

## Gender, Age and Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships in Student Teachers

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### Abstract

This study aims to determine the differences or similarities between the violence suffered by student teachers in their intimate partner relationships, as well as the implications for their training as teachers. The method used was cross-sectional, quantitative, non-experimental, the sample, selected from a probability sampling by clusters, was made up of 520 university students, 367 women and 153 men whose mean age was 20.5 years (SD=3.5), from the Faculties of Education Sciences of the University of Granada, Spain. As a data collection tool, we used the questionnaire on violence in young couples (VIREPA), in order to know the different forms of violence suffered by the participants according to gender and age. Regarding the differences between men and women and the pre-established age groups, it was determined that women suffered more violence in 4 of the 5 dimensions studied, although no significant differences were identified. The results show that the violence suffered by young people is to a greater extent towards women, but without discarding the bidirectional character of violence, independently of gender and age. This leads us to rethink the educational implications that this generates in their training from the approaches to education for equality.

### Keywords

Violence in couples, young people, teachers in training, university

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## Sexo, Edad y Violencia en las Relaciones de Pareja en Estudiantes de Magisterio

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### Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo determinar las diferencias o similitudes entre la violencia que sufren los estudiantes de magisterio en sus relaciones de pareja, así como las implicaciones para su formación como docentes. El método utilizado fue transversal, cuantitativo, no experimental, la muestra, seleccionada a partir de un muestreo probabilístico por conglomerados, estuvo formada por 520 estudiantes universitarios, 367 mujeres y 153 hombres cuya edad promedio fue 20.5 años (DE=3.5), de las Facultades de Ciencias de la Educación de la Universidad de Granada, España. Como herramienta de recogida de datos se utilizó el cuestionario sobre violencia en parejas jóvenes (VIREPA), con el fin de conocer las diferentes formas de violencia que sufren los participantes según género y edad. En cuanto a las diferencias entre hombres y mujeres y los grupos de edad preestablecidos, se determinó que las mujeres sufrieron más violencia en 4 de las 5 dimensiones estudiadas, aunque no se identificaron diferencias significativas. Los resultados muestran que la violencia que sufren los jóvenes es en mayor medida hacia las mujeres, pero sin descartar el carácter bidireccional de la violencia, independientemente del género y la edad. Esto nos lleva a repensar las implicaciones educativas que esto genera en su formación desde los enfoques de educación para la igualdad.

### Palabras clave

Violencias en parejas, jóvenes, maestros en formación, universidad

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The World Health Organisation (2013) established actions on issues related to violence in young adult intimate partner relationships as a priority mental health problem. In 2017, this type of violence was recognised as a health problem in different countries, implementing action plans and policies (Díaz, Álvarez-Díaz & Vélez, 2020).

Violence in intimate partner relationships is a phenomenon that has long occupied the attention of educators, sociologists, psychologists and professionals committed to social processes (Franco & De Franco, 2020). All of this implies working at all educational levels, without neglecting university education, which too often is overlooked and forgotten (Puigvert, 2008). Violence in young adult intimate partner relationships can be defined as the threat or use of sexual, verbal, or physical violence exerted by one partner on the other. To adequately identify situations of violence, it is necessary to assess physical and/or sexual violence along with other forms of violence such as verbal violence and/or threats. This affects couples who are either in long-term relationships or are beginning a relationship (Carrasco, 2011; Garrido-Antón et al., 2020; González-Gijón & Soriano-Díaz, 2021; Pacheco et al., 2021).

Different studies (Leen et al., 2013; Carrascosa et al., 2018; De la Villa Moral et al., 2017; Ruel et al., 2017; Navarro Pérez et al., 2020; Zumalde et al., 2021) show concerning data regarding psychological violence, which exceeds 80%. Although less frequent, sexual and physical violence is of great seriousness (Wincentak et al., 2017). Another noteworthy aspect of violence in romantic relationships is its bidirectional nature, with a high level of reciprocity between perpetration and victimisation.

One possible explanation for the violence that can occur in these relationships is related to the difficulty these young individuals have in recognizing themselves as victims of violence (Pazos et al., 2014). This can be a consequence, in some cases, of idealizing violent behaviours based on romantic love, which leads them to justify violent behaviours such as jealousy, obsessive control, and so on (Soldevila et al., 2012).

On the other hand, research highlights the impact of violence on the health of those who experience it, including illnesses such as depression or anxiety, as well as immediate negative effects on well-being and physical, mental, and reproductive health. This affects the quality of life and hinders personal development (Sugg, 2015; Meza, 2018; Duval et al., 2020).

It is necessary to provide socio-educational intervention proposals based on various research studies to offer more effective and contextually appropriate guidance (Ravi et al., 2020). Likewise, prevention programs focused on developing optimal emotional regulation and impulse control skills with an emphasis on relationships are needed (Ontiveros et al., 2020).

Likewise, a study on violence in intimate partner relationships involving 1091 young university students in Andalusia, whose average age was 20 years, found that 68.2% of these participants had suffered cyberbullying by their partner, 49.71% had suffered psycho-emotional violence, 44.63% had suffered attitudes related to control and surveillance, 16.68% had suffered sexual violence and 5.60% had suffered physical violence (Tarrío et al., 2022). Regarding same-sex couples in Spain, a study found that 18.6% of lesbian women and 11.3%

of gay men acknowledged having suffered psychological violence during their relationships (Longares et al., 2019).

It is necessary to highlight that young students, in general terms, present a greater naturalisation and acceptance of behaviours related to violence, such as: jealousy; repressive control; overprotection; ghosting as a form of breaking up, which refers to the complete disappearance of the person with whom they have a relationship, regardless of the type of relationship; emotional blackmail or harassment through social networks. This is often due to the misconception that true romantic love is based on a relationship of domination (Pastor et al., 2018) and is related, in turn, to the myth of the couple. In fact, after a research study with a sample of 1223 interviews with young people aged between 15 and 29 living throughout Spain, it was found that 48.9% of boys and 42.6% of girls, of whom 40.1% have a university education, consider that having a partner is a very important factor in their lives. However, they do not refer to any type of sex-affective relationship, but to a single traditional, i.e. monogamous, partner (Ballesteros et al., 2019).

With regard to violence in intimate partner relationships suffered specifically by young university students, at the national level, it was found that 15.6% of a sample of 498 students had been punished with ignorance, indifference and silence, 20.9% had experienced situations of jealousy and accusations of alleged links with other people outside the relationship, i.e. infidelity, and 66% of those surveyed said they felt overprotected by their partner (Rubio et al., 2020). This shows that the most common type of violence in intimate partner relationships among young Spanish university students is psychological violence and the least common is physical violence, since it is the one they recognise the most. This fact is reflected in the fact that, out of every 10 students, 0.35 of men and almost 1 of women have ever felt abused by their partner compared to 4.6 out of every 10 men and 6.7 out of every 10 women who have felt fear in their relationships (Sánchez, 2018).

On the other hand, if we focus on the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, we can gather data on violence in intimate partner relationships which show that 73.16% of the victims attended to by the Victim Support Service were women and the rest, 26.84%, were men (García, 2022). Likewise, and in general terms, Andalusia is at a similar or higher level than the national average in terms of tolerance towards control in intimate partner relationships. Thus, 27.03% of the young people surveyed residing in this Autonomous Community agreed that a person should have free access to their partner's mobile phone by knowing their unlocking password, while 20.43% agreed that they should also know the rest of the passwords to their social networks, behaviours that are directly related to violence in intimate partner relationships (Unión Sindical Obrera [USO], 2019).

With regard to the province of Granada, the existence of certain erroneous beliefs about violent relationships is highlighted. Indeed, among students at the University of Granada, a reinforcement of some of these beliefs has been observed. For example, 37% believe that abusers are inherently aggressive by nature and 36.3% believe that violence in perpetrators is due to mental and psychiatric illnesses. In addition, many young people associate this type of violence with factors related to alcohol and other drug use and believe that low economic or educational status is a key problem for victimisation (Martínez et al., 2021).

Based on all of this, the purpose of this study is to analyze the violence that occurs in intimate relationships among students studying Primary Education at the University of

Granada (Granada, Ceuta, and Melilla campuses) in relation to gender and age. The aim is to examine the implications for their education and develop educational proposals for these future education professionals, because one of UNESCO's priority objectives for the 2030 Education Agenda is the implementation of measures that contemplate equality and the gender perspective in all educational areas and in teacher training (Arango & Corona-Vargas, 2016). This is why in Spain a change is occurring in the socialization of the new generations (Subirats, 2017).

## **Methods**

### **Design**

A quantitative, non-experimental, ex post facto study of a descriptive nature was conducted using a single group measurement. The study was conducted among all courses of the Primary Education program at the University of Granada, Spain.

### **Participants**

The participant sample was selected through simple random sampling from all courses and groups of the Primary Education program at the University of Granada across the campuses in Granada, Ceuta, and Melilla.

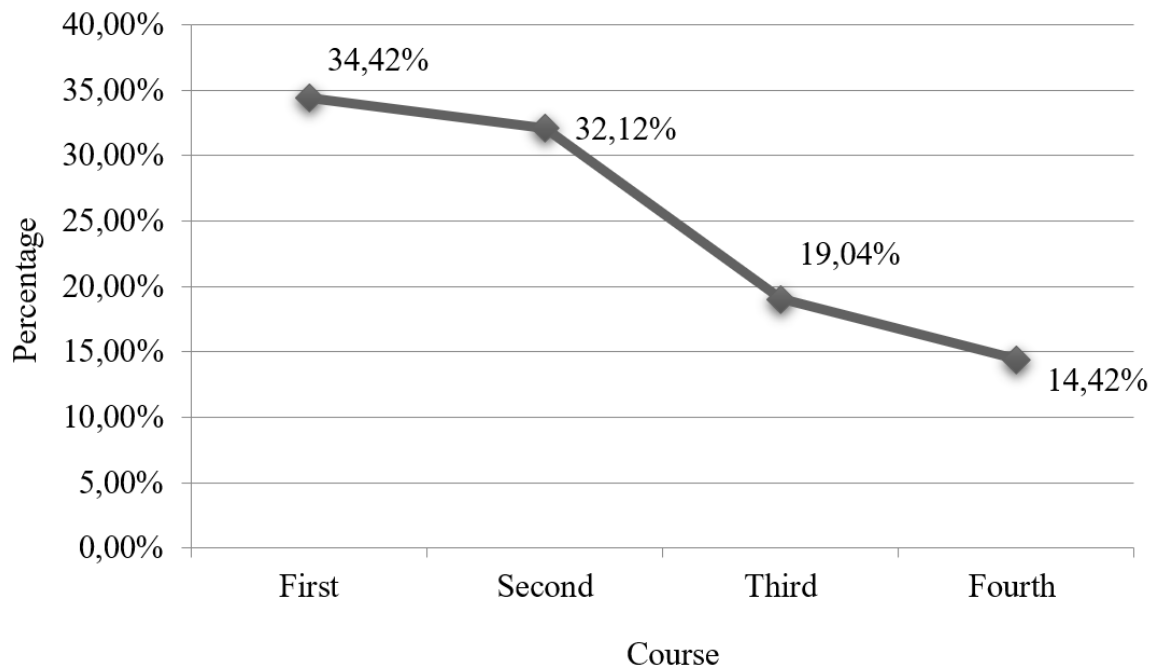
The University of Granada is divided into several campuses and can be found in three cities: Granada, Ceuta, and Melilla. The latter two are geographically situated in North Africa, giving this university unique characteristics.

The sample consisted of 520 students enrolled in the Primary Education program at the University of Granada, with 406 (78.1%) from the Granada campus, 49 (9.4%) from Ceuta, and 65 (12.5%) from Melilla.

The distribution of the sample by courses can be observed in Graph 1.

Additionally, 70.6% (n=367) of the participants were female, and 29.4% (n=153) were male.

Regarding age, the majority of participants were under 21 years old (n=326; 62.7%), followed by those aged between 21 and 24 (n=156; 30%), and lastly, the group of participants over 24 years old (n=38; 7.3%).

**Graph 1***Distribution of the Sample by Courses***Measurement Instruments**

This study used a self-administered questionnaire, the Young Couples Violence Survey (VIREPA), developed by González-Gijón and Soriano (2021). This instrument consists of two parts. The first section examined sociodemographic variables, including demographic factors, partner data, and self-perpetration of violence, while the second section contained 20 items measuring different types of violence that can occur in intimate relationships. The items were grouped into five dimensions: emotional violence, physical and psychological violence, personal devaluation, social and economic control, and sexual violence. According to González-Gijón and Soriano (2021), the dimension is defined as follows:

1. **Emotional Abuse (EM):** This dimension allows the assessment of psychological abandonment, which is the lack of attention to the emotional needs and feelings of the person. It also includes violence through forms of stigmatization designed to convince individuals that they have less personal and social value than other partners.
2. **Physical and Psychological Abuse (PPA):** This dimension helps us identify physical abuse, which is intentional actions or inactions that cause physical harm or put a person in danger. Psychological abuse includes behaviors that humiliate, cause pain, or psychological harm. This also includes Munchausen syndrome, which occurs when one partner actively manufactures or induces fictitious symptoms or pathology in the other partner.
3. **Personal Devaluation (PD):** This form of violence attempts to devalue a person's religious beliefs, ideological values, while reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes.



4. **Social and Economic Control (SEC):** This dimension identifies social control, including monitoring, barriers, and prohibitions that discourage or prevent partners from forming relationships. Economic control or abuse is the misuse of another person's goods or resources without consent.
5. **Sexual violence (SA):** This dimension refers to sexual violence that is committed through force, without consent, and against one's will. It also includes engaging in sexual activities that the other person considers humiliating and offensive to their dignity.

The questionnaire was rated using a five-point Likert scale response format with the following options: 1 = never, 2 = sometimes (you have experienced this 1 to 2 times), 3 = often (you have experienced this 2 to 5 times), 4 = almost always (you have experienced this 6 or more times), and 5 = always. Regarding the reliability of the instrument, it showed high internal consistency. The coefficient alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for the entire instrument was 0.937, and the values for each of the five dimensions also exceeded 0.700. The omega coefficient ( $\omega$ ) also showed high reliability for the total score ( $\omega = 0.908$ ) and for each factor, with values above 0.826. Both indices contribute to the high internal consistency of the instrument (González-Gijón & Soriano, 2021).

## Procedure

For data collection, the project received evaluation and approval from the Committee on Ethics in Human Research (CEIH) at the University of Granada, Spain. The anonymity of all participants was ensured. The ethical considerations outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki were followed, and data confidentiality was maintained in accordance with the Organic Law 7/2021 of May 26 on the protection of personal data processed for the purposes of crime prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution, as well as the enforcement of criminal sanctions. Once the favourable report was obtained, the instrument was prepared to be administered in person to each selected group during the sampling process. This process was conducted throughout the academic year 2021-2022.

Regarding participant recruitment, students were contacted via institutional email sent through the official platforms of the University of Granada. This email provided a brief introduction to the study, its objectives, and an invitation to participate. The email emphasized that participation was voluntary and anonymous, and that the results would contribute to enhancing awareness and education on relationship violence in an academic context. A link to the online questionnaire was included in the email.

The questionnaire was designed in an online format to ensure ease of access and participation for students. Participants could complete the questionnaire at any time and from any location, offering flexibility, especially for those with complicated schedules. The platform was also optimized for mobile devices, making it accessible via smartphones and tablets.

After completing the questionnaire, participants did not receive immediate individual feedback on their responses. However, they were informed that the general findings of the

study would be shared later with the university community. For any questions or concerns about the study or the questionnaire, participants were provided with an email contact. This contact allowed them to reach out for clarifications or additional information. Additionally, information about psychological support resources available at the university was shared, in case any participant felt affected by the content of the questionnaire.

### **Data Analysis**

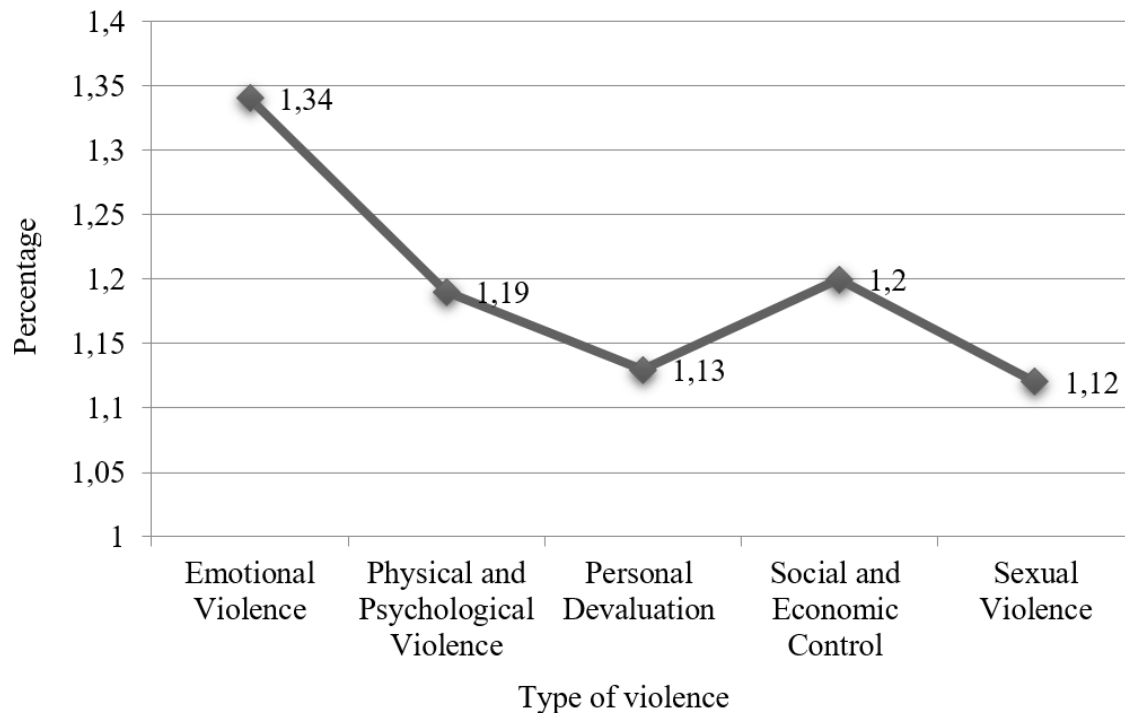
The data analysis was performed using the statistical package SPSS v.26. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were applied using non-parametric tests due to the data not following a normal distribution. This was confirmed by conducting a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test on the sample, which resulted in a p-value of less than 0.05. Hence, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare variables based on gender, and the Kruskal-Wallis H test was employed to compare variables across different age groups. Bivariate correlation analyses were also conducted using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (Rho) to examine the relationship between the studied dimensions, age, and duration of the relationship.

### **Results**

We will begin by describing the sociodemographic variables related to the maintained relationship (sexual orientation, current or past partner, and cohabitation with the partner). From the data obtained, we identified that 90% (n=468) of participants were in heterosexual relationships, while 9.6% (n=50) were in homosexual relationships. Regarding whether they referred to a current or past partner, 47.5% indicated a past relationship, and 51.9% indicated a current partner. Additionally, only 15.2% of participants had lived with their described partner. When asked about their self-perception of violence, 98.3% (n=511) stated that they did not feel violence in their current relationship, while 1.2% (n=6) acknowledged being currently violence. Regarding past relationships, 86% (n=447) affirmed that they did not feel violence, while 13.5% (n=70) acknowledged experiencing violence in a past relationship.

Although the results obtained indicate a low-to-very-low tendency towards victimisation, the mean scores obtained for the dimensions related to different types of violence analysed in terms of gender and age reveal that the highest means correspond to emotional violence, followed by social and economic control and physical and psychological violence. The type of violence least experienced by our participants was sexual violence, closely followed by personal devaluation.



**Graph 2***Types of Violence Suffered*

Concerning the averages obtained for each type of violence, concerning the gender variable, as we can see in Table 1, although the averages are very close, women have higher arithmetic averages (Table 1) than men in emotional violence, physical and psychological violence, personal devaluation and sexual violence, and men in social and economic control.

**Table 1***Types of Violence Suffered According to Gender*

Types of violence	Men (N=153)		Women (N=367)			
	M	DT	M	DT	U	p
Emotional Violence	1.28	.51	1.37	.72	27748.500	.853
Physical and Psychological Violence	1.17	.35	1.20	.52	26018.000	.112
Personal devaluation	1.10	.27	1.14	.44	27803.500	.968
Social and Economic Control	1.24	.50	1.19	.50	24677.000	.006
Sexual violence	1.06	.27	1.14	.56	27429.500	.449

On the other hand, with regard to the analysis of the differences in the types of violence according to gender, carried out using the Mann-Whitney U test for two independent samples when the p-value is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), we can accept, with 95% confidence, that there are statistically significant differences between men and women in the mean value of the variable social and economic control ( $p = .006$ ), where men have a higher value ( $M = 1.24$ ) than women ( $M = 1.19$ ) in this type of violence (Table 1).

Concerning age, the participants older than 24 years showed that the type of violence most suffered was emotional violence and personal devaluation. The group of participants aged between 21 and 24 years suffered the most physical and psychological violence, and those under 21 together with the 21-24 age group, sexual violence.

**Table 2**

*Types of Violence Suffered According to Age*

Types of violence	< 21 (N=326)		21 - 24 (N=156)		> 24 (N=38)			
	M	DT	M	DT	M	DT	H	p
Emotional Violence								
Physical and Psychological Violence	1.30	.60	1.35	.70	1.60	.95	5.204	.074
Personal devaluation	1.17	.42	1.24	.56	1.24	.56	1.825	.402
Social and Economic Control	1.10	.33	1.15	.45	1.29	.61	10.415	.005
Sexual violence	1.17	.46	1.26	.56	1.26	.56	6.046	.049
Emotional Violence	1.12	.51	1.12	.49	1.08	.30	.370	.831

Concerning the averages obtained for each type of violence, concerning the variable age, as we can see in Table 2, although the averages are also very close, the age group over 24 years old presents the highest values in all the dimensions except in the sexual violence dimension (M=1.08) and the highest average (M=1.60), in the emotional violence dimension.

As for the differences concerning age, carried out using the Kruskal-Wallis H-test for independent samples when the p-value is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), we can affirm, with 95% confidence, that there are significant differences in the personal devaluation dimension ( $p = .005$ ), and social-economic control ( $p = .049$ ) between the different age groups (Table 2). Therefore, there are significant differences concerning violence related to social and economic control in men aged 21-24 years (M=1.26) and over 24 years (M=1.26) and in violence related to personal devaluation in the age group over 24 years (M=1.29). In the rest, there are no significant differences between men and women and age groups concerning the different types of violence studied.

Finally, we performed a correlational analysis using Spearman's Rho test, taking into account the non-parametric characteristics of the variables under study. Likewise, when comparing the scores of the dimensions of the VIREPA questionnaire that are related to the different types of violence analysed (table 3), with the age of the participants and the duration of the relationship to which they refer in their responses, we found that there is a positive correlation in all of them, with a significance level of .05, except in the correlation between sexual violence and the age of the participants, which presents negative values, so that the correlation is negative or inverse. The correlation values (rs) indicate a "very low to no correlation" (.01 to 0.1) in all dimensions concerning the age and duration of the relationship. Thus, age and length of relationship do not correlate with the types of violence suffered.

**Table 3***Correlational Analysis Between Types of Violence, by Age and Duration of the Relationship*

Types of violence	Age	Length of relationship
Emotional Violence	,083	,096*
Physical and Psychological Violence	,030	,077
Personal devaluation	,097*	,102*
Social and Economic Control	,038	,053
Sexual violence	-,017	,017

*Note.* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (bilateral).

### Discussion

Violence in young couples has traditionally been identified in formal contexts such as marriage or committed, monogamous relationships. However, recent research suggests that this type of violence is a significant problem among young and single individuals as well (Duval et al., 2020). The objective of this research was to analyse violence in relationships among students pursuing a degree in Primary Education at the University of Granada (Granada, Ceuta, and Melilla campuses) in relation to gender and age, aiming to identify implications for their training and, in future studies, inform educational proposals for these future educators.

The findings revealed that emotional violence, social and economic control, and physical violence were the most prevalent forms of violence in the sample. These results are consistent with studies by Tasayco et al. (2019), Garrido-Antón et al. (2020), and Molina-Rico et al. (2022). In contrast, sexual violence and personal devaluation were reported less frequently. Previous studies (Rubio et al., 2017; Garthe et al., 2017; Meza, 2018; Zych et al., 2019; Duval et al., 2020) confirm that women are more often victims of psychological, emotional, and sexual violence, which aligns with the results of this study. Notably, women reported higher scores than men in emotional, physical, and psychological violence, personal devaluation, and sexual violence.

Vivanco Muñoz et al. (2015) found that men report a higher prevalence of economic violence, which is consistent with our findings. Regarding age differences, significant variations were observed in personal devaluation and social-economic control across different age groups, complementing previous research on physical and sexual violence (Gómez et al., 2014; Redondo Pacheco et al., 2017). It is also important to highlight the very low or non-existent correlation between the types of violence experienced and the participants' age or relationship duration, which contrasts with most studies. For instance, Martín and De la Villa Moral (2019) found that emotional dependence was unrelated to gender, age, or education level, while psychological violence was associated with age and education level.

Currently, many universities implement programs for the prevention and treatment of violence in their educational contexts, aiming to raise awareness within the university community, promote equality, and prevent violence in romantic relationships. These

programs include workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns targeting students, faculty, and administrative staff to increase awareness of the various forms of gender-based violence (psychological, physical, sexual, and economic) and their effects. Additionally, some universities offer specialized training for faculty and staff, preparing them to detect signs of violence and intervene appropriately. Psychological support services are also essential, providing counseling and therapeutic programs for both victims and perpetrators of violence, aiming to address the underlying causes of violent behavior. Furthermore, many universities have established clear protocols for addressing cases of gender-based violence, ensuring victim protection and the sanctioning of perpetrators. These protocols include measures such as confidential reporting, psychological support, and legal assistance. Some universities also integrate prevention programs into their academic curricula, offering courses on gender equality, human rights, and respectful relationships. In collaboration with specialized external organizations, universities can provide additional resources such as 24/7 helplines, legal services, and support groups. These programs and protocols are essential in creating safer, more inclusive, and respectful educational environments, contributing to a culture of non-violence and equity.

### Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of investigating violence in young couples' relationships within the university context, an environment where teachers play a key role as role models of attitudes and values. Education on intimate partner violence should be an integral part of the curriculum, allowing educators to reflect on their role in the prevention and early detection of this issue. Teacher training is crucial, as previous research (Moriana, 2017; De Botton et al., 2012; Aroca et al., 2016) underscores the need to equip educators to address gender violence, an area in which many teachers still lack training (Gómez & Sánchez, 2017; Bas-Peña et al., 2015). This gap in training must be addressed to foster an educational environment based on non-discrimination, equality, and respect between genders, contributing to a fairer and more equitable society.

However, the results of this study are limited by a homogeneous sample, which restricts the ability to generalize the findings to other populations (70.6% (n=367) of the participants were female, and 29.4% (n=153) were male). Additionally, the descriptive and cross-sectional nature of the study prevents establishing causal relationships between the variables analyzed. As a future direction, it is suggested to approach this issue from a qualitative perspective, which would allow for a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of those directly affected, enriching the overall comprehension of the phenomenon.

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