

How severity of intimate partner violence is perceived and related to attitudinal variables? A systematic review and meta-analysis

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ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence against women (IPVAW) is a global public health problem where multiple factors, such as the perceptions and attitudes toward IPVAW, should be considered to properly address this issue. This systematic review and meta-analysis synthesized the information available about perceived severity of IPVAW by different actors (e.g., victims, perpetrators, students, and professionals), analyzed the relationship between attitudes toward IPVAW and perceived severity of IPVAW, and examined gender differences in perceived severity of IPVAW. A systematic search was conducted according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis guidelines using Web of Science, Scopus, and ProQuest databases. Studies were included if they (a) provide information about perceived severity of IPVAW (physical, psychological, or sexual violence); (b) the relationship between perception of severity of IPVAW and attitudes toward IPVAW was analyzed empirically; (c) the languages of publication were English or Spanish; and (d) they were not theoretical studies or reviews. To this end, two independent researchers selected studies, resolving discrepancies with a third researcher. A total of 27 studies were included in systematic review and 12 in the meta-analysis. The results showed that men perceived IPVAW as less severe than women. Likewise, a negative relationship was found between perceived IPVAW severity and favorable attitudes toward IPVAW, such as sexist views, victim blaming, excusing the perpetrator, rape myth acceptance, and traditional gender roles adherence. The Classic Fail-Safe *n* was calculated to ensure the finding was robust against potential publication bias. These findings highlight some of the potential factors to focus on IPVAW prevention programs. However, the number of studies included were limited, requiring more research to generalize the results.

1. Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is one of the most common forms of violence against women, encompassing any physical, psychological, or sexual abuse, as well as controlling behaviors by a current or former intimate partner (WHO, 2012, 2021). Intimate partner violence against women (IPVAW) is a global public health concern of epidemic proportions, with nearly one-third of the global population of women having experienced some form of IPVAW in their lifetime (WHO, 2013). Consequently, women who have been victims of IPV show adverse

physical and mental health symptoms, such as fractures, chronic pain, hematomas, gastrointestinal problems, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, among other symptoms (Blanco et al., 2004; Sarasua et al., 2007; Wang, 2016; WHO, 2022). Due to the prevalence and consequences of IPVAW victimization, examining variables to target for intervention and prevention efforts are needed.

IPVAW is a social problem where public response to IPVAW can have an important influence on victims, perpetrators, and society (Flood & Pease, 2009; Gracia et al., 2020; López-Ossorio et al., 2018). Specifically, attitudes toward IPVAW are related to IPVAW perpetration and

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play an important role in the responses to IPVAV by victims and perpetrators (Pease & Flood, 2016; Wang, 2016). For example, women with favorable attitudes toward traditional gender roles were less likely to report IPVAV victimization (Harris et al., 2005). Likewise, attitudes that justify IPVAV, such as peer approval of IPVAV during dating in adolescence were related to IPV perpetration in adulthood (Eriksson & Mazerolle, 2015). Attitudes toward IPVAV are also related to the social perception of the severity of IPVAV (Herrera & Expósito, 2009; Vidal-Fernández & Megías, 2014). In turn, perceived severity of IPVAV is associated to individuals' willingness to intervene in cases of IPVAV (Martín-Fernández et al., 2018). This suggests that addressing perceived severity of and attitudes toward IPVAV could be an effective strategy to prevent IPVAV (Badenes-Sastre & Expósito, 2021; Currier & Carlson, 2009). Thus, in this study we examine the relationship between attitudes of acceptance of IPVAV and the perceived severity of IPVAV through a systematic review and meta-analysis.

1.1. Theoretical framework

This study was guided by feminist theory. A tenant of feminist theory is the exploration of gender relations focusing on the social construction of gender, and how this leads to privilege and oppression (West & Zimmerman, 1987). When examining IPVAV, there is a focus on gender and oppression created by IPVAV victimization. Particularly, one factor that contributes to IPVAV are gender norms and attitudes, such as acceptance or justification of violence against women, which also impacts public and professional responses to IPVAV (Ferrer et al., 2020). A tenant of feminist theory is to dismantle the different forms of IPVAV legitimization in society, as well as understanding social perceptions and attitudes toward this problem (De Miguel, 2005). Based on feminist theory, exploring the influence attitudes toward IPVAV on perceived severity of IPVAV is important. Additionally, knowing how IPVAV is perceived is essential to predict help-seeking and reporting behaviors in the case of experiencing or witnessing partner violence (Kuijpers et al., 2021).

Gender differences in the perception of IPV have been found, with men showing lower perception of IPV severity than women (Kuijpers et al., 2021). In this regard, according to previous research, the normalization of violence against women could be influenced by attitudes toward victims, perpetrators, and different forms of violence toward women (Herrera et al., 2014). For example, gender inequality supposes the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural roles according to sex and/or gender (European Institute for Gender Inequality, 2020) and it is a factor that contributes to IPVAV (Gracia et al., 2019), as well as greater attitudes of tolerance toward aggression (Fitzpatrick et al., 2004). Hence, it will be essential to explore the influence of attitudes toward IPVAV on the perception of severity of IPVAV.

1.2. Perception of severity and attitudes toward IPVAV

Research examining the perception of IPVAV has increased significantly in recent years (Badenes-Sastre & Expósito, 2021). Perceived severity of IPV refers to people's beliefs about the magnitude or significance of the threat of IPV (Riddle & Di, 2020; Witte, 1994). The perception of IPVAV could vary depending on the type of violence, with physical or sexual violence potentially being perceived as more severe (Novo et al., 2016), and threats or non-severe physical aggression being more tolerated than other forms of violence (Gracia & Herrero, 2006). Similarly, attitudes toward IPVAV, such as the acceptability of IPVAV, sexist beliefs, and blaming the victim are negatively related to the perception of the severity of IPVAV (Lelaurain et al., 2018; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2020). Recently, a systematic review about IPVAV in the European Union (Gracia et al., 2020) identified 20 labels to define attitudes toward IPVAV, including legitimization (e.g., victim blaming or justification), acceptability (e.g., tolerance or permissive attitudes), intervention (e.g., willingness or helping), and perceived severity (e.g.,

minimization or recognition), revealing associations between gender and attitudes toward IPVAV. Particularly, the study showed less acceptance and justification of IPVAV by women, as well as a higher perception of severity of IPVAV and willingness to intervene in cases of IPVAV than men. Similarly, Flood and Pease (2009), also highlight that in general, men show more favorable attitudes toward IPVAV and perceive IPVAV as less severe than women do.

According to Ming et al. (2020) multiple factors, such as perceptions and attitudes toward IPV, should be considered when looking at methods to minimize and prevent IPVAV. Therefore, it is essential to explore how the severity of IPVAV is perceived by different actors (Badenes-Sastre & Expósito, 2021). Specially, victims of IPVAV usually take an average of more than eight years to verbalize their situation or file a complaint (Ministry of Equality, 2020), suffering in silence because they may normalize the abuse and do not perceive the situation as severe (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010; Wang, 2016). It has a strong impact on the health of women who are victims of IPV, as it increases mortality risk by 40% (Chandan et al., 2020). Likewise, public, professionals', and victims' perceptions of IPVAV are influenced by their attitudes toward IPVAV (Gracia et al., 2018). Therefore, the perception of severity of IPVAV, as well as attitudes toward IPVAV, are important variables to examine. In this line, although mentioned above, Gracia et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review about attitudes toward IPVAV during 2000–2018 in the European Union. No specific systematic review, without country limits, about the perceived severity of IPVAV and its relation to attitudinal variables has been carried out. Additionally, no meta-analysis has been conducted to examine the relationship using all available quantitative data. Thus, it will be essential to examine how the severity of IPVAV is perceived, as well as how it is related to attitudes of acceptance of IPVAV. The present study aims to address this gap because it will promote further understanding of how IPVAV is perceived by different actors and what variables influence that perception, contributing to a more specific and effective approach to prevention and intervention efforts to reduce IPVAV. Additionally, conducting a meta-analysis and systematic review can highlight gaps in the current literature that may be beneficial to examine in future research.

1.3. The present research

The present systematic review and meta-analysis was conducted to synthesize the information available about perceived severity of IPVAV by the general population, perpetrators, victims of IPVAV, and professionals who work with victims of IPVAV. Perceptions of IPVAV severity is an important construct to examine, as it may influence help-seeking behaviors by victims, public response to IPVAV, and can be utilized in education and prevention efforts (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010; Gracia, Herrero, et al., 2009). This study analyzed the relationship between attitudes toward IPVAV and perceived severity of IPVAV through the use of a meta-analysis. Additionally, this study examined if there are significant differences between men and women on their perceived severity of IPVAV. In this respect, we hypothesized that people who present more favorable attitudes toward IPVAV will perceive IPVAV as less severe than people with less favorable attitudes toward IPVAV (Hypothesis 1). Furthermore, we expected that men will perceive IPVAV as less severe than women (Hypothesis 2).

2. Method

This systematic review was performed according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021), and relevant methodological references (Perestelo-Pérez, 2013; Rubio-Aparicio et al., 2018). We registered the study in the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO; registration number CRD42020215561). Likewise, in order to obtain effect sizes from relevant studies on attitudinal variables related to perceived severity of

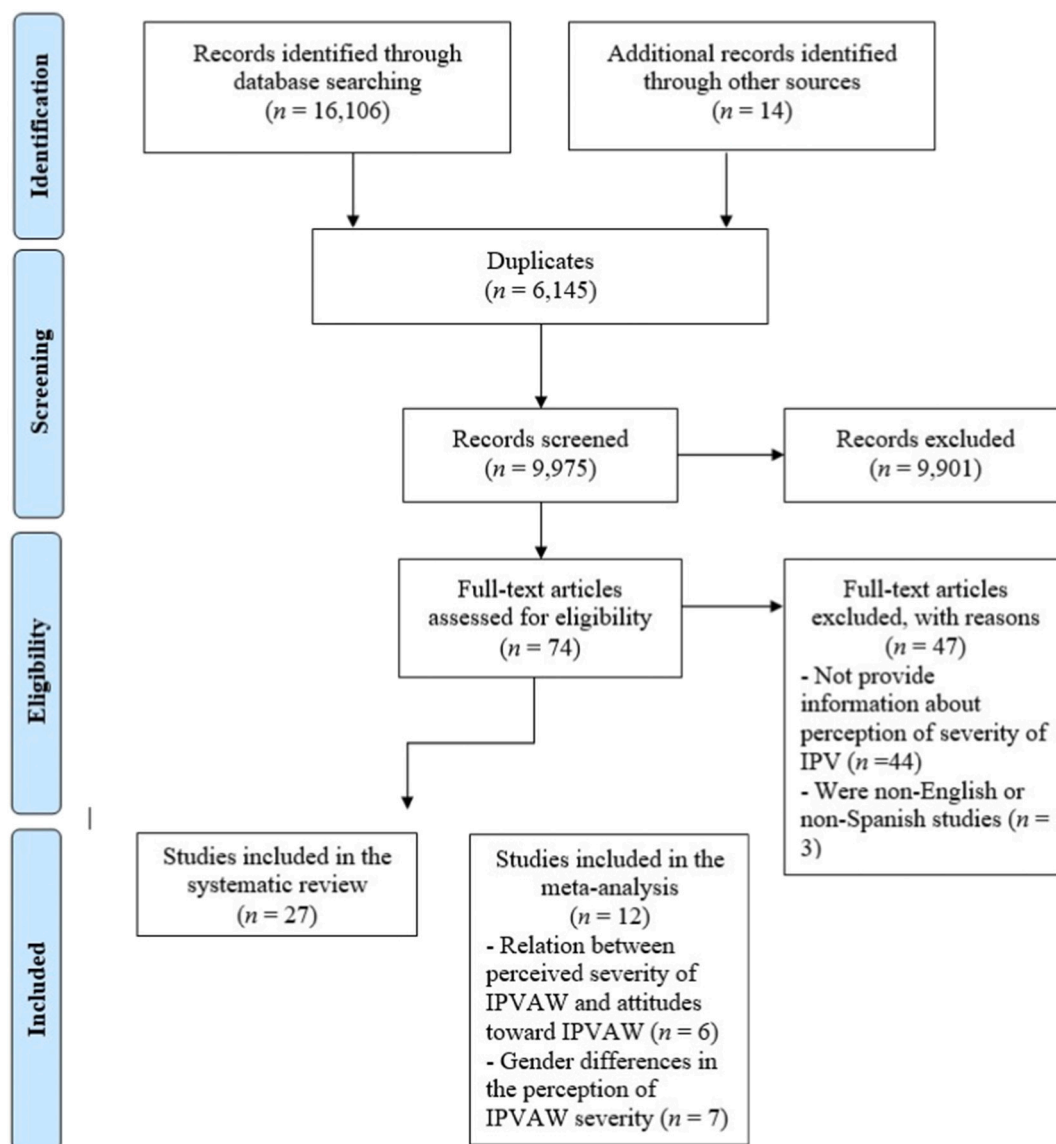


Fig. 1. Selection process PRISMA flow diagram.

IPVAW, this study followed typical meta-analytic procedures (Borenstein et al., 2009; Card, 2012).

2.1. Search strategy

We performed a comprehensive database search using Web of Science (including SciELO Citation Index, Russian Science Citation Index, MEDLINE, KCI-Korean Journal Database, Derwent Innovations Index, Current Contents Connect, BIOSIS Previews, BIOSIS Citation Index, Collection Principal de Web of Science, Scopus, and ProQuest (including Health & Medical Collection, Nursing & Allied Health Database, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, PsycARTICLES, PsycEXTRA, Psychology Database, PsycINFO, PsycTESTS, Education Collection, International Bibliography of the Social Science, and Social Science Database). The search was conducted in November 2020, without limited temporality. The Boolean search terms that were used in order to locate studies within these databases that included terms related to perception of severity of IPVAW (“percept* sever*”, “perceive* sever*”, “percept* serious*”, “perceive* serious*”, “percept* gravit*”, “perceive* gravit*”, and “minimiz*”), attitudes toward IPV (tolera*, accept*, approv*, justif*, attitud*, opinion*, sexism*, attribut*, blam*,

stereotyp*, and reject*), relationship between perception of severity of IPVAW and attitudes toward IPVAW (predictor OR correlate* OR relation* OR associat*), and IPVAW (“intimate partner violence against wom*” OR “violence against wom*” OR “gender violence” OR “gender-based violence” OR violence OR aggression OR abuse OR “domestic violence” OR maltreatment OR batter OR “dating relation*” OR “dating violence” OR “partner violence” OR “spouse abuse”). The database search was accompanied by a manual screening of references included in previous reviews on this topic.

2.2. Studies selection

Studies were included if they met the following inclusion criteria: (a) provide information about perceived severity of IPVAW (physical, psychological, or sexual violence); (b) the relationship between perception of severity of IPVAW and attitudes toward IPVAW was analyzed empirically; (c) the languages of publication were English or Spanish; and (d) they were not theoretical studies or reviews. Conversely, we excluded studies that: (a) did not provide information about perception of severity of IPVAW; (b) were letters to the editor, reviews, or meta-analysis; and (c) were non-English or non-Spanish languages studies.

Table 1
Characteristics of studies included.

Authors, year, and country	Methodology	Sample	Type of violence	Variables evaluated	Main findings regarding perceived severity of IPVAW
*Adams- Clark and Chrisler (2018), USA	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	152 men 253 women 5 transgender	Sexual violence	- Minimization of rape (Rape-Supportive Attributions Scale; Monson et al., 2000) - Victim blaming (Sex-Role Stereotypical Victim Blame Scale; Monson et al., 2000) - Social desirability (Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960)	Significant effects of gender and type of sexual act on victim blaming, and rape minimization. Men endorsed more victim blaming and more rape minimization than did women. Participants who read a vignette involving penile-vaginal intercourse scored significantly lower on rape minimization.
Burke (2015), USA	Quantitative Doctoral dissertation (cross-sectional study)	585 women	Physical, psychological, and sexual violence	- Perceived severity of IPVAW (5-item questionnaire)	Women who experienced IPVAW perceived it more severe than women who did not experience IPVAW.
Cantera et al. (2009), Spain	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	313 women (180 Euskera and 133 Spain)	Psychological violence	- Perceived severity of IPVAW (VEC scale; Cantera et al., 2009)	Euskera version: 48% of women did not perceive the behaviors presented as psychological violence; 29% perceived medium severity; and 23% perceived high severity. Spain version: 43% of women did not perceive the behaviors presented as psychological violence; 29% perceived medium severity; and 28% perceived high severity.
Delgado and Gutiérrez (2013), Spain	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	110 participants over 65 years (42 men and 68 women)	Psychological and sexual violence	- Perceived severity of IPVAW (VEC scale; Cantera et al., 2009)	Perceived severity of IPVAW was higher in women than in men. The effect of marital status indicates a lower ability of perception when people have a partner. Age correlates negatively with the perception of violence.
*Delgado and Mergenthaler (2011), Spain	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	289 students (176 men and 113 women)	Psychological violence	- Perceived severity of IPVAW (VEC scale; Cantera et al., 2009)	Women perceived more severity in acts related to psychological violence than men. Men perceived more severity in acts related to physical and sexual violence than women. Perceived severity increases in higher education levels.
Diakonova-Curtis (2013), USA	Quantitative Doctoral dissertation (cross-sectional study)	122 men 153 women	Sexual violence	- Comprehension and perception of rape - Crime evaluation - Behavior and personal character blame - Perceptions of how each character was dressed, how much alcohol each might have consumed at dinner, and how much the woman might have fought to get away from the man	The severity of sexual violence was perceived as less serious when the perpetrator was the husband and was perceived most serious when the perpetrator was a stranger. People's attitudes about women's roles in the domestic and professional spheres were moderately related to their perceptions of the man's role in the sexual assault. The less traditional attitudes about domestic and professional roles were associated with higher perceptions of IPVAW as serious.
Fiorillo-Ponte (1999), USA	Quantitative Doctoral dissertation (cross-sectional study)	37 victims of IPVAW	Physical violence	- Perceived severity of IPVAW (1 item questionnaire)	Participants who experienced more severe abuse perceived the abuse as more severe than those who experienced less severe abuse.
Follingstad and DeHart (2000), USA	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	449 psychologists (251 men and 198 women)	Psychological violence	- Perceived severity of IPVAW in five clusters (threats to physical health; control physical freedom; general destabilization; controlling; ineptitude)	The clusters "Threats to physical health" and "control physical freedom" obtained the highest mean scores in severity compared to clusters "general destabilization", "controlling", and "ineptitude".
Follingstad et al. (2004), USA	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	800 lawyers 449 psychologists	Psychological violence	- Perceived severity of IPVAW (Psychological Abuse Scale; Follingstad & DeHart, 2000)	Psychologists were much more likely to identify the abusive behaviors than the lay participants. Although psychologists were more likely to consider items to be psychological abuse, those lay participants who also determined them to be abusive were even more extreme in their ratings of the severity of the items. Females rated behaviors more severely than males, African American participants rated the behaviors as harsher than White participants, single participants were more severe in their ratings of behaviors labeled psychological abuse than either people living with a partner or those who had

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Table 1 (continued)

Authors, year, and country	Methodology	Sample	Type of violence	Variables evaluated	Main findings regarding perceived severity of IPVAW
Gilbert and Gordon (2017), USA	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	121 victims of IPVAW	Physical and psychological violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Abuse (Conflict Tactics Scale; Straus, 1979) - Commitment with the relationship (Commitment Inventory; Stanley & Markman, 1992) - Forgiveness of IPVAW (Acts of forgiveness scale; Drinnon, Jones, & Lawler, 2000) - Minimization of IPVAW (10 item questionnaire) 	<p>been previously married, and those people claiming to be a victim were more likely to label behaviors as abusive than those not labeling themselves as a victim. Minimization of aggression was not significantly correlated with frequency of psychological and physical aggression. Minimization of aggression did not significantly mediate either the relationship between personal dedication and forgiveness or constraint commitment and forgiveness. Commitment was positively related to minimization of aggression, and minimization of aggression was in turn significantly related to forgiveness. The interaction between perceived severity and levels of police involvement was significant for the low and high perceived severity groups. Police officers perceiving incidents of IPVAW as more severe tend to choose the highest level of police involvement (law enforcement actions irrespective of the victim's wishes), as compared to police officers who perceived the same incidents of IPVAW as less severe. No significant differences were found in the perceived severity of IPVAW between gender, age, and years of experience as a police officer. Men perceived lower levels of severity than women. High social disorder conditions, the level of perceived severity of domestic violence is higher when compared to low social disorder conditions. Women perceived hypothetical scenarios of IPVAW as more severe. The 25–45 age group also perceived the same scenarios as more severe than those in the >45 years old group. The less educated perceived that the hypothetical scenarios of IPVAW were less severe, whereas the better educated were more willing to mediate. Participants who feel more personal responsible and perceive the same incidents of IPVAW as more severe are more willing to report them to the police, as compared to those that perceive the same severity but feel less responsible.</p>
Gracia et al. (2008), Spain	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	145 police (115 men and 28 women)	Physical, psychological, and sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAW (Perceived severity of incidents of partner violence against women scale; Gracia et al., 2008) - Level of the police involvement in the cases of IPVAW (Level of police involvement in the cases of IPVAW; Gracia et al., 2008) - Personal responsibility (Personal responsibility; Gracia et al., 2008) 	<p>No significant differences were found in the perceived severity of IPVAW between gender, age, and years of experience as a police officer. Men perceived lower levels of severity than women. High social disorder conditions, the level of perceived severity of domestic violence is higher when compared to low social disorder conditions. Women perceived hypothetical scenarios of IPVAW as more severe. The 25–45 age group also perceived the same scenarios as more severe than those in the >45 years old group. The less educated perceived that the hypothetical scenarios of IPVAW were less severe, whereas the better educated were more willing to mediate. Participants who feel more personal responsible and perceive the same incidents of IPVAW as more severe are more willing to report them to the police, as compared to those that perceive the same severity but feel less responsible.</p>
*Gracia, García, and Lila (2009), Spain	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	350 Latin American immigrants	Physical, psychological, and sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAW (Perceived severity of incidents of partner violence against women scale; Gracia et al., 2008) 	<p>Men perceived lower levels of severity than women. High social disorder conditions, the level of perceived severity of domestic violence is higher when compared to low social disorder conditions. Women perceived hypothetical scenarios of IPVAW as more severe. The 25–45 age group also perceived the same scenarios as more severe than those in the >45 years old group. The less educated perceived that the hypothetical scenarios of IPVAW were less severe, whereas the better educated were more willing to mediate. Participants who feel more personal responsible and perceive the same incidents of IPVAW as more severe are more willing to report them to the police, as compared to those that perceive the same severity but feel less responsible.</p>
Gracia, Herrero, et al. (2009), Spain	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	174 men 245 women	Physical, psychological, and sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAW (Perceived severity of incidents of partner violence against women scale; Gracia et al., 2008) - Personal responsibility (Personal responsibility; Gracia et al., 2008) 	<p>Women perceived hypothetical scenarios of IPVAW as more severe. The 25–45 age group also perceived the same scenarios as more severe than those in the >45 years old group. The less educated perceived that the hypothetical scenarios of IPVAW were less severe, whereas the better educated were more willing to mediate. Participants who feel more personal responsible and perceive the same incidents of IPVAW as more severe are more willing to report them to the police, as compared to those that perceive the same severity but feel less responsible.</p>
*Gracia and Tomás (2014), Spain	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	1006 general population	Physical, psychological, and sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAW (1 item) - Perceived frequency of IPVAW (1 item) - Victims blaming attitudes - Acceptability of IPVAW (1 item) 	<p>33% of the participants considered the provocative behavior of the woman as a cause of PV. Perceived severity of IPVAW had not significant association with victim blaming attitudes. Most offenders have high scores on low minimization of the harm caused during the aggression. Minimization of harm done correlated with ambivalent sexism, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, and it was not related to social support and self-esteem. Sexist attitudes predict minimization of the harm done.</p>
*Guerrero-Molina et al. (2017), Spain	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	129 aggressors	Physical, psychological, and sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAW (Attribution of Responsibility and Minimization of Harm Scale; Lila et al., 2008) - Ambivalent sexism (Ambivalent Sexism Inventory by Glick & Fiske, 1996. Spanish adaptation by Expósito, Moya, & Glick, 1998) - Self-Esteem (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Spanish adaptation by Fernández-Montalvo & Echeburúa, 1997) - Functional Social Support (Functional Social Support Questionnaire by Broadhead, Gehlbach, Degruy, & Kaplan, 1988, Spanish adaptation by Bellón, Delgado, Luna & Lardelli, 1996) 	<p>Most offenders have high scores on low minimization of the harm caused during the aggression. Minimization of harm done correlated with ambivalent sexism, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, and it was not related to social support and self-esteem. Sexist attitudes predict minimization of the harm done.</p>

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Table 1 (continued)

Authors, year, and country	Methodology	Sample	Type of violence	Variables evaluated	Main findings regarding perceived severity of IPVAV
Herzog (2004), Israel	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	987 general population	Physical, psychological, and sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social Desirability (Social Desirability Scale by Crowne & Marlowe, 1960, the Spanish adaptation by Ferrando & Chico, 2000). - Perceived severity of IPVAV (1 item) 	Jewish respondents considered marital assault as the third most serious offense evaluated, whereas Arab respondents perceived it as significantly less serious than all the other violent and nonviolent offenses evaluated, except for tax evasion. Arab and/or men respondents assigned significantly lower seriousness scores to these scenarios than did Jewish and/or women respondents.
*Kienas (2009), Canada	Quantitative Doctoral dissertation (cross-sectional study)	326 students (183 men and 143 women)	Physical and sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Victim minimization (Rape-Supportive Attributions Scale; Lanhinrichsen-Rohling & Monson, 1998) - Victim blaming (Victim Blame Scale; Lanhinrichsen-Rohling & Monson, 1998) - Identification with the victim (Identification with the victim; Lodewijkx et al., 2005) - Feelings of anger and pity (Zomeran & Hein, 2005) - Behavioral tendencies to protest (Zomeran & Hein, 2005) - Desired length of penalty for the perpetrator (Modification of Rape Responsibility Questionnaire (Deitz, Littman, & Bentley, 1984, by Szymanski et al., 1993)) 	No significant differences were found to minimization between groups that participate in person or online. Men were more minimizing of the victim's experience than women. Victim minimization negatively correlated with victim blaming, identification with the victim, anger, pity, tendency to protest, and desire of penalty for the perpetrator.
*Lelaurain et al. (2018), France and Portugal	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	115 men 120 women	Physical and psychological violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAV (12 items) - Romantic love (Attitude Toward Love Scale; Knox, 1970; Knox & Sporkowski, 1968) - Ambivalent sexism (Ambivalent Sexism Inventory; Dardenne et al., 2006; Glick & Fiske, 1996) - Domestic violence myths (Domestic Violence Myth Acceptance Scale; Lelaurain et al., 2018; Peters, 2008) 	Romantic love was not a predictor of perceived severity of IPVAV. Perceived severity of IPVAV was correlated with romantic love, ambivalent sexism, domestic violence myths, victim blame and exoneration of perpetrator.
*Lelaurain et al. (2018), France	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	75 men 72 women	Physical violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAV (18 items) - Justification of IPVAV - Legitimizing ideologies (Domestic Violence Myth Acceptance Scale; Peters, 2008) - Ambivalent sexism (Ambivalent Sexism Inventory; Dardenne et al., 2006; Glick & Fiske, 1996) 	Women participants perceived violence as more severe than did men participants. When the participants were interacting with men researcher perceived violence more severe than with a women researcher.
Marshall (1992), USA	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	915 women (707 students and 208 women community)	Physical, psychological, and sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAV (Severity of violence against women scales) 	46 acts were proposed to discriminate among nine dimensions of IPVAV against women. The women community perceived more severity IPVAV than women students.
Murphy and Smith (2010), Australia	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	146 adolescent women	Psychological violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAV - Previous exposure to warning-sign behaviors - Response protectiveness 	Jealous/possessive behaviors were perceived to be the least problematic domain. Verbal aggression was perceived to be the most serious problem in a relationship. Public debasement was considered more serious than personal putdowns. Broader exposure to exit-control tactics, jealousy/possessiveness, verbal aggression, and personal putdowns was weakly associated with lower perceived severity.
*Sánchez (1997), USA	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	106 men 120 women	Sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAV - Tolerance / acceptability of rape (Rape Myth Acceptance Scale; Burt, 1980) - Opinions regarding punishment - Labelling of the event 	Rape myth beliefs were significantly correlated with perceived severity of IPVAV. There were significant differences between case histories on perceived severity of IPVAV, individuals in the stranger rape condition agreed more strongly with the statement than subjects in the marital rape condition.

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Table 1 (continued)

Authors, year, and country	Methodology	Sample	Type of violence	Variables evaluated	Main findings regarding perceived severity of IPVAW
Sánchez-Fernández et al. (2020), Spain	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	344 students (120 men and 224 women)	Psychological violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAW - Justification of violence behavior - Experiences of controlling behaviors in participants' own relationships - Frequency of controlling behaviors in young couples - Subjective risk perceived of dating violence - Acceptability of IPVAW (Acceptability of IPVAW against women; Martín-Fernández et al., 2018) - Ambivalent sexism (Ambivalent Sexism Inventory; Glick & Fiske, 1996, Spanish adaptation by Expósito, Moya, and Glick, 1998) - Myths toward love (Myths Scale toward Love; Bosch et al., 2007; adapted in an adolescent sample by Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2013) 	<p>Statistically significant interaction between means of control that was used and the acceptability of IPVAW against women on the measure of perceived severity of the situation.</p> <p>In face-to-face condition low levels of acceptability of IPVAW and low levels of benevolent sexism predicted a greater perception of severity in comparison with high levels. High scores for IPVAW predicted a lower perceived severity. Significant interaction between adopted role on the scene and acceptability of IPVAW against women on the measure of perceived severity, so in the protagonist condition, low levels of acceptability of IPVAW against women predicted a greater perception of severity of the situation in comparison with high levels. High levels of hostile sexism predicted a lower perceived severity of the situation, high acceptability of IPVAW against women predicted a lower perceived severity of the situation, and high scores for myths about romantic love predicted low perception of severity.</p>
Webster et al. (2014), Australia	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	27,622 general population	Physical, psychological, and sexual violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAW - Gender roles 	<p>Participants with a high score on the gender roles are more likely to agree that IPVAW is a serious issue in our community (98%), while a low gender roles score is linked with lower levels of agreement (91%).</p>
*Yamawaki et al. (2009), USA	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	194 students (91 men and 103 women)	Physical violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAW (5 items) - Excuse perpetrators (3 items) - Blame victims (5 items) - Ambivalent sexism (Ambivalent sexism inventory; Glick & Fiske, 1996) - Gender roles (Sex role ideology scale-short form; Kalin & Tilby, 1978) 	<p>Japanese participants tended to minimize the seriousness of IPVAW more than did American participants. The differences between men and women in perceived seriousness and excusing were not significant.</p> <p>There were significant mediated effects for gender in blaming victim and perceived severity of IPVAW via the effects of gender role traditionally.</p>
*Yamawaki et al. (2012), USA	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	77 men 117 women	Physical violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perceived severity of IPVAW (Minimization Scale; Yamawaki et al., 2009) - Victim blame attribution (Victim blame attribution scale; Yamawaki et al., 2009) - Domestic violence myths (Domestic violence myths scale; Yamawaki, 2011) - Perpetrator excuse (Perpetrator excuse scale; Yamawaki et al., 2009) 	<p>Men participants tended to minimize the seriousness of the assault more than women participants. Male participants and individuals who more strongly endorsed domestic violence myths tended to minimize the incident of domestic violence, more than female participants and individuals who endorsed the myths less.</p>
*Yamawaki et al. (2018), USA	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	111 students (47 men and 64 women)	Physical and psychological violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimization of IPVAW (Perceived seriousness of violence measure; Yamawaki et al., 2009) - Victim blaming (Victim blaming attitudes measure; Yamawaki et al., 2009) - Gender role traditionality (Sex-role egalitarianism abbreviate scale; King et al., 1994) - Victim blaming (Victim blaming attitudes measure; Yamawaki et al., 2009) 	<p>The results indicated that the assault that was perpetrated by the female abuser was minimized more in comparison to the assault that was perpetrated by the male abuser, and male participants tended to minimize the seriousness of the IPVAW incident more than did female participants. Men minimization of the seriousness of the IPVAW incident more than women.</p>

Note: IPVAWAW = Intimate Partner Violence Against Women; USA = United States of America; * = The studies that include * refer to those analyzed in the meta-analysis.

The database search initially revealed 16,106 studies, of which 6145 were duplicates, and the manual search yielded 14 additional studies, resulting in a total of 9975 studies. During the first step screening, 9901 studies were excluded by title and abstract, and 74 studies were retained for full text screening. Finally, 27 studies were included in the systematic review and 12 in the meta-analysis (see the selection process PRISMA flow in Fig. 1).

2.3. Data extraction and analysis

Two researchers (M.B. and M.A.) independently selected studies based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Disagreements between researchers were solved by discussion and when required, through a consensus with a third researcher (C.S.). The screening was conducted in two phases. First, we selected articles by title and abstract in order to verify compliance with the inclusion criteria. Second, when the

summary could not provide all required information, we selected definitive studies by full text. Once the articles meeting the inclusion criteria were selected, the researchers performed data extraction following a previously developed coding protocol. Specifically, extracted data included authors, year of publication, study population and demographic characteristics, assessment instruments, statistical analysis, type of violence, perception of severity of IPVAV, attitudinal variables toward IPVAV, and main results. Inter-coder reliability was appropriate, obtaining 97.9% of agreement on systematic review studies, and 97.4% of agreement on meta-analysis studies. Additionally, to evaluate the methodological quality of each of the studies included in the systematic review, the Cambridge Quality Checklist (Murray et al., 2009) was applied.

Studies were included in the meta-analysis if they provided statistical information needed to calculate at least one bivariate effect size. Data extracted from the studies were entered and analyzed using Comprehensive Meta-Analysis Software 3.0 (Borenstein et al., 2014). First, using a random-effects approach (Borenstein et al., 2010) the aggregate correlation between perceived severity of IPVAV and approving attitudes toward IPVAV (including high levels of ambivalent sexism, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, domestic violence myth acceptance, rape myth acceptance, victim blaming attitudes, agreement with traditional gender roles, and attitudes that excuse the perpetrator's actions) was calculated. The study was used as the unit of analysis, so that only one effect size was included per study. Therefore, if one study examined multiple attitudes toward IPVAV and provided multiple effect sizes, we calculated an aggregate effect size for that study so only one effect size was included per study in the analysis. Next, in order to ensure our finding was robust against potential publication bias, which refers to the phenomenon that insignificant findings often go unpublished, a Classic Fail-Safe N was calculated. A Classic Fail-Safe N (Rosenthal, 1979) provides the number of insignificant studies it would take to nullify the result to become statistically insignificant at a $p > .05$ level. Lastly, using the subgroup of gender as the unit of analysis and using women as the control group, a Hedges g statistic was calculated in order to determine if there was a significant difference between men and women on perceived severity of IPVAV.

3. Results

3.1. Systematic review results

Study characteristics of the 27 studies included, are collected in Table 1. The years of publication of the studies included ranged from 1992 to 2020, with 29.63% of the studies published in the last five years of the review. All the studies included in the systematic review showed good methodological quality (see Supplementary Material).

3.1.1. Sample characteristics

The sample from all included studies consisted of 37,290 participants ($n = 32,234$ general population (2273 women; 1347 men; 5 transgender; and 28,609 not differentiated by gender; $n = 146$ adolescents; $n = 1427$ students; $n = 158$ victims of IPVAV; $n = 129$ perpetrators; $n = 350$ Latin American immigrants; $n = 143$ police officers; $n = 449$ psychologists; $n = 800$ lawyers; and $n = 110$ participants over 65 years old). The overall gender distribution was 14.85% women, 8.42% men, 0.01% transgender, and 76.72% not differentiated by gender. Likewise, the nationality of samples recruited varied. Ten studies included samples from the United States, nine from Spain, two from France, two from Australia, one from Russia, one from Israel, one from Canada, and one from both Japan and United States.

3.1.2. IPVAV perceived severity assessment

Four studies assessed physical violence, six psychological violence, two sexual violence, five physical and psychological violence, one psychological and sexual violence, and nine examined all of the types of

violence (physical, psychological, and sexual). In this regard, although of terminology to evaluate perceived severity of IPVAV was similar among studies, the instruments to assess it was heterogeneous.

Particularly, some studies used items ad hoc to assess the perception of severity of IPVAV about a vignette or scenario ($n = 11$), warning sign behaviors ($n = 1$), statements about the IPVAV ($n = 6$), the victim's experience of abuse ($n = 1$), or applied specific questionnaires like Attribution of Responsibility and Minimization of Harm Scale (Lila et al., 2008; $n = 1$), Perceived Seriousness of Violent Measure (Yamawaki et al., 2009; $n = 3$), Psychological Abuse Scale (Follingstad & DeHart, 2000, $n = 1$), and VEC Scale (Cantera et al., 2009; $n = 3$).

3.1.3. Main findings about perceived severity of IPVAV

Regarding the most relevant findings on the perception of severity of IPVAV, this systematic review showed that physical violence was perceived more severe by women than men (Lelaurian et al., 2018; Yamawaki et al., 2012; Yamawaki et al., 2018), as well as among women who were victims of physical violence, with women reporting experiencing severe abuse perceiving IPVAV as more severe (Fiorillo-Ponte, 1999). Also, differences in the perception of physical violence according to nationality were found. Specifically, Japanese students tended to minimize the severity of physical IPVAV at higher rates compared to American students (Yamawaki et al., 2009).

In relation to psychological violence, Cantera et al. (2009) found that almost half of the women did not perceive psychological violence as severe. Similarly, psychological violence was perceived more severe by psychologists than lawyers, and women perceived psychological violence as more severe than men (Follingstad et al., 2004). Differences between groups were also found in the perception of the severity of sexual violence. For example, men minimized the severity of sexual violence more than women did (Adams-Clark & Chrisler, 2018). Likewise, when scenarios of sexual IPVAV were compared to violence by a stranger, individuals perceived sexual violence by a stranger as more severe than that of the partner (Diakonova-Curtis, 2013; Sánchez, 1997).

Other studies assessed physical, psychological, and sexual IPVAV, but none of the studies analyzed the differences according to these types of violence. However, some studies found a relationship between certain socio-demographic variables, such as marital status, education, age, nationality, or previous experiences of IPV, and the perception of severity of IPVAV. In particular, people with a partner were less likely to perceive psychological and sexual violence as severe (Delgado & Gutiérrez, 2013; Follingstad et al., 2004). Additionally, people with higher levels of education (Delgado & Mergenthaler, 2011; Gracia, Herrero, et al., 2009), and younger people perceived IPVAV to be more severe (Delgado & Gutiérrez, 2013; Gracia, Herrero, et al., 2009). However, no significant differences were found in the perceived severity of IPVAV according to age, in a sample of police officers (Gracia et al., 2008).

Regarding nationality differences, African American participants rated psychological violence as more severe than White participants (Follingstad et al., 2004). Jewish respondents considered marital assault as the third most serious offense evaluated, whereas Arab respondents perceived it as significantly less serious than all of the other violent and nonviolent offenses evaluated (Herzog, 2004). Japanese participants tended to minimize the seriousness of physical violence compared to American participants (Yamawaki et al., 2009). Likewise, women who experienced IPV perceived it more severe than women who did not indicate experiences of IPV (Burke, 2015; Follingstad et al., 2004). Gender differences were not found in a sample of police officers (Gracia et al., 2008).

3.1.4. Relation between perception of severity and attitudes toward IPVAV

Several studies explored the relation among perception of severity of IPVAV and some attitudinal variables. Specifically, perceived severity of IPVAV was negatively related to ambivalent, hostile, and benevolent

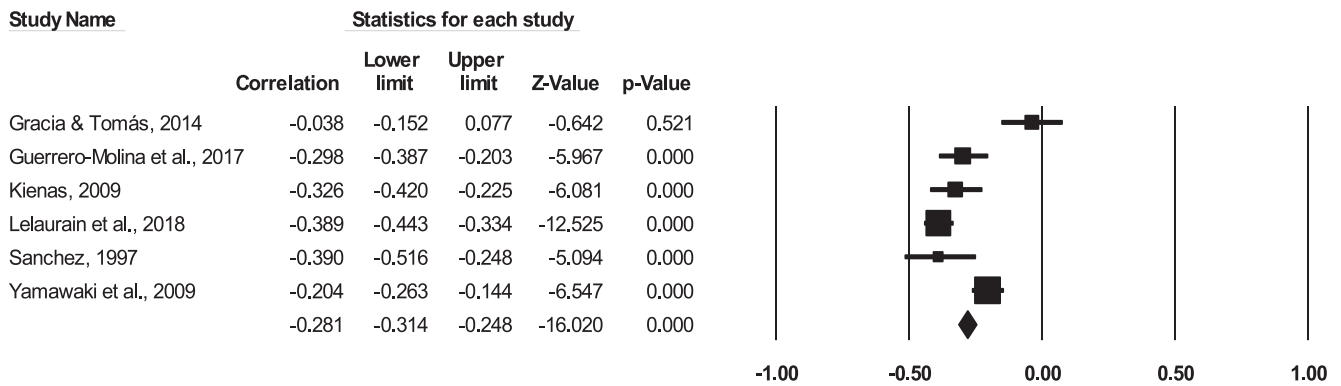


Fig. 2. Forest plot for meta-analysis on the correlation between attitudes toward IPVAV and perceived severity of IPVAV.

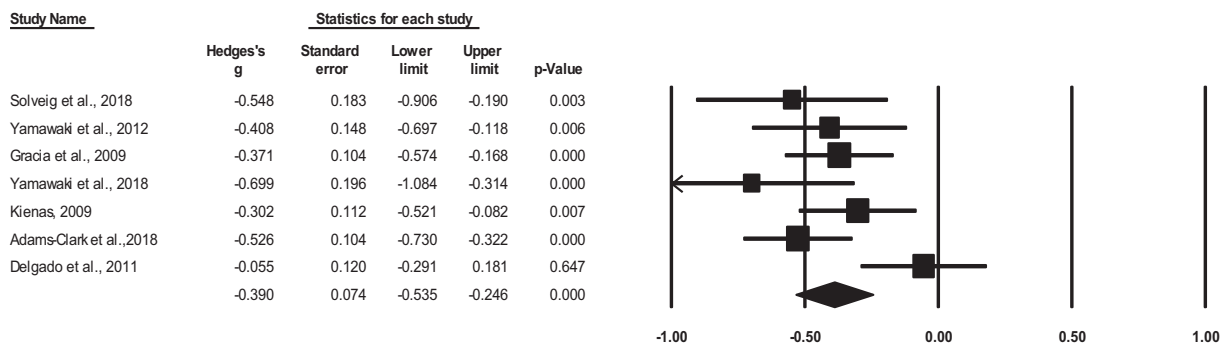


Fig. 3. Forest plot for the difference between men and women on their perceived severity of IPVAV (Hedges g; women used as the control group)

Note. Effect sizes (Hedges g) with a negative values indicates that men perceived IPVAV as less severe than women, and a positive value would indicate that women perceived IPVAV as less severe than men.

sexism (Guerrero-Molina et al., 2020), and traditional gender roles (Webster et al., 2014), while a high perception of severity of IPVAV was positively linked to a greater willingness to intervene by a sample of police (Gracia et al., 2008). However, perceived severity of IPVAV was not associated with victim blaming attitudes (Gracia & Tomás, 2014), or frequency of physical and psychological violence (Gilbert & Gordon, 2017).

Likewise, perceived severity of physical and psychological violence was correlated with romantic love, ambivalent sexism, domestic violence myths, victim blaming, and exoneration of perpetrator (Lelaurain et al., 2018). Perceived severity of physical violence was negatively related to domestic violence myths (Yamawaki et al., 2012), and perceived severity of physical and sexual violence was negatively associated with victim blaming, and positively associated with empathy for the victim, anger toward what happened to the victim, compassion for the victim, desire to protest IPVAV, and desire of penalty for the perpetrator (Kienas, 2009). Particularly, Kienas (2009) found that men reported a greater tendency to minimize the severity of the violent situation and blame the victim, as well as having less anger about what happened toward the victim, less compassion toward the victim, less desire to protest IPVAV, and believed the perpetrator should not be penalized compared to women. Perceived severity of sexual violence was negatively related to attitudes about women's roles in the domestic and professional spheres (Diakonova-Curtis, 2013) as well as rape myth beliefs (Sánchez, 1997). Lastly, perceived severity of psychological violence was negatively linked to benevolent sexism and acceptability of IPVAV (Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2020). Contradictory results were found in the relationship between the perception of the severity of IPVAV and victim blaming, requiring more studies to clarify this relationship.

3.2. Meta-analysis results

A total of six studies examined the relationship between attitudes toward IPVAV (ambivalent sexism, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, domestic violence myth acceptance, rape myth acceptance, victim blaming attitudes, agreement with traditional gender roles, and attitudes that excuse the perpetrator's actions) and perceived severity of IPVAV (see Fig. 2). We found a significant, negative relationship between accepting attitudes toward IPVAV and perceived severity of IPVAV ($r = -0.28$, 95% CI = $-0.37, -0.17$, $p < .001$). This means that the higher levels of agreement with favorable attitudes toward IPVAV, the less severe someone would perceive IPVAV to be. Additionally, we calculated a Classic Fail-Safe n of 358, meaning it would take 348 insignificant studies to nullify our current result, suggesting our result is robust against potential publication bias. Lastly, when examining if there was significant difference between men and women on their perceived severity of IPVAV, it was found that men perceived IPVAV as significantly less severe than women (Hedges $g = -0.39$, $p < .001$; See Fig. 3).

4. Discussion

Examining individuals' perceived the severity of IPVAV is critical for IPVAV prevention and intervention work. Knowing how IPVAV is perceived by different actors of society (e.g.: victims, perpetrators, students, or professionals), as well as its relation to attitudes toward IPVAV, can aid in the efforts to reduce IPVAV and support survivors. However, there are no studies that synthesize and analyze all information available on this topic. In order to address this gap, this study collected information about 27 studies that assessed perceived severity of IPVAV and 12 studies were examined by meta-analysis.

The systematic review analyzed 27 studies that explored the

perceived severity of IPVAV. The systematic review and the meta-analysis results revealed differences in the perception of severity of IPVAV by gender. Specifically, men showed lower perceptions of severity of IPVAV than women (Adams-Clark & Chrisler, 2018; Delgado & Gutiérrez, 2013; Delgado & Mergenthaler, 2011; Follingstad et al., 2004; Gracia et al., 2008; Gracia, García, & Lila, 2009; Gracia, Herrero, et al., 2009; Kienas, 2009; Lelaurian et al., 2018; Yamawaki et al., 2009; Yamawaki et al., 2012; Yamawaki et al., 2018), supporting Hypothesis 2. These differences could be explained by traditional gender roles based on gender inequality that, assuming a normalization of violence based on the superiority of men over women and constituting one of the main causes of IPVAV (Expósito & Herrera, 2009). Precisely, feminism involves a set of beliefs and ideas toward gender equality (Fiss, 1994), and feminist identification reflects attitudes toward the social construction of gender and is related to more favorable attitudes to support movements designed to achieve gender equality (Van Breen et al., 2017). It will be fundamental to educate on gender equality for minimizing the normalization of IPVAV.

The heterogeneity of studies regarding the sample and type of violence assessed should be noted. Out of the entire sample ($n = 37,290$), only 9.70% were differentiated by gender. It is noteworthy that although previous literature points to gender inequality as one of the main reasons for IPVAV (Gracia et al., 2019; Hunnicutt, 2009; WHO, 2005), the findings of our study displayed a low percentage of research committed to examining a gendered perspective related to attitudes toward IPVAV. In this regard, it will be essential to incorporate a feminist perspective in research, considering differences between women and men in order to solve traditional androcentrism (Equiluz et al., 2006; Ferrer & Bosch, 2005), as well as to adopt more specific and effective measures to address IPVAV. Additionally, the United States and Spain were the countries with the highest number of studies on the subject. In this sense, the influence of social and cultural norms related to IPVAV (Gracia et al., 2020; Ngoc et al., 2013) should be taken into account to explore cultural differences with other countries and when interpreting the results.

The meta-analytical results displayed a negative association between perceived severity of IPVAV and favorable attitudes toward IPVAV, such as sexism, victim blaming, excusing the perpetrator, rape myths beliefs, and gender roles (Adams-Clark & Chrisler, 2018; Gracia & Tomás, 2014; Guerrero-Molina et al., 2020; Kienas, 2009; Lelaurian et al., 2018; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2020; Webster et al., 2014; Yamawaki et al., 2009; Yamawaki et al., 2012; Yamawaki et al., 2018). These results confirm Hypothesis 1 and suggests a need to focus on attitudes that could make the perception of severity of IPVAV invisible. According to Gracia et al. (2020), attitudes toward IPVAV are related to perpetration and public response to IPVAV and reveal social and cultural norms that contribute to accepting or rejecting violence in the relationship. These findings could have strong implications for victims, because if they do not perceive the severity of the situation, or do not believe they will receive supportive responses from society, they may be less likely to seek resources or support (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Goodson & Hayes, 2021; Nicholson & Lutz, 2017; Shorey et al., 2013). Likewise, it will be essential to intervene in the elements that hinder the perception of severity of IPVAV by society as a first step in its approach, because if we do not consider the severity of a problem, we will not act accordingly. Therefore, the importance of continuing to explore attitudes and acceptance of IPVAV is paramount.

A key goal of the study was to examine the perception of IPVAV by different actors. Findings highlight the importance of examining the perceived severity of IPVAV, as well as the attitudes toward IPVAV, that professionals who support victims of IPVAV have. For example, it was found that lawyers perceived IPVAV as less severe than psychologists (Follingstad et al., 2004), which may indicate additional training related to IPVAV for lawyers who work on IPV cases. Although some studies analyzed the perception of severity of IPVAV in samples of professionals such as police (Gracia et al., 2008), lawyers (Follingstad

et al., 2004), or psychologists (Follingstad et al., 2004; Follingstad & DeHart, 2000), we did not find any studies that explored the perceived severity of IPVAV by healthcare professionals. This is an important gap to address because women who suffer IPVAV visit health centers three times more often than women who do not suffer IPVAV victimization (Shearer et al., 2006). Health care professionals can have an essential role in detecting warning signs of IPVAV among their patients (Shearer et al., 2006). According to Heron and Eisma (2020), healthcare professionals are in a privileged position to prevent and intervene in IPVAV. Hence, future studies are needed to evaluate the perceptions and attitudes of health professionals regarding IPVAV.

Although there was variation regarding the type of IPVAV (e.g., sexual, physical, or psychological) examined in each study, none of the studies examined differences in the perception of severity based on the type of IPVAV. Only a few studies assessed the perception of severity of IPVAV according to the type, such as sexual (Adams-Clark & Chrisler, 2018; Diakonova-Curtis, 2013; Sánchez, 1997) or psychological violence (Cantera et al., 2009; Delgado & Gutiérrez, 2013; Delgado & Mergenthaler, 2011; Follingstad et al., 2004; Follingstad & DeHart, 2000; Murphy & Smith, 2010; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2020). Therefore, future research should consider the comparison among types of IPVAV due to the difficulty of detecting psychological violence compared to physical or sexual violence (Novo et al., 2016). Similarly, additional types of violence, such as cyber abuse, financial abuse, and stalking warrant attention for future research.

Although it was not the objective of this systematic review, several studies showed a significant relationship between perceived severity of IPVAV and socio-demographic variables. For example, having a partner decreases the perceived severity of psychological (Delgado & Gutiérrez, 2013; Follingstad et al., 2004) and sexual IPVAV (Delgado & Gutiérrez, 2013). Similarly, lower educational courses (Delgado & Mergenthaler, 2011; Gracia, Herrero, et al., 2009) were associated with less perception of severity of IPVAV. Also, differences between nationalities such as African American vs. White American (Follingstad et al., 2004), Jewish vs. Arab (Herzog, 2004), and Japanese vs. American (Yamawaki et al., 2009). Differences between women who previously experienced IPV compared to women who were not victims of IPV were also found (Burke, 2015; Follingstad et al., 2004). Specifically, women who experienced IPV perceived it as more severe than those who not experienced IPVAV (Burke, 2015; Follingstad et al., 2004). It is noteworthy that in one study, no significant effects were found among the perceived severity of IPVAV and age, gender, or previous experiences (Gracia et al., 2008). In this line, Delgado and Gutiérrez (2013) showed that age only correlates negatively with the perception of severity of threats. According to the socio-ecological model of violence, the influence of social and cultural factors are needed to understand IPVAV (Cummings et al., 2013), as well as for deepening its influence on the perceived severity of IPVAV, facilitating the design of more specific prevention programs.

4.1. Implications for research, practice, and policy

The current study has robust implications for research, practice, and policy. It provides novel findings regarding how severity of IPVAV is perceived and its relation with certain attitudinal variables. Concerning research implications, the results contribute to advancing the scientific knowledge on IPVAV, allowing other researchers continue exploring this topic based on previous conclusions. Additionally, this study highlights the need to carry out more research about perception of severity of IPVAV that: a) explore the reasons of gender differences; b) analyze the differences according to culture and socio-demographic variables; c) compare among types of IPVAV (physical, psychological, and sexual); d) focus on professionals who attend victims of IPVAV (Follingstad et al., 2004), and e) investigate the influence of ideological variables (Vidal-Fernández & Megías, 2014). This would allow us to adopt a global perspective of IPVAV, taking into account its impact at different

Table 2

Review of critical findings from the study.

Key findings of the study
1. A total of 27 studies were included in systematic review and 12 studies were included in the meta-analysis.
2. A significant, negative relationship was found between perceived severity of IPVAV and favorable attitudes toward IPVAV, such as sexist views, victim blaming, excusing the perpetrator, rape myths acceptance, and traditional gender roles.
3. The results showed that men perceived IPVAV as less severe than women.
4. In addition, the results suggest that having a partner, lower levels of education, older ages, and having not experienced IPVAV were related to perceiving IPVAV as less severe.

Note: IPVAV = Intimate Partner Violence Against Women.

Table 3

Implications for research, practice, and policy.

Implications based on research findings
1. These findings contribute to advancing the scientific knowledge on IPVAV, allowing other researchers continue exploring this topic based on previous conclusions. Specifically, the results highlight the need for additional studies that explore the differences in perceived severity of IPVAV according to gender, type of violence, actors, and/or socio-demographic variables.
2. This study highlights the need to apply preventive measures focused on reducing favorable attitudes toward IPVAV that facilitate the normalization of IPVAV and contribute to difficulties perceiving IPVAV as severe.
3. Training on IPVAV for professionals who work with victims (e.g., lawyers, health care professionals, or police) and adopting political and legal measures to sensitize society about the severity and consequences of IPVAV may be beneficial.

Note: IPVAV = Intimate Partner Violence Against Women.

levels (López-Ossorio et al., 2018).

In relation to practical implications, the results obtained in this study suggest the need to apply preventive measures focused on reducing favorable attitudes toward IPVAV that facilitate the normalization of IPVAV. In this regard, education efforts that target attitudes toward IPVAV for professionals who work with victims of IPVAV, such as police, lawyers, and health professionals, is important due to their unique position to identify and assist victims of violence (Lila et al., 2010; Shearer et al., 2006). Likewise, institutions should make efforts to translate the empirical evidence into practice through investing on equality education and IPVAV prevention programs, training on IPVAV for professionals who could attend victims, and adopting political and legal measures to sensitize society about the severity and consequences of IPVAV (See Tables 2 and 3 for key findings from the study).

4.2. Limitations and future directions

Although rigorous methods for this study were carried out, the findings should be interpreted with caution because the results are limited to the data obtained from the included studies. As for any systematic review and meta-analysis, it is always possible that there were studies that were missed during the screening process. The number of studies included in the meta-analysis was limited ($n = 12$), and only six studies analyzed the relationship between perception of severity of IPVAV and attitudinal variables, requiring more research to generalize the results. Secondly, the instruments to assess perceived severity of IPVAV, as well as the type of IPVAV (physical, psychological and/or sexual) measured, were heterogeneous. Nonetheless, the conceptualization of the perception of the severity of IPVAV was similar in all studies. Finally, the studies included in the systematic review examined a variety of samples. However, there were not enough studies to include in the meta-analysis and analyze the results according to sample. Specifically, only two studies assessed perceived severity of IPVAV in victims and a single study did so with perpetrators. Future research may benefit from examining attitudes and perceptions of IPVAV with a variety of actors, such as victims and perpetrators of IPVAV.

In light of these limitations, future research should continue to explore what factors facilitate or impede how individuals perceive the severity of IPVAV, as well as to analyze potential differences according to the sample and type of IPVAV. Likewise, ideological variables (Vidal-Fernández & Megías, 2014), gender, culture, and legal contexts (Flood & Pease, 2009) should be considered as possible influencing factors in the perception of IPVAV severity, adopting an approach that takes into account the interaction of cultural, social, and psychological factors

(Heise, 1998). Future studies could compare the perception of the severity of IPVAV considering the culture of the country in which the sample is collected, because according to Donato (2021), it is culture that changes the perception of a phenomenon. In this regard, it may also be useful to societal factors that may influence perceived severity of IPVAV, such as mass media (Anastasio & Costa, 2004; Flood & Pease, 2009; Herrera & Expósito, 2009) or feminist movements (De Miguel, 2005) that make violence visible. All of this would facilitate the visibility of the severity of IPVAV, and consequently, more effective prevention programs and interventions.

5. Conclusion

This study sought to examine the link between attitudes related to IPVAV and perceived severity of IPVAV. The meta-analysis concluded that men perceive IPVAV as less severe than women, and that favorable attitudes toward IPVAV (e.g., sexism, victim blame, excuse of perpetrator, rape myths beliefs, and traditional gender roles) are negatively related to perceived severity of IPVAV. Further, the results suggest that having a partner, lower levels of education, older ages, and having not experienced IPVAV were related to perceiving IPVAV as less severe. The findings of this study highlight the need for increased awareness of attitudes toward IPVAV, taking into account gender differences, as well as the relationship with perceived severity of IPVAV. Continued gender equality education that can target attitudes and perceptions of IPVAV remain important and necessary.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors of this article have no conflicts of interest.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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