriculum of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the health and humanities areas, from the perspective of interdisciplinarity, in order to achieve a change in the comprehensive and sensitive care of young women.

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