

# Cognitive-behavioral intervention to increase skills in coping with gender violence. Intervención cognitivo conductual para incrementar habilidades en estilos de afrontamiento ante la violencia de género.

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## Abstract:

The objective of this studio was to carry out a theoretical review regarding therapeutic interventions with a focus on cognitive behavioral therapy for the coping of women in the affronts of gender violence. It was carried out from the review of articles, books, manuals and intervention programs and it was found that most of the sources reviewed are focused on interventions for women who have already suffered some kind of violence; however, there were found limitations for the prevention of gender violence, regarding the same, there is a lot of information and psychoeducation. However, there are not 2 defined or specific interventions to reinforce coping skills to detect in a timely manner behaviors that can lead to women being victims of gender violence.

## Keywords:

*Cognitive-behavioral therapy, coping styles, gender violence, psychoeducation, prevention.*

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## Resumen:

El objetivo de este estudio fue realizar una revisión teórica respecto a las intervenciones terapéuticas con enfoque en la Terapia Cognitivo Conductual para el afrontamiento de mujeres ante la violencia de género. Se realizó a partir de la revisión tanto de artículos, libros, manuales y programas de intervención y se encontró que la mayoría de las fuentes revisadas están enfocadas en intervenciones para mujeres que ya sufrieron algún tipo de violencia, no obstante se encontraron limitaciones para la prevención de violencia de género, respecto a la misma, hay mucha información del tema y psicoeducación, sin embargo no hay intervenciones definidas o específicas de reforzamiento de habilidades de afrontamiento para detectar de manera oportuna conductas que pueden propiciar que las mujeres sean víctimas de violencia de género.

## Palabras Clave:

*Terapia cognitivo conductual, afrontamiento, violencia de género, psicoeducación, prevención.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Keane (2000) defines violence as a physical interference by an individual or group in a third party without consent, and the consequences can range from shocks, scratches, contusions, loss of limbs, or even death. This act is given from a relationship in which the victim does not receive treatment of recognition and respect but is seen as someone deserving of punishment and destruction (Martínez, 2016). However, the concept is extended later because, in essence, it only covers direct physical damage. On the other hand, Defaz (2016) explains that gender culture has caused inequality between men and women, reinforcing the belief of male superiority and placing women in a secondary and complementary role. Likewise, the culture of violence

normalizes the imposition to resolve conflicts, which has become increasingly normalized.

Violence has a multiplicity of forms due to how it is presented. We speak of violence because each one has a particular definition and is studied in various fields. This has contributed to seeing it from its complexity to highlight more precise characteristics, how they are manifested, and the dynamics or functions of the different types of violence (Martinez, 2016). It is essential to know more about gender violence, its causes, consequences, and possible maintaining factors.

According to the publication of UN Women (2020), studies indicate that 35 percent of women worldwide have suffered physical and sexual violence from both their partners and

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people other than their partners. Moreover, national studies indicate that this percentage reaches 70 percent, and it is more common that they suffer depression, abortion, and sexually transmitted diseases. One factor that also raised the rate of assistance to telephone lines was what happened due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Vaca-Ferrer, (2020), various effects have been found in women caused by the abuse. Some of these are the development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and many others and hence other side effects such as loss of self-esteem, feelings of guilt, social isolation, physical health implications, difficulty planning for the future, dependence on the abuser, justifying violence, protecting the aggressor, conflictive interpersonal relationships and sexual problems.

These effects will largely depend on how they deal with the situation. The answers to coping with stressful situations can be adaptive and maladaptive; the adaptive ones are when the person can modify, control or solve what causes stress through behavioral and cognitive strategies. The maladaptive ones, on the contrary, generate emotional discomfort such as depression, anxiety, and psychological vulnerability; this is also influenced by the time at which one is exposed to a stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986, as cited in Castillo, 2017).

It is necessary to publicize information on gender violence from the perspective of prevention or intervention, and it is known that there can be a lot of very varied information regarding violence, but visibility is not enough; there must also be start-ups to prevent it from continuing to be a problem in the population of women, which is identified from the violence that has been normalized to knowing how to put a stop to visible violence and prevent it from having severe consequences. In order to do this, within the field of psychology, it is considered essential to work on and reinforce the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral tools and skills that can help women to identify whether they are experiencing gender-based violence or know how to deal with this problem, whether if they live personally as if they knew of any other women who required support since the damage caused by psychological violence mainly affects emotional stability, the affected woman feels guilty and shame on the situation she is going through. Part of this is due to social learning that women should care, tolerate and forgive, not be a victim, but be responsible for the situation that happens (Ruiz, 2004, as cited in Carmona et al., 2015).

## **METHOD**

The theoretical review was made out from the consultation of articles, manuals, statistical data, and plans of governmental and non-governmental institutions with the inclusion of the words key to the topic to be investigated, which were: gender violence and coping, interventions in gender violence. Information sources were mainly searched from 2016. The most recent updates of the programs reviewed by institutions excluded those

unrelated to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or did not talk about the reinforcement of coping strategies or social skills.

The theoretical search was carried out in the following electronic databases, UN, INEGI, Edu Magazine, Repository, FES Iztacala Electronic Magazine, Academic Google, UTCiencia, Paian Magazine, and undergraduate and doctoral theses.

Information regarding violence was also included to delve later into gender violence and hence its various manifestations to end with its consequences.

Finally, the analysis of the results was carried out to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the theoretical review found.

## **RESULTS**

According to the United Nations Organization (UN, 2021), violence is defined as the intentional use of force, whether physical or verbal, against oneself, someone else, groups, or communities, and can have the possible consequences of trauma, psychological damage, developmental problems, and death.

Therefore, it is essential to highlight a factor by which violence has remained throughout history since it has a purpose for those who exert it, this being power.

The power mechanisms mentioned by Foucault (2011, as cited in Martínez, 2016) are described as mechanisms and procedures whose function is to ensure power; likewise, he mentions that they are not autogenetic or self-subsistent, which indicates that in all types of relationships, work, family, sexual, etc., power will be something intrinsic so that power will be recognized in any type of relationship and he speaks of an analysis of society, defined in power by means of economic, political and social histories.

Violence is not an isolated event, it comes hand in hand with social relationships and the color they take on. They are given as adjectives according to the relationship dynamics; for example, in a work or family relationship, when there are signs of violence, it is called family violence or workplace violence (Martínez, 2016).

Once the violence has been conceptualized, some types of violence will be revealed that explain their affectation from the damage that is exerted and to whom (Rivera, 2017):

Self-inflicted violence: or against oneself, is harming oneself with behaviors such as suicide, self-harm, and mutilation; likewise, suicidal behavior includes suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, and completed suicide (Árevalo-Mira, 2011, as cited in Rivera, 2017). In this type of violence, it is clear that the violence is not always exercised against other people and that its purpose has nothing to do with the domination of others.

Interpersonal violence occurs between family members, friends, acquaintances, and strangers; it includes child violence and violence against women and others; collective violence refers to the use of violence as an instrument by members of a

group against another group to achieve political, economic or social objectives.

Interpersonal violence tends to be more common, both because of the interaction in relationships and the visibility they come to take.

As Rivera (2017) refers, it is also important to highlight that the origin of violence has been studied and explained from the perspectives in which it can originate, for example, the ecological model of violence, which integrates risk factors (biological, social, cultural, economic and political) to highlight the causes of violence.

In that same sense, Defaz (2016) highlights four levels related to the multiple causes of violence, which are:

1.- The individual level determines from the biological factors and the characteristics of personal history what can influence so that there is an increase in the probability of being a victim or aggressor.

2.- The level of relationships explains the influence of the environment, in terms of the behavior and experiences of their close relationships, so that there is acceptance and use of violence.

3.- The community-level investigates the characteristics in the contexts that favor the appearance and use of violence. This has to do with the way in which the individual relates to his environment, for example, in areas of poverty, sale and consumption of drugs, low employment rate, and other causes that allow the appearance of violent acts frequently.

4.- The social level observes the social factors that influence the acceptance of violence through tolerance due to normalized norms or attitudes. This ranges from cultural norms in which violence is a way to resolve conflicts, those that condone the excessive use of force against citizens, those that support political conflict, and even those policies that maintain inequalities.

Just as violence has been made known from its definition and its causes, the study of gender violence is specifically raised as a problem that has gained a lot of visibility thanks to various approaches that seek gender equity. Therefore, it is considered important to define gender.

Gender is given by the sociocultural order according to sexuality and is defined and given meaning from the generic order. The body receives a sexual significance that defines femininity or masculinity and is a symbolic construction according to its own attributes (Hernández, 2015). It is a symbolic interpretation of the biological where the sociocultural construction of masculine and feminine roles interacts.

An asymmetric relationship implies a subordination of one of the parties, being an exercise of dominance or going over the other. It is linked to the process of transformation due to biological differences in factors of inequality and discrimination against women.

Given the sociocultural context with which gender is defined, it is understood that each one develops a role according to the

gender that has been instilled in them, so it follows that they are not in equal conditions.

As Hernández (2015) said, the constructed social reality has been questioned and bankrupted by feminist theory, revealing that until then, knowledge has been made from the male point of view, which has no notion of the role of women in the construction of social reality, giving them a passive role and without the desire to transform.

In addition to this, the characteristics of inequality and invisibility were influenced by the social role of women, such as race, age, sex-affective preferences, religion, ethnicity, and location.

According to Fernández-Parra (2006); Pérez Álvarez (2014, cited in Vaca-Ferrer et al., 2020), one way of understanding gender violence is through the contextual psychological model since, within a context, all human activity has meaning. This indicates that psychological problems interact in cultural and social contexts.

There are some studies in charge of investigating the coping styles used by women who have suffered violence; from this, some authors have generated interventions both at the individual and group level. Below is an overview of how important it is to know the coping styles of women to generate intervention alternatives.

According to the study carried out by Terrones (2019), he explains that having an active coping strategy reduces anxiety, mainly those that have to do with the search for hope, religion, and social support.

Although the above does not refer to active coping, it provides women with a way to find calm in the situation they are experiencing, although the essential thing is to intervene so that the problem is actively faced.

This is explained because coping with social support as a religion gives the feeling of having support and hope that the situation will change or that your partner will change their behavior. The contradiction with this coping is that women justify aggression or mistreatment and that only reinforces the cycle of violence.

In coping with social support, it can be advantageous since it provides them with another perspective of what is happening to them, perceiving the situation as it is and probably taking actions that are recommended by their source of social support. Carmona (2017) mentions that the coping strategies of worrying and not looking at the positive are related to non-physical violence, so the more they resort to these strategies, the more women are concerned about their future and when looking for the positive in the situations is reflected in a lower rate of coercion, prohibitions, conditioning, intimidation, threats and devaluing attitudes on the part of their partner.

When women care about themselves and focus on the positive, they are more likely to detect when behavior by their partners does not make them feel safe and seek other cognitive, emotional, and social resources to get out detect any type of coercion that is an indication of violence for them.

On the contrary, women who use passive coping are more likely to be victims, which is consistent with studies by Comijs et al. (1999, as cited in Carmona, 2017), who also concluded the relationship between passive or avoidance strategies with psychological abuse, verbal aggression and economic abuse.

This is related to the fact of avoiding the situation they are going through due to various factors that go both cognitively, as well as socially and emotionally. The fact of recognizing that violence is experienced does not imply that women automatically obtain the resources to face the situation but that they will face it based on the resources they have, whether they are passive or active resources.

Another of the conclusions reached by Carmona (2017) was that the most predominant strategies are to strive and succeed, physical distraction, and social action, finding that 20% of the individual score corresponds to these strategies. This indicates that the participating women face their problems through commitment, ambition, and dedication and let others know about their problems and try to get help.

In the above, there is a percentage well below the average in the use of active coping strategies at a personal level.

Regarding the same study, it was found that 20% of women use non-coping, which demonstrates a low capacity to deal with their problems and that only leads to not being able to get out of the circle of violence and that women who remain in relationships of violence tend more towards passive coping. In contrast, 51% of those evaluated present non-physical violence, based more on behaviors of prohibition, intimidation, devaluation, etc.

The aforementioned percentages are significant since resorting to passive coping reinforces the dynamics of violence as there are no actions in this regard, this only encourages violence to continue to normalize in their daily lives, and over time it is more difficult to leave the said environment.

Hence the importance of publicizing and making visible all types of violence at the different levels that are manifested, either explicitly or implicitly; as mentioned above, violence escalates as the perception of power over another person is reinforced and behaviors that might seem "harmless" are normalized to the point of escalating to more direct and aggressive manifestations of violence.

For example, the Micromachismos; are individual behaviors that devalue women and reinforce roles and stereotypes, they are almost imperceptible abuses, which appear gradually, and therefore they do not realize the violence until it reaches physical aggression. An example of micromachismo can be a sexist joke, which at first glance seems harmless, but takes power because it is continually reiterated and legitimized in a patriarchal social order, in which women are pressured to project the "feminine" image, to be passive, avoid conflict and seek male approval (Transition Commission towards the Council of Women and gender equality, 2011, cited in Benalcázar-Luna, 2015).

Interventions in cases of gender violence are not the only priority since psychoeducation on violence must first be given and thus know and have a broader perspective of what they are experiencing.

Cognitive restructuring plays an important role since the availability of women to make changes in their beliefs and how many skills they have to modify them would begin to be noticed (Habigzang et al., 2019).

As Deza (2016) mentions, psychoeducation is a process that provides the opportunity to develop and strengthen coping skills in various situations in a way that is more adaptive for women; coupled with this, its psychological care model exposes some recommendations for follow-up. in sessions for women victims of family violence, evaluating activities based on goals and objectives, strengthening self-esteem and teaching to reject violent behaviors for better control of their lives by strengthening personal resources and assertive behaviors. Although the model speaks of victims of family violence, it can also be adapted for women who have suffered violence since, at the prevention level, it strengthens personal and interpersonal areas.

Similar to Habigzang's sessions, et al. (2019) also talks about psychoeducation with the work of the ABC model (Event-Interpretation-Consequences), which postulates that each situation (A-event) activates individual beliefs (B-Interpretation, and this generates consequences (C-Consequences) at an emotional, physiological and behavioral level, which shows the relationship between them and works with mental images to restructure dysfunctional, cognitive and emotional schemes.

Using the individual therapy, it was worked with the consequences and possible psychopathologies caused by exposure to violence. Carrying out an evaluation prior to the intervention is also important since it is not only working with gender-based violence but what has triggered it since more serious symptoms can be left out, and this limits progress in the application of the program. In psychotherapeutic work at the individual level, it is emphasized that each patient has their own needs.

Another way to help more women is through group therapy since it works with the possibility of stopping normalizing violence, giving another meaning to what it has exposed them to, modifying their beliefs and perception, strengthening or improving their emotional and social bonding, increasing functioning and integration, work is also done on the emotional repertoire, how they interact and their symbolization, as well as promoting bonding experiences to rectify emotionally and subjectively (National Institute of Women, 2011, cited in Deza, 2016).

Confidence in seeking social support is reinforced, and noticing that several women have gone through similar situations, in this way, an environment of trust is created to be able to eliminate the shame of what happened.

Habigzang et al. (2019), on the other hand, worked with the expression of thoughts from a role-playing technique and gradual replacement of negative images with positive images; they worked with prevention measures through coping strategies for when the situation of violence and the problem-solving technique (PR) executing the following five steps: orientation to the problem and its clear definition, generating alternative solutions, making a decision, implementing a solution and verifying its effectiveness, the application of PR practice was reviewed to reduce anxiety in decision-making and generate capacity for reflection. The application of this technique can be taken as a way of telling the patient that from now on, she will be independent in her decisions so as not to depend on the therapist and can see her problems in perspective, develop her decision-making skills and coping with results.

In order to take the measures and check what was learned throughout the sessions, relapse prevention was also worked on; strategies were built to learn more about the legislation and protection networks for cases of gender violence and how they work in order to avoid revictimization. Then, social skills training (THS) was given to take protective measures, the participants were trained to be assertive in conflict situations, use clear communication and develop self-protective behaviors, and work was planned for a future project with goals.

Factors they might face, whether challenges or difficulties in implementation, were discussed, and alternatives for resolution were examined. The activities carried out during all the sessions for the adequate handling of violent memories were combined, and finally, the possible changes and beliefs about oneself were identified.

Doing a retrospect of their self-perception at the beginning of the therapy as at the end gives women to notice their own ability to take care of themselves and the personal achievements they have when deciding to take a therapeutic process based on the recognition of the situation to which they were subjected, such as gender violence.

On the other hand, Matud et al. (2005, as cited in Matud et al. 2016) propose strategies that have similarities to the main objectives of the aforementioned authors and present them in a 10-session treatment guide to a group of between 15 and 20 women from a psychological center. The program consists of 5 components which consist of psychoeducation about gender and gender violence to increase awareness and abuse is analyzed and debated, as well as the consequences they have had, and measures are also discussed. If there is any risk, strategies and therapeutic techniques are established to reduce or eliminate their symptoms, for example, cognitive restructuring, problem-solving training, self-control techniques, and decreased activation such as breathing training and relaxation techniques, also techniques and strategies that reinforce self-esteem and security in women and the promotion of a self-concept, self-reinforcement, and self-care, likewise work with adaptation through communication and social skills, training in solution is reinforced of problems, psychoeducation,

developing emotional independence and finally prevention techniques. Works on changing beliefs about gender roles and sexist attitudes, which limit full development and encourage gender violence.

## **DISCUSSION**

According to the review, it is found that to Lancheros et al. (2016), women with passive coping tend to have helplessness, low self-esteem, and hopelessness due to the situation of violence, which translates into difficulty making important decisions due to irrational fears and uncertainty and this is what encourages them to return to their aggressors.

Non-cognitive abilities, skills, and abilities foster coping with demands and pressures from the environment that make the individual aware of understanding, controlling, and expressing their emotions effectively (Bar-On, 1997, as cited in Blázquez, 2009).

Therefore, coping strategies are a key factor in the progress of intervention in victims of gender violence since it is sought that they use more active strategies and not so passive ones, which according to the studies reviewed above, are the most common. (Habigzang et al. 2019; Deza, 2016; Matud, 2016). An important part of having active coping is the search for support and decision-making in order to take action regarding their situation by approaching instances with psychosocial support.

It is important to highlight the importance of gender violence as a public problem of a social nature since, according to the INEGI (2020), by the year 2020, there will be 50 Justice Centers for Women (CJM) distributed in 28 states, of which, in the State of Mexico there are only four and at least in said state, of the total number of women subjected to violence, 53.3%, that is, 3.6 million Mexiquenses reported that the aggressions happened in the last year; likewise, 2 million women of the entity suffered some type of intimidation, harassment, harassment or sexual abuse.

The above, without considering the number of cases of women who do not report or do not confess that they are victims of violence or who do not identify that they are immersed in a violent environment.

In the theoretical review, it was found that there are few institutions that are promoted to support or intervene with women victims of violence, for which the dissemination of institutions that are responsible for supporting women in situations of violence should be a priority, both at the institutional level, government and mental health, since the little or no response when requesting help causes women to distance themselves from the opportunity to receive timely attention and avoid serious consequences, both physically and psychologically.

With the foregoing, it is also considered important to work on some limitations in terms of intervention to help women who have experienced or experience violence since psychotherapeutic interventions for the number of demands may not be enough, and from the review, it was also found Few proposals for a group approach, which is useful for the exchange of beliefs and representations of violence. The needs of the consultant and the contribution given to the development of the group process are considered (Government of the Federal District, 2014, as cited in Deza, 2016). The learning tools applied in the group have a response before similar conflictive

situations, and thus the set of learned tools is put to the test; this will be noted through the domain of negative thoughts and detection of thoughts (Garay et al. 2008, as cited in Escobar et al. 2017).

In terms of functionality, it is seen as viable for the aspect of psychoeducation and intervention, although a clear limitation is that these are given to women who reached the maximum point of violence and are in shelters or victim care programs, so it seems that the intervention is for a specific group, on the other hand regarding prevention, the information is usually less common, so these interventions should also apply to women who have not suffered violence, at a preventive level and the reinforcement of active strategies since this will reinforce coping skills and more effectively detect harmful environments for them.

In addition to the above, it would also be feasible to work with the prevention of relapses and follow-up, since no information was found in the interventions reviewed in this regard, as well as to propose institutional support for complaint mechanisms, follow-up of cases, social support or disclosure of associations civil or non-governmental organizations to provide effective therapeutic support and make the process of leaving the violent environment more difficult.

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