

Protective factors that promote non-violent relationships in adolescents: Theoretical review

*Factores protectores que promueven las relaciones no violentas en adolescentes. Revisión
teórica*

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Abstract:

Background. Dating violence is a problem that threatens the health of adolescents and young adults; hence the research bodies have invested years in its understanding and intervention. However, the literature seems to have focused mainly on understanding the factors of risk that increase the vulnerability of the adolescent population, leaving aside situations that provide tools for the prevention of said phenomenon—state of the art. The review shows how the understanding of dating violence has focused mainly on risk contexts, leaving aside the search for and promotion of protective factors. In turn, an ethical/healthy relationship seems to be ignored. Conclusions. The results show that there is little research regarding the protective factors for the perpetration and victimization of dating violence in adolescents, in addition to the fact that the findings framed here focus on aspects related mainly to the family, social and individual context.

Keywords:

Dating violence; protective factors; adolescents; theoretical review

Resumen:

Antecedentes. La violencia en el noviazgo es un problema que atenta contra la salud de adolescentes y jóvenes adultos, de ahí que los cuerpos de investigación hayan invertido años en su comprensión e intervención, sin embargo, la literatura pareciera haberse centrado principalmente en el entendimiento de los factores de riesgo que aumentan la vulnerabilidad de la población adolescente, dejando de lado situaciones que brinden herramientas a la prevención de dicho fenómeno. Estado del arte. La revisión pone de manifiesto cómo el entendimiento de la violencia en el noviazgo se ha centrado mayormente en los contextos de riesgo dejando de lado la búsqueda y promoción de factores protectores. Y a su vez, parece obviarse qué es una relación ética/saludable. Conclusiones. Los resultados muestran que existe poca investigación referente a los factores protectores para la perpetración y victimización de violencia en el noviazgo en adolescentes, además de que los hallazgos aquí enmarcados se centran en factores relacionados principalmente con el contexto familiar, social e individual.

Palabras Clave:

violencia en el noviazgo; factores protectores; adolescentes; revisión teórica.

Introduction

Adolescence is understood by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2017) as a period of human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood; this period is tentatively located between 10 and 19 years of age. It is essential to recognize that an age range is not fully established since the end of adolescence is framed as the period of acquisition of skills and achievement of goals for development and adaptation in society under a framework of organic and cognitive maturity, which proposes a reconciliation of identity, autonomy and emotional and social competence. All these factors are achieved

today at a more advanced stage of development, which is why it has been considered that adolescence reaches up to 24 years of age (Gaete, 2015).

Among the main biological changes in adolescence, puberty is recognized, mainly consisting of the release of hormones such as estrogen and testosterone, which allows the growth and development of body composition and sexual maturation (Pfeifer & Allen, 2020). Then, at another point, subcortical brain maturation is presented, which refers to the development, maturation, and activation mainly of subcortical areas such as the amygdala, which is related to greater emotional reactivity in this stage of adolescence, especially in its early years (Ahmed et al., 2015).

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Finally, although the existence of many other changes in adolescence is recognized, these are mentioned mainly because of their relationship and coherence with the psychosocial behavior typically recognized in adolescents, which is characterized by increased sexual interest, greater closeness to the peer group, idealization of interpersonal relationships and intense rapid and fluctuating emotional states (Gaete, 2015). As can be seen, multiple factors can function as catalysts to engage in courtship. However, multiple risk factors can have an impact on the formation of unhealthy relationships, which in combination with scarce management or coping resources, can cause states of intense discomfort that maintain or originates risk behaviors for individuals (Rodríguez-Caballero & Perdomo-Escobar, 2021; Teruel & Bello 2014).

Now, courtship is an erotic-romantic relationship in which two people share thoughts, experiences, and emotions, which favors their discovery and that of the other (Morales & Díaz, 2013). Where it is also assumed is the moment in which the foundations of a formal relationship that ends in marriage begin to be laid (Castro & Casique, 2010). However, taking a quick view of reality, it seems that this conception, in many cases, moves away from this assumption since where people should find security and emotional stability, there are high rates of aggression (Echeburúa & Amor, 2016).

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DATING VIOLENCE

Dating violence can be classified as follows. Physical violence: refers to all damage caused by blows, bites, slaps, shoves, scratches, throwing objects, attacks with weapons, strangulation, burns, or beatings. Sexual violence: It is related to rape, attempted rape, physical or psychological coercion, and the use of substances that modify the sexual behavior of the couple towards an unwanted increase in encounters or humiliating practices. Psychological violence: It is identified using insults, shouting, reproaches, criticism, threats, intimidation, coercion, humiliation, ridicule, blaming and intimidation, social isolation, and destruction of significant property, among others (OMS, 2013; Rubio-Garay et al., 2017). Finally, infidelity has been considered a type of violence since it supposes the breaking of a previously established contract when formalizing the courtship relationship, in addition to the fact that reality seems to be denied to the other part of the couple, which is a violent act (Romero-Palencia et al., 2019). Now, it is essential to point out that many adolescents and young adults do not recognize the type of sexual violence; they only recognize it as violence that implies physical harm (Molina, 2020).

In Mexico, in the last survey conducted by INEGI (2007) on dating violence, it was found that 15% of young people suffered from physical aggression, 76% from psychological aggression, and 16% from sexual aggression (Ramos et al., 2017). In another study carried out by the Mexican Youth Institute (INJUVE) in which, a survey was carried out in which it was estimated that 9 out of 10 women between the ages of 12 and 19 have been victims of aggression, of which only 5 out of 10 they have noticed such behavior in their courtships. Likewise, it was found that 76% of couples surveyed at the moment suffer from physical or verbal aggression (National Population Council, 2014).

Then, referring to international statistics in a systematic review by Rubio-Garay et al. (2017), they found the prevalence of 7.7%

to 40.3% of physical violence in courtship committed by men and from 3.8% to 41.9% by women. In suffered violence, men had scores between 0.4% and 53.7%, and women oscillated between 1.2% and 41.2%. When doing an analysis that included men and women, it was found that 77.8% of the population had suffered physical violence. Regarding psychological violence propitiated, figures ranging from 4.3% to 95.3% in men and 4.2% to 97% in women were found. Moreover, in the psychological violence received, data were found between 8.5% to 94.5% in men and 9.3% to 95.5% in women. Finally, in sexual violence committed, men had data between 2.6% to 58.8% and women 1.2% to 40.1%. Regarding the sexual violence suffered, it was found that men reported data from 0.1% to 54.2% and women from 1.2% to 64.6%. Sexual violence had a prevalence of 79.2% when the data were analyzed without distinction of sex.

One of the main difficulties when studying dating violence is its bidirectional nature and the normalization of perceived violence. Aggression within the couple can occur in all socioeconomic and cultural strata (Rubio-Garay et al., 2017). However, the alarming figures describing a more significant presence of violence against women are recognized (WHO, 2013). It is essential to point out that the findings found in marital or partner violence have laid the foundations for understanding violence in courtship. However, it is necessary to address this situation as a phenomenon that, although related as a factor of vulnerability or predictor for marital violence, has different characteristics, so its understanding and intervention must be different (Castro & Casique, 2019).

In order to focus efforts and resources that make it possible to control the emergence of a problem, it is necessary to recognize those characteristics, traits, or exposures that increase the probability of suffering some discomfort; this is known as a risk factor (WHO, 2002). However, dating violence is difficult to understand. To begin, dating relationships are developed in subjects under an economic, demographic, cultural, and subcultural framework, constituting the individual's signifiers that can normalize or make such a problem invisible (Rosado and Rosado et al., 2016). This is manifested in an inability on the part of adolescents to recognize violent behaviors or downplaying behaviors such as jealousy and obsessive control (Marroqui, 2014). Finally, it is recognized that there is less research by the academic body focusing on a phenomenon mostly related to formally constituted couples at more advanced ages of development (Ramos et al., 2017).

Rubio-Garay et al. (2015) reviewed the risk factors associated with dating violence, highlighting the importance of glimpsing each factor's role in the dynamics of violence. With this in mind, these authors determined that precipitating, modulating, and inconsistent factors may be found in the personal, situational, and interpersonal spheres. Some examples of precipitants would be the consumption of alcohol and drugs, unwanted pregnancies, inadequate coping strategies, jealousy and control behaviors, antisocial behavior, little empathy, hostility and anger, attitudes favorable to violence and unfavorable towards women, alterations in personality and psychopathological disorders, history of intimate partner violence, low self-esteem, risky sexual behaviors, communication skills deficits, lack of problem-solving, gender stereotypes, child sexual abuse and abuse, social violence, little support social, among others.

Now, from the perspective of the Bronfenbrenner ecological model, Gracia-Leiva et al. (2019) found the following risk factors for victimization at the individual, microsystem,

exosystem, and macrosystem levels, respectively; tobacco use, early pregnancy, sexual harassment by peers and age. For factors that could have a risk role for both victimization and perpetration, they found sex, dating violence, having friends with problematic behaviors and suffering violence in the family of origin, neighborhood or place of residence, and economic disadvantage.

Likewise, Pazos and collaborators (2014) recognize some risk factors for victimization and perpetration; However, an attempt is made to distinguish by sex; there is no clear differentiation between apparent factors for exercising violence or receiving it. He mentions low school level, exposure to violence in childhood, acceptance or normalization of partner violence, previous experience of violence in previous relationships, traditional gender roles, emotional dependence, and peer pressure, among others.

It has been found that women who accept traditional gender roles see their sexual activity as a couple diminished since they present less autonomy and sexual assertiveness, which in turn correlates with the interaction of power, in which men commonly present dominance over women. Likewise, this favors that for both men and women, the perception of possible victimization in their relationship is not noticed since these traditional roles allow the normalization of violent behaviors in any type of violence (Martínez- Gomez et al., 2021). Thus, the beliefs generated by gender roles maintain the justification for using violence, perpetuating the occurrence of dating violence (Orozco Vargas et al., 2021).

In a study carried out by Rey-Anacona et al. (2021), they found that symptoms associated with depression and psychoticism are significantly related as predictors of dating violence, which may exemplify that individuals with difficulties or alterations in emotional regulation have greater vulnerability to perpetrate dating violence, where anxious and hostile states also play a relevant role in the perpetration of violence (Temple et al., 2016). In general, the literature can classify risk factors as those related to mental problems, thoughts and cognitions about aggressiveness, youth violence, substance use, risky sexual behaviors, poor quality of friendships and relationships, low-income family quality, demographics, and use of aggression (Vagi et al., 2013).

PROTECTOR FACTORS

Now, it is necessary to mention that the literature on dating violence has extensive knowledge about those risk factors that can be more or less related to violent dynamics. However, interest in protective factors is diminished, so the knowledge of those experiences or situations that can favor the development of a non-violent and healthy courtship seems to be ignored.

Froidevaux (2020) conducted a study in a clinical population of 137 adolescents with a psychiatric diagnosis from 12 to 17 years of age. The study aimed to evaluate the relationship between adverse events in adolescence, dating violence, and maternal and paternal emotional validation. The results show that high emotional validation by parents decreases the strength of association between adversity and victimization or perpetration in dating violence. It is suggested that maternal emotional validation can influence the understanding of emotions and their expression and regulation. It provides adequate emotional communication and decreases the probability of responding with violence in both men and women. Likewise, paternal

emotional validation showed this same relationship only with males.

Hérbert et al. (2017) examined risk and protective factors for dating violence victimization. The sample was made up of 87 studies with a total of 278,712 adolescents and young adults. The results show that parental monitoring is related to less psychological and physical victimization. Likewise, parental support was related to less psychological victimization. Finally, a small association was found between affiliation, peer support, and dating violence victimization without precisely determining any type of violence. The authors conclude that, although there is a relationship between family and peer protective factors and dating violence victimization, these data should be taken cautiously because the relationship appears weak.

Returning to Rubio-Garay et al. (2015), it is suggested that communication and problem-solving skills can be protective factors against dating violence. Likewise, positive academic performance and positive parenting habits are recognized where there is a close relationship with the parents.

Pérez-Marco et al. (2020) analyzed a script prepared by adolescents who participated in an intervention to promote healthy relationships. The script aimed to recognize how the participating adolescents recognized a violent situation; they also had to mention a resource for developing healthy relationships. A total of 15 scripts were analyzed, where 12 represented situations involving heterosexual couples, two gay couples, and one lesbian couple. The results show that the participating adolescents mainly recognize psychological violence. Now, in the analysis, it is also recognized that adolescents give priority to peer support as a resource to cope with situations of violence; they recognize themselves as possible agents of change for peers who need support, and this can be suggested as a variable to understand Peer support and integration as a protective factor for dating violence victimization or perpetration.

Vagi et al. (2013), through a review of risk and protective factors in adolescents for the perpetration of dating violence, found a total of 53 risk factors and six protective factors. The sample consisted of 20 studies published between 2000 and 2010. The results show that only one study focused more on protective factors than risk factors. Protective factors for the perpetration of dating violence were: high cognitive dissonance about perpetrating dating violence, high empathy, positive academic performance, a positive relationship with the mother, and a feeling attached to the school.

East and Hokoda (2015) conducted a longitudinal study to determine the risk and protective factors associated with sexual and dating violence victimization. The sample comprised adolescents with a low sociodemographic Latino and African-American descent profile. The results showed that a high knowledge of mothers about the activities of their children, as well as a strict and conservative position on the daily behaviors of their children, is related as a protective factor for the victimization of dating violence and sexual victimization. Likewise, it was found that actively restricting early alcohol consumption reduces the probability of being vulnerable to sexual victimization. It is estimated that a link characterized by trust, closeness, and veracity between the children's activities and the parents' monitoring and surveillance can reduce the probability of sexual victimization and dating violence.

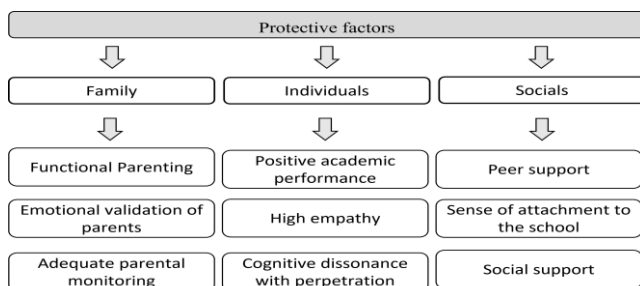
Davis et al. (2019) carried out a longitudinal study in which 1611 adolescents from six different schools in the United States were evaluated, the evaluation covered from 2008 to 2013. The

study's objective was to determine the relationship between adverse events in childhood and dating violence, as well as its protective and risk factors. The results show that adverse childhood experiences such as family and community violence can generate a trajectory for the perpetration of dating violence. It is recognized that social support and parental monitoring or follow-up influence the perpetration of dating violence even when faced with high exposure to community violence. It is also recognized that when there is family violence and high community violence, high empathy and feeling attached to the school can act as protective factors. Finally, it is explained that social support is closely related to the decrease in all types of perpetration in courtship and that monitoring by parents and the feeling of belonging to the school is related to a decrease in the perpetration of physical and verbal violence.

In another study, Schacter et al. (2019) investigated through a 6-year prospective longitudinal design whether experiences of rejection from adolescent peers in high school increased the risk of maladaptive behavior in romantic relationships in high school; it was also examined whether the friendship quality could be assumed as a protective factor. The results show inconsistency in the value of the relationship quality with peers and decreased aggressive behavior with the partner. The authors state that this could be due to the lack of clarity to determine if a friendship relationship is a quality or, instead, close relationships encourage violent behavior in social interaction. Richards & Branch (2012) conducted an exploratory analysis of the independent impact of social support from friends and family on the risk of adolescent dating violence perpetration and victimization. The sample consisted of 970 participants. The results show that it can be assumed that more significant support from friends and family decreases the probability of perpetrating or being a victim of dating violence. However, there were significant differences by sex, the first being that female perpetrators had significantly less support from friends, and male perpetrators had significantly less support from parents. This supposes that the social support of friends in women has a relevant role in the understanding of love relationships. Finally, this study somewhat inconsistently perceives high parental support as a protective factor for the perpetration and victimization of dating violence.

Recognizing protective factors is critical to giving a more integrated look at the phenomenon of dating violence; here, it can be recognized that the areas of interest lie mainly in the immediate environment of the participants, such as individual characteristics, family, and social context (See figure 1).

Figure 1.
Some protective factors that promote non-violent relations



CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, in this theoretical review, three types of protective factors have been found, mainly linked to the family and social context and some individual characteristics. It is recognized that the family context offers the basis for developing emotional skills that allow a non-violent expression in the face of conflicts with the partner. Likewise, it provides a regulator of behaviors that can be potentially risky that is also positively related to the learning of aggressive behaviors. Likewise, it can be assumed that there is another pillar that guides individuals in the development of romantic relationships, the social context; this can provide tools that the family context has not been able to provide, either because it is an adverse environment for the adolescent or, simply because of the lack in the relationship. This means that if friendships nurture the person to develop positive relationships or spaces where they can feel accompanied and safe, they are more likely to increase their social skills, which reduces the probability of violent behavior in the couple. Finally, it is essential not to forget that the same person may have resources that allow them to recognize and identify inappropriate behaviors. Likewise, to explore which strategies can influence not only the prevention of a relationship but also the healthy or ethical promotion that benefits the members in the experience of positive emotions and perception of subjective well-being, recognizing the couple as an important element for the mutual development.

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