

Women's perception of physical violence in dating among adolescents and young people

Percepção de mulheres sobre violência física no namoro entre adolescentes e jovens

Percepción de las mujeres sobre la violencia física en el noviazgo entre adolescentes y jóvenes

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RESUMO

Objetivo: Aprender percepções de mulheres sobre episódios violentos nas relações de namoro entre adolescentes/jovens. Método: Estudo com abordagem qualitativa, para a coleta de dados utilizou-se a técnica do Desenho-Estória com Tema (DET) com estudantes adolescentes e adultos jovens do sexo feminino, nos meses de agosto a novembro de 2018. A análise dos DET categorizou a violência física por similaridade gráfica e o material textual foi processado pelo Iramuteq. Resultados: Foram conformadas três categorias: Início dos relacionamentos e não percepção da violência; Motivações que disparam a violência; e, Estratégias de Enfrentamento. Conclusões: A violência física não é percebida no início do namoro pela existência do encantamento e beleza dos parceiros. Os elementos que desencadeiam a violência e as relações de gênero são minimizados, porém após o reconhecimento do ciclo da violência as adolescentes/jovens buscam estratégias de enfrentamento. O que aponta a necessidade de fortalecimento de apoio social e especializado, dentro de equipamentos escolares, que fomentem processos de comunicação sobre a temática e ampliem o acolhimento a esse grupo.

Descritores: Jovens; Mulheres; Violência; Estudantes.

ABSTRACT

Objective: To understand women's perceptions about violent episodes in dating relationships between adolescents/young people. Method: Study with a qualitative approach, for data collection, the Themed Drawing-Story (DET) technique was used with adolescent and young adult female students, from August to November 2018. The DET analysis categorized physical violence by graphic similarity and the textual material was processed by Iramuteq. Results: Three categories were formed: Beginning of relationships and non-perception of violence; Motivations that trigger violence; and Coping Strategies. Conclusions: Physical violence is not perceived at the beginning of the relationship due to the existence of the enchantment and beauty of the partners. The elements that trigger violence and gender relations are minimized, but after recognizing the cycle of violence, adolescents/young people seek coping strategies. This highlights the need to strengthen social and specialized support within school facilities, which foster communication processes on the topic and expand support for this group.

Descriptors: Young people; Women; Violence; Students.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Comprender las percepciones de las mujeres sobre episodios violentos en las relaciones de noviazgo entre adolescentes/jóvenes. Método: Estudio con enfoque cualitativo, para la recolección de datos se utilizó la técnica Dibujo-Cuento con Tema (DET) con estudiantes mujeres adolescentes y adultas jóvenes, de agosto a noviembre de 2018. El análisis del DET categorizó la violencia física por similitud gráfica, y el material textual fue procesado por Iramuteq. Resultados: Se establecieron tres categorías: Inicio de relaciones y no percepción de violencia; Motivaciones que desencadenan la violencia; y estrategias de afrontamiento. Conclusiones: La violencia física no se percibe al inicio del noviazgo debido al encanto y belleza de la pareja. Se minimizan los elementos que desencadenan la violencia y las relaciones de género, sin embargo, luego de reconocer el ciclo de violencia, los adolescentes/jóvenes buscan estrategias de afrontamiento. Esto resalta la necesidad de fortalecer apoyos sociales y especializados, dentro de las instalaciones escolares, que fomenten procesos de comunicación sobre el tema y amplíen la acogida de este grupo.

Descritores: Jóvenes; Mujer; Violencia; Estudiantes.

Introduction

Youth is characterized as a cycle of significant transformations in their growth and development process, which directly affect the biopsychosocial context of individuals, especially in the mediation of relationships established in the educational space, search for self-sufficiency in the family cycle, experience of a variety of emotions and innovative attitudes; as well as in physical and hormonal changes¹.

In this phase, intimate relationships can give way to unhealthy dyadic coexistence, producing abusive relationships and establishing the submission of women to the male figure, observing its multicausality inherent to cultural, family and personal factors, as occurs in dating among adolescents²⁻³.

Intimate partner violence in dating relationships among adolescents is characterized as a phenomenon of a complex, multifaceted nature that can be presented in a visible or invisible way, in which the exercises of control and power of the aggressor over his victims occur, generating physical, psychological and social consequences⁴.

Globally, it is observed that young women (15 to 24 years old) are more likely to suffer intimate partner violence, especially those from underdeveloped or developing countries. In addition, this form of violence can be related to several problems, such as depression, aggressive and risky sexual behaviors, committing violence in previous relationships, use of psychoactive substances, among others⁵.

In the scientific scenario, studies on dating violence have been notoriety since the 1980s and, among its forms of manifestation, physical violence has been revealing significant rates of aggression perpetrated against the partner, despite the difficulties evidenced by the variation in its prevalence, due to the use of different methodologies and conceptual foundations. which may imply difficulties in knowing the magnitude and extent of this reality⁶

It is estimated that, throughout their lives, 1 in 3 women becomes a victim of physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner and that, in the 15 to 24 age group, 1 in 4 who maintain an intimate relationship will suffer violence from their partner before reaching adulthood⁵. In the Americas region, a systematic review study and reanalysis of prevalence estimates with eligible data for 24 countries revealed that women suffered physical and/or sexual violence with rates ranging from 14% to 17% for Brazil, Panama and Uruguay, up to 58.5% in Bolivia⁷.

Another aspect, to be highlighted, is the gender issues that surround physical violence perpetrated in dating among adolescents (gender violence), characterized by the exercise of acts committed with abuse of power against the victim, establishing unequal and asymmetrical relationships, in which the notions of masculine and feminine are naturalized, as inheritances of patriarchal structures and male domination (androcentrism), justifying itself because the aggressive behavior of the partner can be trivialized by the victim and society^{3,6}.

Therefore, this study aims to apprehend women's perceptions of violent episodes in dating relationships among adolescents/young people.

Method

A qualitative study was carried out from August to November 2018 in the municipality of Feira de Santana, Bahia, Brazil. This study is an excerpt from the thesis entitled "Violence in the intimacy of young people: antecedent factors, violent manifestations and consequences". Here, the perception of physical violence of female adolescents and young adults, aged 15 to 24 years, selected through non-probabilistic and intentional sampling, was examined. The students were enrolled in nine state public schools in this municipality, which met the inclusion criteria: institutions (large schools; located in regions with high rates of violence; students from surrounding municipalities); students (being in the classroom at the time of data collection; age group established; agreeing to participate in the research).

The classes were chosen and made available by the school board, according to the previously scheduled date, and executed by the team of the Center for Studies and Research in Childhood and Adolescence (NNEPA)/State University of Feira de Santana/UEFS-Bahia. To carry out data collection, the Drawing-Story with Theme (DET) technique was used.

The operationalization of the collection for the thesis was developed in stages, where the young women who agreed to participate, remained in the classroom and received instructions. Initially, A4 bond paper, pens were offered, and the elaboration of a drawing that represented or recalled a violent experience lived in courtship was requested; Subsequently, he was asked to report a story about the drawing based on the drawing, following a script with a beginning, middle and end; Finally, a title was requested for his "Drawing-Story". The average time used for this data collection was 40 minutes.

To preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, the teachers were removed from the classrooms, the chairs were organized equidistantly, the researchers remained in a neutral place in the environment, available for clarification and in the center of the rooms urns were made available, for the deposition of the collection material by the young people. For students under 18 years of age, authorization from parents or guardians was requested (Term of Assent) and, for adults, the signing of the Informed Consent Form (ICF).

The analysis of the empirical material followed the model: systematic observation of the drawing; grouping of those that presented graphic similarities and similarities by theme; floating readings of the thematic units; categorization of correspondence of the drawings-stories; as well as analysis and interpretation of the thematic contents.⁸ Thus, the following categories were outlined: "control, power and deprivation" (N=60); "violence (N=140) - physical (N=84), psychological/verbal (N=49) and sexual (N=07)"; "death threat" (N=25); "perception of fatal violence" (N=57).

In this study, the stories categorized as physical violence against females underwent thematic content analysis,⁹⁻¹⁰ carried out in stages: pre-analysis of the "drawings-stories", through systematic observation of the drawings; then, floating reading of the stories (deepening and interpretation), to group by graphic similarity and constitute the initial corpus. After this process, the exploration of the material (coding, classification, categorization) was carried out, through the elaboration of the thematic analysis unit and the constitution of the context unit, with their respective nuclei of meaning. Finally,

the stage of analysis, treatment and interpretation of the results found was processed, considering the references that took as theoretical basis/support the literature produced in the area.

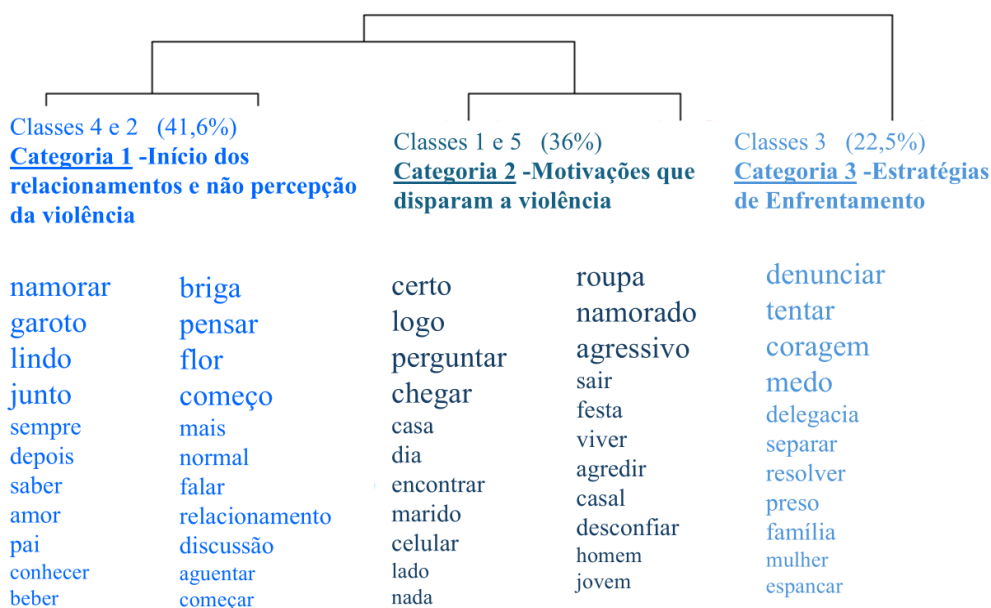
This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the State University of Feira de Santana/UEFS, under Protocol No./CAAE: 89084517.8.0000.0053, according to the regulations of Resolution 466/12 of the National Health Council.¹¹

Results

The participants of the study are female students of public schools in the age group of 16 to 21 years old.

In the figure, it is possible to observe the classification organized through the stories told by the young women presented in the CHD (Figure 1) generated through Iramuteq. The CHD was organized into 5 classes, with a textual percentage of 91.3% and the nomination of the categories was carried out by the authors.

Figure 1 - Descending Hierarchical Classification for stories brought by young females about physical violence in dating, Feira de Santana-Bahia, 2024.



Category 1 - Beginning of relationships and non-perception of violence: as it is identified through the predominant expressions in class 2 such as beginning, flower, normal, fight and in class 4, dating, boy, beautiful, later. **Category 2 - Motivations that trigger violence** is composed of class 1 that presents expressions such as asking, house, cell phone and Class 5 that brings terms such as clothing, going out, party and distrust. And finally, **Category 3 - Coping Strategies** formed by class 3 that presents the expressions denounce, courage, fear and family, which are part of the process of leaving the woman from the context of violence.

Category 1 - Beginning of relationships and non-perception of violence

In this category, we observed that the participants describe the beginning of the cycle of violence within relationships, where in the beginning there is a perception only of "flowers" and that even the existence of discussions are interpreted by the women as something natural or not perceived violence. The initial phase of courtship and/or falling in love is characterized by beauty and charms that mask other perceptions. These signs are corroborated by the following excerpts:

"Not everything is flowers, these are girls and boys at the beginning of the courtship where everything was wonderful, the girl thought the boy was a prince who brought flowers and chocolate, and she was treated like a true princess until one fine day things changed" (par32).

"[...] At the beginning of the courtship, everything was wonderful, but after a while with more affinity, the boy started with some games of hitting her and she thought it was all normal, but after a while she saw that none of that was a joke anymore" (par16).

"[...] It started with beautiful words with loving messages, I thought that after some time her jealousy, which was frequent, was a form of care, she felt jealous because she liked it" (par39).

"[...] It all started with flowers to please and then to apologize, because he would knock and then come with beautiful words, saying that he would not do more for her not to leave him, then everything would go back to normal" (par 08).

"[...] Everything in the beginning was flowers, but jealousy ended the relationship due to the various fights, arguments and even violence, life between the boy and the girl was going from bad to worse" (par02).

Category 2 - Motivations that trigger physical violence

The formation of being a man and being a woman within society is governed by ideologies of superiority of men over women. In view of this, it is possible to observe that in this category factors that trigger violence within affective relationships were cited, related to the feeling of superiority of men towards women.

"[...] until one day the girl scheduled to go out with some friends from college and when she arrived there were many messages from the boy saying that she was not supposed to ask many things, including if she had cheated" (par22).

"[...] And we were studying together, he asked me where I was, and I told him that I went to the market with his friends to buy cookies and he had a reaction that surprised me" (PAR27).

"[...] A couple was getting ready to go to a party when her boyfriend stops for a moment and stares at her saying that ridiculous clothes look like a bitch. She feels humiliated and changes clothes to please him, but even with her changing clothes he was not satisfied. They went to the party and other men looked at her, and that made him angry" (par46).

"[...] The girl went out with her friends to a party and arrived after 11 p.m., the girl's boyfriend assaulted her, suspecting that she was really with her friends and forbade her to leave the house" (PAR03).

Category 3- Coping Strategies

From the perspective of breaking the cycle of violence, this category presents the strategies used by women to end violence. The strategies start from the recognition of the violence suffered and the confrontation of fear, shame to the activation of the family and institutional support network.

"[...] When we completed two years of dating, it started with pushes, hair pulling and over time physically assaulting me because I was afraid of him, I didn't have the courage to break up and I was ashamed to tell my family" (par13).

"[...] until one day she takes courage and denounces the boy, because the girl realized that the problem was never with her or her clothes, but with her partner" (par45).

"[...] I went to the police station and reported him, they came to our house and arrested him, there is a law for male aggressors Maria da Penha, we cannot be silent and I could not remain silent if I love first" (par33).

"[...] One day the physical aggression began, that day the girl who could no longer stand it decided to face it. She filed a complaint at the women's police station and the boy paid for her violence" (par12).

"[...] The girl became depressed and a friend of the girl decided to help, gave advice to the girl to leave him, the girl, tired of being beaten, decided to denounce and ask for a divorce" (par05).

"[...] Soon the girl said, I'm going, you don't boss me, the young man beat her, the girl didn't hesitate and denounced him, the young man was arrested and the girl saw that that push wasn't just a push, it was the beginning of everything" (par07).

Discussion

One of our findings during the development of this study is that adolescents seem to be aware of the cycle of violence even when they do not express it explicitly. During the analysis process, it was possible to perceive that the stories followed the sequence brought by the cycle of violence, namely: the phase of tension, the phase of the honeymoon and the phase of aggression. It is worth mentioning that it was not in all the stories that the cycle occurred and/or started with the first phase.

In the first category presented in the results, it is possible to perceive that all the statements express the phase of falling in love at the beginning of relationships and/or the honeymoon phase. These same expressions were evidenced through a study with 215 young people in the city of João Pessoa-Paraíba aged 14 to 18 years, where elements such as complicity, happiness, fidelity, trust, friendship were demonstrated, when there is an understanding between two people.¹² The expressions brought in the results show that relationships always start full of passion, due to the enchantments for beauty, the way that boys do to conquer girls, always very attentive, affectionate, giving gifts.

However, it is not a phase that lasts for long, soon jealousy begins to appear, but in this phase it is still something seen as a care or as a game between the couple, as a way of demonstrating true love, something to animate the relationship.¹³ The beliefs in romantic love described by expressions such as "half of the orange", "omnipotence", refer to the idea that love can do anything,

that that person came to complete the other and without it something incomplete is left.¹⁴

In the second category presented in the results, through the stories presented by the students, we perceive the phase of tension in relationships. The tension phase is described through the appearance of excessive jealousy, moments of anger, insults, threats, making the relationship unstable.¹⁵ Gender understandings also play an important role during this phase, as it is possible to understand that violence can be practiced regardless of sex, but that women are more vulnerable to being abused, in addition to seeming to sustain and justify unhealthy male behaviors in their love relationships.¹⁴

It is important to note that during the construction of gender roles, the family plays a fundamental role in education and values that are passed on during childhood, as these teachings will be taken to adult life and reflected through behaviors. Childhood and adolescence are described as a vulnerable phase for both genders and that in them they are susceptible to internalizing myths about gender roles and Violence Against Women.¹⁶

In the meantime, the results presented in category two refer to relationships perpetrated by violence following gender-based patterns of superiority. We understand that gender is a social element that is based on the differences between the sexes, being a way of understanding power relations. Gender is also a social category that is not directly determined by sex, but which can include sex because gender norms are established, generating more or less stable modes of subjectivation over a given historical period.¹⁷

Reflected in the results from the gender perspective, it is visible that the prohibitions of going out with friends, wearing a type of clothing, deprivation of going out to usual places because it does not please the partner and humiliations that hurt morale, follow a social pattern of male superiority. Corroborating what is presented, in a study developed with young people, they expressed that the isolation and submission of the victim is the most extreme form of psychological violence. However, in this same study, it is evidenced that younger people have difficulty identifying cases of psychological violence, as they normalize and accept certain violent behaviors because they understand it as a form of care coming from their partner.¹⁶

Also in this same category, the adolescents report behaviors through stories, in which the partner deprives their partners of having contact with friends and family, in addition to the demand for behavior change. These reports are present in a study carried out with 18 young people, nine of whom reported that their partners were upset when they saw them interacting with people of the opposite sex and asked them to change their behavior when talking to people of the different sex, in addition to not allowing them to see their friends and trying to convince them that everyone in their system is a bad person.¹⁸ Corroborating even more, a study carried out with women in the interior of the state of Bahia aged between 30 and 55 years, reports that after marriage men began to demonstrate exacerbated control actions, preventing women from studying, leaving home, blaming women for relationship problems, criticism and verbal aggression.¹⁹

The last category of the results presents strategies used to break the cycle of violence, however, for this to happen, women need to understand and break many cycles. In the narratives presented, the elements of fear, shame, courage, and denouncing were mentioned. These expressions are also described

in other studies, in addition to fear, there are threats to harm the victim or her family if she leaves the relationship, the lack of early identification of being in a violent relationship, the shame and concealment of the violence suffered, the threat of taking custody of the children, retention of financial assets.^{13,20}

Executing coping strategies differs among many women, as they adopt ideals that they deem ideal for that moment. A study also developed with women points out some strategies adopted, namely: accepting the responsibility of being under violence, attaching the blame to it; they use alcohol, drugs and medicines as an escape from reality; they reciprocate the violence perpetrated by their partner or try to maintain dialogue; they seek separation and few seek social and/or institutional support.²¹

In addition to these elements, which take care of the woman, preventing her from leaving the cycle of violence, there is also the lack of information from the support network for women in situations of violence. This support network can be composed of the social network and the specialized service network. Family, friends, religious entities make up the social network, which also plays a fundamental role in the process of leaving the context of violence, however many are not prepared to provide support to these women, as they do not understand the processes that women are going through and will go through during the breaking of the cycle of violence. With this they express themselves by giving guidance on places that the woman can look, demand the breakup of the relationship and try to protect the woman from episodes of violence.²²⁻²³

However, since 2007, the National Pact to Combat Violence Against Women has been created in Brazil, with the aim of collaborating in the prevention, combat, assistance and guarantee of women's rights.²⁴ From this, the network to combat violence against women was creating articulations through the bodies that make up the network with services in the field of social assistance with the Women's Reference Center, justice, public security through the Ronda Maria da Penha and health services with the CAPS, NASF, UPA, UBS among other services.²⁵ However, many women do not know the services and what each one offers, and sometimes the network itself does not know itself and makes the woman end up going from one service to another, often causing her to give up seeking help.²²

Thus, the adolescents participating in this study were able to describe their views and perceptions of how a relationship permeated by violence occurs. Listing that women need support from their social and specialized environment, which will only happen through proximal processes, communication, welcoming, especially in adolescence, because it is at this stage of life that it is possible to understand the ways to build a healthy relationship.

Conclusion

In this study, the adolescents/young people perceive physical violence after involvement with their partner, because in the beginning there is an enchantment and even the initial discussions are interpreted as something natural. Where the beauty of the partners seems to mask other perceptions. The elements that trigger violence within affective relationships and gender relations are minimized or imperceptible.

After experiencing and recognizing the cycle of violence, some adolescents/young people seek coping strategies, even with fear and shame, they activate the family and institutional support network. This points to the need to strengthen social and specialized support, within school equipment, which foster communication processes on the subject and expand the reception of this group.

Study limitations

The analysis of the DET was only of the textual material and there was no deepening, as happens in studies of social representations when one seeks to investigate collective imaginaries, as a possibility of contributing to the transformation of conducts, since this technique enables the mediation of emotional experiences that are appropriate to the experience of dating violence.

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