

# Gender-Based Violence and Alcohol Consumption in Youth Leisure Contexts: Challenges for Spanish Social Work

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## Abstract

Adolescent leisure contexts in which alcohol are abused have undergone changes in recent decades, with the incorporation of girls/women to more intensive forms of consumption and with new forms of gender-based violence becoming more visible. This article studies the gender differences in the use and enjoyment of time in leisure contexts, the differences in the consumption of alcohol, and the vulnerabilities to which girls/women are subjected to in order to create proposals for Spanish social work intervention. We present empirical data from a qualitative study in which a sample of students from southern Spain have been interviewed in depth with the aim of establishing the connections between alcohol use and abuse and the instances of gender violence that occur in leisure contexts. Our final objective is to reflect upon and make innovative proposals for the role of Spanish professional social workers in prevention and intervention with young alcohol users and in the gender violence that is produced in the spaces of consumption.

## Keywords

alcohol, gender, gender-based violence, social work, young people

This study examines forms of gender violence that are taking place in leisure spaces as larger numbers of young women enter these spaces and where situations of intensive alcohol consumption occur. Our broader aim is to enhance how social workers can intervene in such cases. We have used a hermeneutic methodology that is focused on the experiences of the interviewees and their social context in order to give meaning to their testimonies. Likewise, we adopt feminist epistemology (Harding, 1987; Lengerman & Niebruge-Brantley, 2001) to integrate gender perspective and make

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visible the voices and experiences of those who are typically silenced by patriarchal discourse. Our phenomenological approach to data analysis of the results has been particularly relevant.

Over recent years, young people's leisure spaces have been transformed into what has been called an "intoxication culture"—that is, a space where male and female Spanish teenagers spend the weekend in patterns of intensive alcohol consumption. According to the data from our previous research and from the epidemiological records on drug use in Spain, girls/young women have been incorporated into, and have adopted, the same patterns of consumption as young men, and have even become those that participate and drink the most intensively (Romo et al., 2016). This female presence in a traditionally male space has brought about the appearance of new vulnerabilities for young women and new forms of gender-based violence. The results show that the reasons given for this drinking—disinhibition and having a good time—may be contributing to the generation of new expectations in relation to codes of femininity and breaking with the gender system (Romo et al., 2016). The study we present here addresses these problems, which create continuous challenges for social policies and social work. We argue that social workers must understand the multidimensionality of these new problems and their intersections: adolescents, alcohol, leisure, and gender-based violence.

Our starting point is Rubin's (1975) sex/gender system. She sets out how through this system some societies defend maintaining a binary order that, in the words of the author, "requires repression"—in men of whatever is the local version of "feminine" traits, and in women the local version of "masculine" traits (p. 180). Thus, this system lays out that there should be a "continuity" between the biological sex of people and the socially assigned gender. In this study, we look at the differentiated consumption of alcohol, and the social perceptions that exist with regard to it, as a contemporary form of Rubin's sex/gender system. In this regard, men who consume alcohol are reinforcing their masculinity, while the women who consume alcohol are questioning this sex/gender continuity, for which, in the latter case, the consumption leads to sanction and social criticism. This approach is along the same lines as the WHO<sup>1</sup>'s study on gender, health, and alcohol use: We suggest how differentiated norms and roles are made evident through alcohol consumption, such as hierarchical relations between genders. In particular, we highlight the vulnerability to which young women are exposed in leisure contexts in contrast to the privileges of young men; it is the latter who hold the "power" in this environment.

Over the last decade in Spain, there has been a transformation in Spain in the conceptualization and legal regulation of gender-based violence. Increasingly, gender-based violence has come to be considered a fundamental problem of human rights and a public health problem. Since 2004, the year in which Spain passed its law against gender-based violence (*Ley Orgánica 1/2004, de 28 de diciembre, de Medidas de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género*), scientific study of the matter has advanced, as has the design and implementation of a public resource network for the integrated social care of women who suffer this social problem.

In Andalusia (Southern Spain), the most relevant is *Law 7/2018, of July 30, on comprehensive measures of prevention and protection against gender-based violence*, which amends *Law 13/2007, of November 26*. *Law 7/2018* is one of the most advanced in observing the *2017 State Pact against Gender Violence*. It is new and pioneering because it expands the concept of victim and the definition of different forms of aggression against women. For example, it considers sexual aggression to be gender violence (along with physical, psychological, and financial aggression). It also deems crimes that are outside of the relationship or former relationship to be gender-based violence if their basis is discrimination for reasons of gender, and it guarantees that the Andalusian education administration integrates gender equality into curricular design and development in the different educational stages, among other matters. In the same way, this law provides assistance to women without the need for a prior formal complaint.

In 2018, coinciding with an atmosphere of social tension and debate caused by the case of “La Manada” (“the Wolf Pack”)—concerning a gang rape that took place in 2016—different parliamentary groups pushed proposals for the reform of the penal regulation of sex crimes in Spain. Following these proposals, the draft bill of the *Organic Law of Comprehensive Right of Sexual Freedom* emerged, and driven by the Ministry for Equality, was passed in March 2020. It reforms the penal code by modifying the current regulation of crimes against sexual freedom, it regulates the victims’ right to assistance and protection, and it provides measures for the detection of sexual violence and for social and financial aid for those who suffer this violence (Tarancón, 2020).

The case of “La Manada” became notorious and has contributed to the development of laws such as the aforementioned Law 7/2018 in Andalusia and the draft bill of the *Organic Law for the Comprehensive Right to Sexual Freedom in Spain*. In our previous research (Romo et al., 2019; Ruíz-Repullo et al., 2020), we have been able to observe—among other things—young men’s difficulty in identifying behaviors classified as “gender violence” and the normalization of many of these behaviors. This highlights the importance of the need to develop laws like the aforementioned, which deal with these aspects at the criminal level.

## Background

### *Nightlife, Abuse of Alcohol, and Gender in Spain*

The patterns of intensive consumption of alcohol that affect a large proportion of young people in Spain correspond to what some authors have called a “culture of intoxication” (Hunt & Antin, 2017; Measham & Brain, 2005; Radcliffe & Measham, 2014). This culture makes sense in the leisure spaces where the excessive consumption of alcohol is considered above all pleasurable and involves having fun and being sociable (Szmigin et al., 2008). The available epidemiological data show that young men and women intensively consume alcohol in leisure contexts. One of the four 14-year-olds claims to have been intoxicated through alcohol at some time in their life, a proportion that rises to 56.5% of 16-year-olds and 74.1% of 18-year-olds (Observatorio Español sobre Drogas y Adicciones [OEDA], 2018). The age of first using alcohol is similar for boys and girls, at 13.8 and 13.9 years old, respectively.

Alcohol consumption and participation in public leisure spaces have been understood as a symbol of the construction of the hegemonic masculinity (Bird, 1996; Capraro, 2000; Dempster, 2011). Hegemonic masculinity is occasionally associated with committing violent acts and other types of risk behaviors with which manhood or masculinity is put to the test in peer groups (De Visser & Smith, 2007; Dickens & Sergeant, 2008; Peralta et al., 2010; Sergeant et al., 2006). Despite the evident connection between alcohol consumption and the reinforcement of masculinity, there are few studies that have applied a gender perspective or gaze to analyzing this phenomenon, something which is essential if we are to investigate the differential consumption of drugs and associated behavior with accuracy (Courtenay, 2000). The studies that have taken this perspective into account (Peralta et al., 2010) conclude that drinking in excess, even to the extent of intoxication, is a form of being manly or demonstrating masculinity in front of the peer group. In this context, violent behavior and behaviors of risk (fights, acts of aggression, reckless driving) are frequent. When associated with alcohol, they produce a climate of disinhibition known as *liquid courage* (Palmer et al., 2009) or *alcohol myopia* (Cowley, 2014), in which the effects of gender norms are multiplied, justifying the acts of aggression committed in order to dissipate any doubt or questioning over manhood/masculinity (Benson & Archer, 2002).

Intensive alcohol consumption has run parallel to the inclusion of women into the spaces of leisure and consumption. We are witnessing a situation of change in the trends of drug consumption that affect women in Europe. Specifically, in different European countries, there has been an

ongoing incorporation of women to intensive alcohol consumption and a relative increase in its frequency, the level of alcohol consumption, and self-reported drunkenness, over at least the last decade (Romo et al., 2016; Slade et al., 2016). In Spain, adolescent women admit to having been drunk at some time in their life in greater proportion to adolescent men (51.4% of young women compared to 48.7% of young men; OEDA, 2018). In the discipline of social work, some authors have maintained that this is due to a breaking of gender roles and gender commands that affect the behavior of young women (Gómez et al., 2010).

### *Gender-Based Violence in Spain*

The classic conceptualization of gender-based violence has been based on the existence of a couple relationship—previous or current—and the perpetration of acts of physical and/or psychological aggression within it. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) defined it as

any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. ([https://www.who.int/topics/gender\\_based\\_violence/es/](https://www.who.int/topics/gender_based_violence/es/))

In recent years, this conceptualization has been undergoing redefinition and a broadening, with new theories and legal texts that consider a greater range of behaviors and contexts. In this regard, the *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* of 2011 (popularly known as the Istanbul Convention) is the first instrument of a binding nature in Europe that allows for the recognition and reporting of other forms of gender-based violence that take place between strangers in public space. Article 3.a of the convention states:

“violence against women” is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (Council of Europe (Istanbul Convention), 2011, p. 5)

Gender-based violence manifests in an extensive repertoire of ways (verbal harassment, flirtatious remarks, harassing expressions, lewd stares, stalking, physical closeness, or touches that seek sexual contact) that infringe upon women’s rights and freedoms (Abbey et al., 2004; Meza de Luna & García Falconi, 2015; O’Donohue et al., 1998; Quinn, 2002). In this sense, the model by Fitzgerald et al. (1995) establishes a triple categorization of these forms of violence: gender harassment (e.g., insults or hostile attitudes toward women), unwanted sexual attention (e.g., telephone calls or requesting dates), and sexual coercion (e.g., bribes and threats).

The *Fundación Salud y Comunidad*<sup>2</sup> (Health & Community Foundation), through its latest *Observatorio Noctámbul@s*<sup>3</sup> (“Night-Owls” Observatory) report (2018), shows that the participation of girls in traditionally male spaces generates new forms of gender violence. The Fifth Noctámbul@s Report concluded that “the apparent parity in consumption of alcohol and other drugs between boys and girls does not translate into greater equality when experiencing and inhabiting nightlife spaces” (p. 25). Hence, in order to understand the phenomenon of sexual violence against women, we need to study in depth: nightlife, the use of drugs, the role of social networks, and young women’s awareness and capacity for agency, among other aspects. Moreover, this report concludes that “the sexual violence and *machismo* in nightlife continue to be of greater importance/concern for women of all ages” (Fundación Salud y Comunidad [FSC], 2018, p. 63), something that may be verified by the disparity between women (73.3%) and men (25.8%) who responded to the

questionnaire. With regard to identifying the violence, the aforementioned report states that when asked whether they had experienced situations of violence in nightlife spaces, 33% of young women answered that they always did, 43% said often, 22.9% less often, and 1.3% said that they had never witnessed violence. These data lead one to wonder why the young women have perceived, witnessed, or experienced these types of violence to a greater degree in nightlife contexts if they share the same space and time as the young men.

### *Gender-Based Violence in Youth Leisure Spaces*

Alcohol consumption in leisure spaces is associated with the perpetration of different forms of violence including gender-based violence (Abbey et al., 2004; Arostegui, 2016). Cowley (2014) found that men reveal themselves to be active, dominant, and sexually aggressive subjects, compared to the passive role that is assigned to women. This exacerbation of gender differences means that those young women who drink more than is socially accepted are seen as more accessible sexually. For this reason, when sexual aggression occurs, the victims are blamed because they are considered to have transgressed or broken the socially attributed gender norms.

This conception, along with cases of social outrage, such as that of the aforementioned “La Manada,” have contributed to the Spanish government’s drawing up of the draft bill of the *Organic Law of the Comprehensive Right to Sexual Freedom*. In 1998, due to another infamous and tragic event, the death in Granada of Ana Orantes, who was burned alive by her husband, the regional government of Andalusia was moved to implement an action plan (*First Action Plan of the Regional Government of Andalusia for the Eradication of Violence against Women*, 1998/2000; Alcázar-Campos, 2013). Both events had a large social and media impact and were a driving force behind the implementation of different laws. The case of Ana Orantes resulted in gender-based violence becoming a public topic of debate and the first comprehensive law against gender-based violence in Spain was enacted (*Organic Law 1/2004 of 28th December, of Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender-based Violence*). The case of “La Manada” opened up Spanish society to the debate on sexual abuse in recreational contexts and the need to focus criminal legislation in order to take care of women who participate in spaces of leisure and who suffer different types of violence. This led to the recently passed draft bill of the *Organic Law for the Comprehensive Right to Sexual Freedom*.

Another relevant aspect concerns the very conceptualization and identification of these acts as expressions of gender-based violence, both by the perpetrators and by the victims. The space itself in which they occur results in a tendency to minimize the importance of these acts if compared with others taking place in more formal spaces such as the workplace (Tinkler et al., 2018). Even at the legal level, there is clear differentiation if the contexts are taken into account since in more formal environments there is more regulation and penalization of these types of behavior (Tinkler et al., 2018).

As a result, social work plays an essential role in fighting on a preventative level against gender-based violence and the consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Social work needs to develop preventative actions with qualified professionals at the community level (Lunderberg, 2018). There are various strategies that are being implemented in social work in relation to the prevention of gender-based violence. In this regard, community-level action has been revealed to be one of the most efficient strategies for prevention through intervention in the processes of socialization that lie at the origin of gender-based violence. Hence, the role of female and male social workers in the educational environment is key to having an impact on that process of socialization (Elboj & Ruiz, 2010). As some studies show (Barter, 2007), preventative actions with adolescents should take into account how differentiated socialization plays an important role in the origin and perpetration of gender violence. Moreover, some more innovative preventative strategies are based on the search for

allies in order to detect and report cases of gender-based violence, mainly through friends and bystanders (Oak et al., 2020).

## **Methodological Considerations**

In agreement with Lincoln and Guba (1985), we consider that there is no one valid methodology for investigating and discovering truths, but rather a diversity of useful approaches. For this study, we have adopted a hermeneutic perspective, wishing to learn about daily life experiences using in-depth interviews analyzed from a gender perspective.

The hermeneutic approach holds that the most basic fact of social life is the meaning of an action. Social life is constituted by social actions, and actions are meaningful to the actors and to the other social participants. Moreover, subsequent actions are oriented towards the meanings of prior actions; so understanding the later action requires that we have an interpretation of the meanings that various participants assign to their own actions and those of others. (Little, 2008, p. 1)

The hermeneutic perspective is recommended within the analysis of gender in which this study is based. Within this hermeneutics, the phenomenological approach (Patton, 2002) seeks to get close to reality through people's experiences. Specifically, this approach proposes that

there is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means. The subjective experience incorporates the objective thing and becomes a person's reality, thus the focus on meaning making as the essence of human experience. (Patton, 2002, p. 106)

Following the proposals of Hycner (1985) and Finlay (2014), we conducted a phenomenological reduction in search of the most relevant content that emerged from the interviews, considering the "lifeworld" of the informants (Sullivan, 2012, p. 38) and trying to "understand this expression" of the related experiences (Sullivan, 2012, p. 39).

Hermeneutic phenomenology studies individuals' narratives to understand what those individuals experience in their daily lives, in their lifeworlds (. . .) If all human experience is informed by the individual's lifeworld, and if all experiences must be interpreted through that background, hermeneutic phenomenology must go beyond description of the phenomenon, to the interpretation of the phenomenon. The researcher must be aware of the influence of the individual's background and account for the influences they exert on the individual's experience of being. (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 5)

Our next step was to look for units of meaning, understood as "those words, phrases, non-verbal or para-linguistic communications which express a unique and coherent meaning (irrespective of the research question) clearly differentiated from that which precedes and follows" (Hycner, 1985, p. 282). In order to make the data handling more operative, we proceeded to group these units of meaning into wider entities and, lastly, to define the large themes, which are much more generic than the previous groupings. Thus, in this article, the results are set out relative to two of the large themes: "alcohol consumption" and "gender-based violence."

## **Epistemological Basis**

This study analyses the experiences of young women and men who consume alcohol in nightlife spaces and the relationship with episodes of gender violence. Our broader objective was to detect changing needs and to propose implications for social workers. In order to achieve this, we analyzed the subjective interpretations and experiences embedded in the young people's discourses (DeVault,

1996). We understood this as a necessary condition not only as a way of revealing key aspects for the development of social change that is occurring in this regard (Brooks, 2007) but also as way of making such meanings visible. They will thus be taken into greater consideration when it comes to managing preventative interventions and social policies (Ortiz, 2002). We adopted a relational approach to gender, taking it to be a social construction created and redefined through daily interaction with others (West & Zimmerman, 2009). This led to the inclusion of both young men and women within the study.

In line with feminist epistemology, we use a qualitative methodology that purposefully contributes to women becoming subjects of research and not objects. Telling their stories in the first person helps to bring about this shift from object to active subject in the study (Harding, 1987).

From that anti-oppressive logic that characterizes the feminist perspective, we also add a queer approach (Butler, 2006; Warner, 2001) when it comes to defending the idea that gender is a continuation that cannot be reduced to a binary framework. However, heteronormative logic exerts pressure on there being two genders based on a binary sexual division (man vs. woman) in societies. Society penalizes those who do not fit this binary model and those who break from the sex/gender continuity. In the research that we have conducted, nobody identified as transgender or gender fluid. In the future, research should be undertaken including trans and gender nonconforming people in the sample, since some studies (Lindhorst et al., 2010) show that, as victims of gender violence, their experiences are different to those of cisgender women. However, this was not the aim of the present study.

The research team assumed from the first moment that, due to the fact of adopting a constructionist interpretive perspective of social reality, it was actively producing qualitative data in a joint way with the people participating in the study. This was considered to be a key element in the research process, due to the importance given in feminist research to direct interaction with those who participate in the research, as well as reflectiveness and subjective processes in the construction of knowledge (Rose, 2001).

## **Sample**

Twenty-four in-depth interviews have been analyzed for this study, carried out within the research project on alcohol and drug consumption and its relation to gender-based and interpersonal violence that adolescents experience in recreational and leisure contexts. The interviewees were made up of 10 female (41.66%) and 14 male (58.33%) Spanish young people between 15 and 19 years of age, all residing in two Andalusian provinces. The sociodemographic variables of the chosen sample (environment, gender, age, and partner) provide a heterogeneity of profiles and of discourse from each reference group with the aim of learning, analyzing, and interpreting different perspectives. The average age of the sample was 17.7. All of them were consumers of alcohol; they came from rural (12.5%) and urban (87.5%) settings, while 45.83% were in a relationship and 54.17% were not at the time of interview.

## **Fieldwork**

The project fieldwork began in May 2017 in two provinces of Andalusia (a region located in the south of Spain). By way of purposive sampling, we undertook a process of seeking independent networks in different environments (cities, towns, and villages). This made it possible to maximize gaining different experiences as well as establishing greater control of biases in participant selection. The general inclusion criterion was that of young women and men between the ages of 15 and 19, with standard profiles (they were in education, lived with family and were not offending minors nor

were they at risk of social exclusion) and who were consumers of alcohol and frequented places of youth leisure.

In the first phase, in-depth interviews were conducted in different secondary schools in a province of eastern Andalusia and in a university faculty in Western Andalusia. Thanks to the school and university teaching staff where the fieldwork was carried out, we had suitable spaces to hold the interviews, which made it possible to establish bonds of trust and sincerity with the interviewees.

The selection of the most representative profiles of the young women and men interviewed was carried out based on the matching process undertaken in the first phase. The individual interviews enabled us to explore personal and interpersonal aspects as well as aspects of the sociocultural context in depth. The questions were designed around the five themes that are the object of study as follows: recreational and leisure milieu; consumption patterns of alcohol; interpersonal, gender, and sexual violence in leisure contexts; information and communication technology and its relation to this type of violence; and prevention and intervention of this violence.

The average length of the interviews was 60 min. The interviews were recorded and transcribed afterward. The finalization of the data collection process was determined following the principal of theoretical saturation. A summative content analysis was carried out. After the first general reading of the transcriptions, the first identification of codes and categories was made with the participation of various members of the team, which served to reach a consensus on the criteria for the codification process and the thematic units of interest. Subsequently, the categories developed were collated, using a triangulation process that enabled the testing of the level of consistency and the solving of discrepancies. After the codification, the most significant units of analysis were extracted and the interrelations between the different themes were identified. All of this analytical process was developed with the help of the QSR NVivo Version 11 program.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The study was approved by the University of Granada's Ethics in Research Committee (CEI-UGR/883). All of the minors who participated in the project agreed voluntarily to be interviewed, having received information about the study as well as a commitment to confidentiality letter signed by the research team. The families of the young men and women also received information about the study and signed a consent form, having been informed as to the reason for giving their consent to their children participating in the research.

## **Results**

Our results showed the varied forms and meanings that socialization and the consumption of alcohol assume in the social lives of these young people. Likewise, they illustrated the forms in which alcohol consumption is set up and managed as a potential source of pleasure and which encourages interviewees to establish sexual relations with or without violence. The results that are presented below should be taken as an illustrative sample of a set of discourses that circulated in the contemporary context of the study.

### *Motivations for Drinking and Peer-Group Pressure*

The relation between drug consumption and violence is complex, since it depends on the psychoactive substances consumed, the context in which it takes place, and the expectations that are generating regarding it. We know that the risk of violent behavior increases in proportion to the increase in blood alcohol level (Norström et al., 2017). There are also studies that indicate that the consumption of different substances is related to physical and psychological violence in couples (Sabina



et al., 2017), with alcohol being one of the most widely studied risk factors (H. J. Choi et al., 2017). We can therefore state that violence forms part of masculinity and that it is heightened in leisure contexts due to the effects of alcohol consumption and their enabling environment.

One of the research aims was directed at learning the motivations of the young women and men for using and abusing alcohol in recreational contexts. Among the answers provided by the interviewees, they stated that to drink was “positive” because, when they drink, they laugh more and have more fun:

When you're a bit drunk you laugh with everybody. (Julio, 17 years old)

I tell you, I like that buzz that . . . I'm going to laugh about more things. (Eva, 17 years old)

They remarked, moreover, that when they drink they feel less embarrassed and that allows them to interact more easily with other people:

I have a better time a little tipsy, I don't feel embarrassed anymore and speak to everyone [ . . . ] the times I've gone out without drinking I've had a good time, but not in the same way. (Lola, 16 years old)

As we confirmed in the interviews, group pressure plays an important role. Group pressure made our interviewees start drinking because, if they did not, they would not feel part of the peer group. The following accounts explain it thus:

The first times I drank, then more or less . . . it was strange for me, I almost didn't like it, but as everybody was doing it, so . . . you had to do it. (Andrhad to years old)

I started to drink because I was the only one who didn't, and, I don't know, I felt the littlest, I felt left out of the group . . . and I said, okay, then to not be the odd one out, then I'll drink [ . . . ] what I've always wanted is to fit in because as I didn't fit in at my old school then I say, I've got to fit in here no matter what, so I'll do what the rest do. (Patricia, 16 years old)

In the youth recreational contexts where we carried out fieldwork, fights and episodes of violence were frequent, both physical and verbal, including insults, derogatory comments, and humiliations. The participating young people were asked if they had witnessed or been involved in any type of fight when they have gone out partying. Various participants stated how, sometimes, they themselves were involved in acts of violence. On other occasions, they were witnesses, as 16-year-old Ricardo says: “every time I've gone to a bar, there's always been a fight in that bar.” Both the young men and the young women participating in this study commented that there were times when they had become involved in a fight to defend a friend.

Well, maybe someone comes along who is more of a joker, and he starts teasing a friend and you've got to get involved [ . . . ]. If there's a fight, a friend is fighting, you've got to do your part [ . . . ] because either my friend gets out alive and I get out alive, or we both end up dead. A friend is a brother. (José, 15 years old)

Maybe if the fight's got something to do with one of my girlfriends then I get involved, don't I? And I defend her. (Sofía, 17 years old)

There was an agreement in the testimonies that the young men used physical violence to a larger degree, whereas the young women were more likely to use verbal violence in recreational leisure contexts that they attended frequently.

Getting in a fight, or hitting someone, because of girlfriends or for anything like that, yes, I've seen it. Maybe it's that men tend to take it more to the physical, and women more with words and insults and the like. (Eva, 17 years old).

In this regard, we can confirm that the reasons that led them to participate in acts of violence are different between the young men and women. The young men initiate the confrontations or look for fights due to jealousy related to the conflicts with their partner. The informants have cited the fact that the partner "is flirting or simply talking or dancing with another person." Others have given the reason of acting the "tough guy" before the peer group or the person that they like.

Being the tough guy in front of friends and the girl you like. (Lola, 16 years old)

Sometimes, when the boys fight so that the girl he likes sees how strong and brave he is. (Patricia, 16 years old)

For the young women, however, the main reason given for being involved in a fight was that of defending a female friend in a fight or argument with other girls or with their boyfriend.

We girls tend to fight but it's to defend our [female] friends when other girls say something to them, their boyfriend doesn't let them do anything or there are boys who say things to us or touch our bum. (Eva, 17 years old)

Many of the interviewees stated that alcohol abuse had a connection with the fights they had witnessed or in the situations of conflict and violence they had been involved in.

Fights tend to take place when you have finished being in the disco, when you leave, in the same area, fights tend to happen more. When the night has gone on a long time and you've had a lot to drink and that. (Silvia, 17 years old)

People are more drunk than they realise and then suddenly, not because of anything you've done, they look for a fight for any reason [...] when they're drunk they're not really aware of what they're doing. (Gonzalo, 18 years old)

I've got friends who after drinking they've gone crazy and you have to stop them, because for example they've got in a fight with someone and they go for that person all out to beat them up, and it's drink and take something and then they go full out to beat... (Patricia, 16 years old)

### *Alcohol Abuse as Trigger of Episodes of Gender-Based Violence*

Asking whether there is any difference between young men and women when they drink in respect of the consequences, the female and male interviewees stated clearly that yes, when the young men drink alcohol they tend to get violent and the young women vulnerable:

The girl when she drinks, the only or worst thing that happens to her, is that she doesn't control if she goes with a guy or such, but the boy, when he drinks he can't control not only if he goes with a girl but also at the slightest thing he's all confrontational and wants to fight with the other guy or he starts up with the girlfriend or looks for a fight with so and so, and that I have seen. (Julio, 17 years old)

Previous research has clearly shown that the young women who consume drugs suffer different types of violence. The Council of Europe (2011) showed this following an exhaustive review of the research, thus confirming a gender dimension in the phenomenon of violence and establishing a

positive link between the use of psychoactive substances and the violence experienced or perpetrated. This was based on three main findings: A higher prevalence of violence experienced among female drug users than among women in general, a higher prevalence of violence experienced among female drug users than among male drug users, and a higher use of psychoactive substances among people who have experienced violence in their lives than among those who have not. We have also observed that our interviewees, male and female, have some difficulty in identifying when we are referring to gender-based violence and when not. One young man asked:

When you refer to gender-based violence, do you also mean all that about not letting her go out, control, not letting her dress in that way? I've seen that a lot. (Carlos, 17 years old)

Nevertheless, the young women appear to find it easier to identify the instances of gender-based violence, whether due to having witnessed them or suffered them in recreational contexts.

I've seen violence with punches, in that a guy hits a girl in the way that maybe the girl does something that guy doesn't like, or she is going off with another guy or is dancing only with one other guy, then he might smack her one, definitely not more, he doesn't beat her up, but a slap I have seen, although it's true that I've also seen it the other way around. (Silvia, 17 years old)

One day, I went to the toilet with a friend and a boy came after us who we knew by sight, and he started to say that we should have a threesome, and so on, he touches you up here, there, and sure, then I got crazy and I told him to get away from me, to go away [...] and so I felt very uncomfortable in that moment, if I'm saying no, it is no. (María, 18 years old)

Regarding heteronormative masculinity and the consumption of alcohol and other substances, the male interviewees reported instances of harassment and violence.

So a kid comes up to her and starts to touch her, to pull and stuff like that. Or to convince her that it's him who's the boss. (Felipe, 17 years old)

Harass her. Go after her asking for her number, touching her up, saying to her let's go to the bathrooms, saying to her lets go outside... things like that. (Hugo, 16 years old)

They also stated having seen other young men who "get very insistent," that "harassment, groping, and intrusive comments are habitual practices, especially if they are in a group" and that on many occasions it gives rise to multiple harassment.

If they come across a lone girl, four of them go, not just one, four go and form a semicircle around her. They form a semicircle, they corral her and they say to her, "come with us, we'll buy you something, we've got" I don't know what... (Iván, 15 years old)

This group harassment gives rise to situations in which the young women experience a great deal of fear, having to make decisions that they do not like because they sense that their personal safety is in danger.

One of them started, he said: you look like you blow, will you give me a blow job? At that moment, apart from [feeling] uncomfortable, you don't feel good because you get frightened... because a group of boys comes after you to say things to you, you get scared and it was terrible. (Ana, 16 years old)

You see how it is and that he's threatening you and is coming closer to you and that you back away and that he keeps coming closer and shouting at you and somehow it's like . . . "well, that's it, so you don't do anything to me I'll go with you and you can do what you want with me." (Patricia, 16 years old)

Instances of jealousy, control, violence, and harassment also take place within couples themselves. In our study, the young men and women considered jealousy to be a demonstration of love toward their partner. This idea could be related to the "myth of romantic love" (Bajo, 2020). Mythologizing jealousy as a proof of love is a deception adopted in order to justify the doubts or fears that individuals themselves have. We can see this reflected in the participants' testimonies, such as the following:

Look . . . you get jealous because for example if you love that person then you don't want to lose her or you're afraid of losing her, because for example she is speaking to other guys . . . then you do get jealous. (Hugo, 16 years old)

Since the 19th century, feminist analyses have rejected the view that "romantic love" is a bond of satisfaction and freedom. "Within feminist thought there is a long tradition which identifies a direct relationship between the practice of love and the reproduction of patriarchal power" (Langford, 1999). There are forms of control and jealousy that range from the type of clothes the partner should wear to those related to the mobile phone and social networks.

Next time you're going to dress more like . . . (Julio, 17 years old)

On Instagram, there's a lot of possessiveness and violence in the sense of "you are mine," and keep them held really tight and there's a lot of tough guy possessiveness. [ . . . ] If you're not speaking to me on WhatsApp every half hour then you're obviously already being unfaithful, and things like that. (Iván, 15 years old)

### *Implications for Social Workers and Other Institutions*

In our study, the young people interviewed said that, in their educational institutions, they had received education through workshops both on the prevention of alcohol and drug consumption and on the prevention of sexual violence and gender-based violence. The content of these workshops or talks and their quality varied depending on the professional who gave it. The participants considered that the speakers had not always known how to connect with them, that they were not very dynamic or used technical language that the students did not understand very well. Thus, they suggested giving workshops that are less theoretical, more practical, and dynamic, in which they could ask questions that concerned or interested them. This is not always possible due to the limitations of the context of the venue—that is, in the educational institutions, where the students do not feel free to ask questions for fear of being labeled. Nevertheless, the young people are signaling, without being fully aware of it, a shortcoming of the education that they receive about drug consumption, gender-based violence, and their interrelatedness.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

This study has sought to analyze the experiences of young women and men who consume alcohol in nightlife spaces and the relationship with episodes of gender violence, detecting needs, and proposals for social workers. One of the main results of the research concerns the normalization of the excessive consumption of alcohol among Andalusian young men and women. Peer-group influence

and pressure is a determining factor for understanding this pattern of alcohol consumption. When it comes to explaining the style of consumption, group influence has been analyzed by other studies that show similar results in other contexts (e.g., Peralta et al., 2010).

Intensive alcohol consumption in leisure spaces is linked to instances of gender-based violence that, on occasions, are made invisible by the context itself where they occur: A festive context which people attend to “have a good time.” Some studies previous to ours have already pointed out that the association between the use and abuse of alcohol and the space in which the drinking takes place means that the violence to which young women are exposed is trivialized and ignored within the hegemonic discourse (Cowley, 2014). It is assumed that what happens in those contexts is one more expression of the exercise of masculinity that comes to be naturalized under the expression “boys will be boys” (Quinn, 2002), as construction and socialization in gender norms has an influence on the interpretation of these forms of behavior (Heldman & Wade, 2010; Tagri & Hayes, 1997). “A man watching girls—even in his workplace—is frequently accepted as a natural and commonplace activity, especially if he is in the presence of other men. Indeed, it may be required” (Quinn, 2002, p. 387).

Both the results of this study and those of others carried out in an international and national context are in agreement in showing that the behaviors categorized as gender-based violence are not perceived as such by their male perpetrators. In the case of this study, the young women found it easier to identify these types of behavior than the young men (FSC, 2018; Tinkler et al., 2018; Whitaker et al., 2018). With regard to the assessment of the violence, they downplay or do not consider as violent those forms that do not involve physical violence including touching, verbal harassment, or persuasion to obtain certain types of behavior, some of which are of a sexual nature. This finding is in line with other studies carried out on youth populations (Meza de Luna & García Falconi, 2015; O’Donohue et al., 1998), which point to the relativization and rendering invisible of violent behaviors that do not fit with the imaginary and the social construction of gender-based violence.

The differences in the ways of experiencing parties and the normalization of sexual aggression by young women entail a challenge for prevention and intervention programs and for the professionals responsible for carrying them out, including social workers. In this regard, our research makes evident how the attainment of certain levels of equality has not proved sufficient to change ways of thinking and being in society by the younger generations of this country. Our study confirms the survival of attitudes and practices of control by young men regarding their female partners and young women generally, which constitutes an environment of risk for everyone, but particularly for young women. The data analyzed in our study demonstrate the urgent need to implement public policies, programs and actions aimed at offering information, awareness, detection, and early intervention, both on an individual level and on a group and community level with young people.

In light of the data presented here, in spite of the fact that administrations have launched campaigns aimed at younger people for the prevention of violence and for the responsible consumption of drugs, we conclude that these have proved insufficient and to a large extent ineffective. In this regard, one future challenge is for a combined intervention that deals with both the alcohol consumption and the violence that occur in this environment. Just as previous studies have indicated (Elboj & Ruiz, 2010; Levy, 2002), the prevention of this type of violence requires a questioning of the hegemonic model of heteronormative masculinity as well as a deconstruction of the social ideology that exists concerning gender-based violence. In this sense, the violence committed in the spaces of nightlife where alcohol is consumed can be trivialized and understood as a consequence of the context of excesses in which it occurs. It is therefore of great importance to clarify the traits and characteristics that define gender-based violence, an aspect that other studies have also emphasized (Fellmeth et al., 2015; Whitaker et al., 2018) with the purpose of ending the lack of visibility held by certain forms of behavior that constitute violence.

This requires an intervention at the community level with the direct participation of social work professionals and social agents involved in the socialization of young people. Likewise, future social workers, both professionals and trainees, need to have training in gender equality and the prevention and early detection of gender-based violence. For this, the direct involvement of universities, professional associations, and public administrations is needed to guarantee high-quality training. “Today’s situations of social exclusion require further research and specialized training in social work and gender” (Agrela & Morales, 2017, p. 276).

The consumption of alcohol and other drugs among the studied population of young people is associated, as we have stated, with sexual practices that are sometimes abusive. These two practices, which can be called problematic, reveal the need for those programs or interventions, aimed at the young, to address three aspects: consumption, sexual practices, and the interrelation of the two.

It is essential that the education of young people on drugs and the prevention of gender-based violence—specifically or mainly sexual—be carried out in the settings in which young people exist: the family, the educational system, and peer groups. We must not forget the importance of the role played by communication media or the new tools of mass communication among the young, and although this requires regulation at the macrolevel (the state), it offers a huge potential for reaching a group that lives, socializes, and communicates through them.

The education of young people for the prevention of practices of risk requires interventions both on the individual and on the group level and commits social work to acting in all spheres and in those social resources where social workers are placed (community social services or specialized social services). Many of these social work resources and professionals are working in prevention through education. Hence, it is essential that professionals themselves adapt the contents and techniques both in order to reach the juvenile population earlier and better and to offer an education that addresses both alcohol and drug consumption and the associated violence in certain contexts. It is important to educate young people in health and legal aspects but also on social and personal consequences. This will enable young people to gain another perspective on substances, motivations, uses, effects, and so on; and it will help them to identify when gender-based violence and sexual violence is inflicted or received and to learn the consequences that it has on interpersonal relationships and particularly on intimate relationships. Furthermore, this education will enable them to be capable of identifying whether they are in a violent relationship, how it manifests and the cycle that it follows. It is important to demystify gender stereotypes and myths such as “romantic love.” But above all, it is essential to give them tools to identify situations of risk or abusive situations, and to know what they can do if they suffer, or know someone who is suffering, some type of violence.

The prevention and early detection of both cases of gender-based violence and of early and problematic consumption of legal and illegal drugs is key to achieving an immediate and successful intervention. Prevention work on youth violence rarely includes a gender perspective, which in turn can be understood to affect social work practice and how professionals approach issues involving violent acts (Arnell, 2017).

Orme (2002) argued that feminist theories had a limited impact upon social work theory and practice beyond the formula of “add women and stir” (p. 800). In social work, we should take into account feminist theorists whose approaches are concerned with undoing subject and object, recognizing the capacity for agency of the people we work with, making visible the inequalities and discrimination that women suffer, and pushing for the securing of rights or the need to work from the perspective of diversity (Alcázar-Campos, 2014).

In social work, a diagnosis is carried out, among other actions, avoiding pathologization, assessing the needs observed in order to undertake an individualized care plan. Ultimately, the role of social work is essential in the fight against gender-based violence and in the detection of, and intervention against, the different forms of violence that occur in leisure spaces, although this is not sufficient to eradicate a social problem that violates the fundamental rights of women. As some

studies (Lundberg, 2018) suggest, it is important to develop preventative actions at the community level that use qualified and specialized social workers who are also able to detect cases of gender-based violence that sometimes go unnoticed by some of these professionals—even training supervisors working within multidisciplinary teams (Y. J. Choi & An, 2016). In order to go forward in this direction, we need to understand gender-based violence as a policy problem of primary importance.


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### Notes

1. The World Health Organization is the body of the United Nations specializing in the management of prevention policies, promotion, and intervention worldwide in health (for more information, visit <https://www.who.int/about>).
2. Spanish foundation that for over 25 years has been working in the research, prevention, intervention, and raising of public awareness on health and social problems.
3. It is responsible for examining the connection that exists between drug use, harassment, and other forms of sexual violence in nightlife contexts for the purpose of their prevention.

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