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Bidirectional Violence among Male and Female University Students: Comparison of Observations and Results between Two Countries

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a research project that included the application of a survey in 597 university students in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and Tijuana, México, whose central aim was to examine the degree of violence in intimate couples, including that of men towards women and women against men, in different countries. It also explores the level of knowledge and analyzes the degree of awareness that the samples have about existing abuse. The results show similarity in the exercise of violence by both sexes; aspects of hegemonic masculinity that still permeates both, and the need for studies that have a real impact on education against this problem. This, irrespectively of age and socio-economic stratum to which both sexes belong.

Keywords: Perception of violence, bidirectional violence, heterosexual couples, Tijuana, Santo Domingo.



Violencia Bidireccional entre Hombres y Mujeres Universitarias: Resultados y Observaciones al Comparar entre dos Países

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Resumen

Este trabajo expone los resultados de una investigación que incluyó la aplicación de una encuesta a 597 universitarios de Santo Domingo, República Dominicana y Tijuana, México, y cuyo objetivo central fue examinar el grado de violencia en la pareja tanto de hombres hacia mujeres como de mujeres hacia hombres, en diferentes países. También explora el nivel de conocimiento y analiza el grado de concientización que las muestras poseen acerca del maltrato existente. Los resultados demuestran la similitud en el ejercicio de la violencia por parte de ambos sexos; aspectos de masculinidad hegemónica que aún permean a ambos, y la necesidad de implementar estudios que ejerzan un impacto real en la educación contra esta problemática. Esto, con independencia de la edad y el estrato socioeconómico al cual ambos sexos pertenezcan.

Palabras clave: Percepción de la violencia, violencia bidireccional, parejas heterosexuales, Tijuana, Santo Domingo.

Most studies about intimate partner violence are limited to addressing men's abusive behavior towards women by highlighting the patterns of masculinity and femininity established within the framework of patriarchal culture. However, over the years research has shown that this abuse is bidirectional, therefore demonstrating that both sexes equally play the roles of perpetrator and victim, especially among young couples (Shook, Gerrity, Jurich, & Segrist, 2000; Muñoz, Graña, O'Leary, & Gonzalez, 2007; Argoff, 2009; Goinheix's, 2012; Martínez, Vargas, & Novoa, 2016; Aparecida, da Cruz, Coelho, Figueira, & Carvalho, 2016).

Several articles confirm this to be so in the case for Mexico (see Cáceres, 2007; Hernández, 2007; Trujano, Martínez, & Camacho, 2010; Alegría & Rodríguez, 2015). In 2012, the Instituto Mexicano de la Juventud (Mexican Institute for Youth) announced that about 30 percent of Mexican men and women between the ages of 12 and 29 had been victims of violent behavior in their intimate relationships (Méndez, 2012).

The Encuesta de Salud Reproductiva en la Adolescencia de Baja California (Survey of Reproductive Health in Adolescents of Baja California) found that 47.6 percent of the youth population in Baja California experienced some type of non-extreme violence from their intimate partner. This result was only six percentage points below the number of young women who found themselves in the same situation (El Colef, 2006). The records indicate that the predominant type of violence was psychological, with more than 70 percent directed against males (González & Fernández, 2014). This concurs with what has been found by other authors in different parts of Mexico, such as Moral and López (2012).

Delving further into this matter, Ramírez (2002) pointed out the difficulty - and even the fear - felt by many men for not fulfilling their socially assigned role as the dominant partner. This implies that it is not enough to identify these abusive behaviors, but that it is also necessary to provide specific coping tools and skills. On the other hand, it also indicates that in certain contexts men are being educated in a non-traditional manner in which they are taught to respect women "which may explain why many of them, although they perceive their female partners' behavior as violent, learn to tolerate and live with it" (Ramírez, 2002, p. 350).

This situation surpasses not only gender differences but also differences in educational and socio-economic status. Furthermore, violence is frequently reported among college-age students regardless of their academic field of study and country of origin (Soriano, 2011; Olvera, Arias, & Amador, 2012; UCM, 2013; Moral & López, 2013; Fernández, 2014; Mohamed, Herrera, & Carracedo, 2014; Formental, Hernández, & Fernández, 2014; Rodríguez, 2015; Sosa & Menkes, 2016; Aparecida et al. 2016; Cubillas, Valdez, Domínguez, Román, Hernández & Zapata, 2016).

For these reasons, this study was designed to investigate the magnitude of violence between both sexes among college student couples of medium to high socioeconomic status, both in the city of Tijuana, Mexico and in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Very few studies of this nature have been carried out in Tijuana, and it is the first study in Santo Domingo that explores bidirectional violence, including violence perpetrated by women towards men.

This binational research paper¹ presents concrete findings aiming to delve deeper into the issue of violence between both sexes that live as couples, addresses their degree of knowledge and awareness about violence and explores the influence of hegemonic masculinity that remains in these two different cultures.

Methodology

The survey for this study was designed and validated for both Tijuana, Mexico (Fernández, Martínez, Unzueta, & Rojas, 2016) and Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (Rosales, Florez, & Fernández, 2017). While all survey participants were currently enrolled in a university, there was a wide range of age variation (between the ages of 18 to 63). The age variation did not reveal enough dissimilarity to be considered as a differentiating or determining variable. It should be noted that participation in the survey was anonymous, voluntary and strictly confidential². Participants were university students currently in a relationship with the same partner during at least the past year.

The fundamental variables considered were:

a) Sex (male or female)

b) Type of violence (economic, sexual, psychological and physical). For this variable we considered the definitions already established by other authors (Moreno, 1999; Amor, Echeburúa, De Corral, Zubizarreta & Zarazúa, 2002, Ruiz, Plazaola & Del Río, 2007; García, Pico, Sánchez, Savall, Celda, Blasco & Martínez, 2005; Fernández & Pérez, 2007; Pico, Echeburúa & Martínez, 2008)³

c) And level of awareness of violence (by victim and/or victimizer⁴). This was achieved by contrasting the first part of the questionnaire, consisting of 14 open questions that assess their general degree of awareness about the presence of violence and ability to discern between different types of violent behavior. This part of the questionnaire poses questions such as: What does intimate partner violence mean to you? Do you think you have ever exerted, or been a victim of violence? It also measures whether they are capable of identifying when they have been a victim or perpetrator of violence (see Fernández et al. 2016; and Rosales et al. 2017). The last part of the questionnaire emphasizes specific aspects of each type of violence by introducing such questions as, for example: Has your intimate partner ever yelled at you in public? Have you ever yelled at your intimate partner in public? It also asks about various manipulative behaviors associated with sexual, psychological or economic abuse, some of which might have previously been perceived as normal. The entire questionnaire was designed and tested to gradually raise the subjects' awareness about behaviors which are in fact manifestations of violence.

The data was processed using SPSS Statistics v19 in order to determine the presence or absence of intimate partner violence among university students. Comparisons by sex and by type of violence were analyzed and evaluated according to Pearson's chi-square statistical test (χ^2) (bilateral significance). Each of the items was encoded as a dichotomous variable. Once the data was captured, its frequencies were analyzed and each response was differentiated based on sex. Nonparametric tests were used to analyze the correspondence between sex and each of the violence types and conditions (victim or victimizer), using the χ^2 test with a level of significance of 0.05 after the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to verify the relationship between the variables of interest.

Study sample

The study sample was random, non-probabilistic and by convenience.⁵ The selection criteria was to include students from private schools with a medium-high socioeconomic level, which comprised a total of 597 university students of medium to high socioeconomic status of which 181 were male, and 416 were female. In the case of the City of Tijuana, the group consisted of 366 people, 123 men, and 243 women. Their ages ranged between 18 and 63 years. The greatest percentage of participants was in the age group of 20 through 25 years, and the next largest group consisted of students between 18 to 19 years of age. The students attended the Universidad de la Tercera Edad (University of the Elderly: UTE) in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, where the group totaled 231 students, of which 173 were female and 58 were male. Ages fluctuated between 20 and 63 years of age, a majority of which ranged between 31 and 50 years old. Table 1 shows the total study sample’s distribution.

Table 1
Composition of the study sample and sub-samples

Sex	City		Sample total
	Tijuana	Santo Domingo	
Male	123	58	181
Female	243	173	416
Total	366	231	597

Source. Prepared by the authors

Results

Table 2 shows that less than half of the university students surveyed in Santo Domingo and Tijuana recognized having experienced (currently or in the immediate past) intimate partner violence while in a couple relationship at the start of the survey. That shows that the majority of participants from both countries (and particularly the Tijuana men) weren’t aware or had knowledge about being in a violent intimate relationship, be as victims and/or abusers.

Table 2

Initial recognition of intimate partner violence (shown by their responses to the first 14 questions) in both Santo Domingo and Tijuana

City	Sex				Total	
	Female (173)		Male (58)		Total (231)	
Santo Domingo	ct.	%	ct.	%	ct.	%
	76	43.9	28	48.3	104	45
Tijuana	Female (241)		Male (125)		Total (366)	
	ct.	%	ct.	%	ct.	%
	97	72.4	37	27.6	134	36.6

Source. Prepared by the authors. *Note.* ct. = count

The largest number of participants who recognized having experienced violence in their relationships (suffered or exercised) was found among the Tijuana women. This could be influenced by the fact that this Mexican city has a greater number of working women compared to other cities in the country. Most of them are economically independent, and there are a high number of women who are heads of households, which can be related to a greater initial violence awareness and knowledge about their autonomy possibilities. This feminine economic emancipation scenario does not occur in Santo Domingo, where it should be noted, as show in [Table 2](#), that even though there were no significant differences between sexes (and the number of participants who perceived themselves as being victims of violence was less than half of entire study sample), in Tijuana there are more men who point out the existence of intimate partner violence.

Table 3

Comparison of responses to the last part of the questionnaire about intimate partner violence in both Santo Domingo and Tijuana

City	Sex				Total	
Santo Domingo	Female (173)		Male (58)		Total (231)	
	ct.	%	ct.	%	ct.	%
	129	74.5	48	82.7	177	76.6
Tijuana	Female (241)		Male (125)		Total (366)	
	ct.	%	ct.	%	ct.	%
	188	78	98	78.4	286	78.1

Source. Prepared by the authors. *Note.* ct. = count

When comparing the answers shown in the first (Table 2) and last (Table 3) parts of the questionnaire, the resulting differences display the degree of unawareness in each sample with respect to identifying when violence was occurring, and what types of violence were taking place in the couple's relationship. For example, in the case of Tijuana, out of a total of 245 victimizers, 136 were unaware that they were abusing their partner because they did not regard abusive behaviors as violent. The fact that the violent actions were considered normal could partially explain that they would go unnoticed. The percentage of women who recognized that they were being victimized or acting as victimizers in both Santo Domingo and Tijuana is very similar, after having completed the last part of the questionnaire and did not show differences by sex in either case. To delve further into this matter, Table 4 shows the following comparison.

Table 4

Comparison between responses to first and last parts of the questionnaire as indicators of the respondents' awareness of having experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) in Tijuana and Santo Domingo

Violence awareness	City											
	Santo Domingo						Tijuana					
	Female (173)		Male (58)		Total (231)		Female (241)		Male (125)		Total (366)	
Persons who initially recognised having experienced IPV	76	43,9	28	48,3	104	45	97	72,4	37	27,6	134	36,6
Total persons who at the end recognised having experienced IPV	129	74,5	48	82,7	177	76,6	188	78	98	78,4	286	78,1
Persons who changed their perception while filling the survey IPV	53	30,6	20	34,5	73	34,6	91	37,8	61	48,8	152	41,5

Source. Prepared by the authors. *Notes.* ct. = count; IPV = Intimate Partner Violence.

As previously discussed, this questionnaire addresses general awareness only up to question 14, after which it examines the specific aspects characterizing the four types of violence studied, as a means of raising participants' awareness about the presence of violence in its different forms and degrees in both roles as victim and victimizer. Table 4 shows how the number of cases who recognize the existence of violence in their intimate relationship, jump from less than half (46 percent in Santo Domingo and 36.6 percent in Tijuana) to a majority when we comparing the beginning and end of the survey. In regard to sex, it's worth noting, in the case of Tijuana, the high difference shown between women (72.4 percent) and men

(27.6 percent) about recognizing violence in their relationship at the beginning of the survey, situation that is latter recognized by both sexes at the end of the survey.

These findings highlight the degree of respondents’ unawareness, regardless of sex, age and country, in so far as their ability to distinguish between different types of violence within their couple relationship, taking into account the fact that in many cases, respondents' knowledge may have been distorted prior to the survey.

It is important to add that in our study there were no age-related differences even when the average age ratios in the samples from both countries were unequal. Furthermore, these results concur with those found by Soriano (2011) and other authors like Moral and Lopez (2013), whose samples ranged from 18 to 63 years of age.

Table 5
Types of intimate partner violence in respondents in Tijuana and Santo Domingo

Type of violence	City											
	Tijuana						Santo Domingo					
	Female		Male		Total		Female		Male		Total	
	(241)		(125)		(366)		(173)		(58)		(231)	
	ct.	%	ct.	%	ct.	%	ct.	%	ct.	%	ct.	%
Psicological	186	77,2	93	74,4	279	76,2	164	94,8	55	94,8	219	94,8
Physical	68	28,2	41	32,8	109	29,8	151	87,3	48	82,8	199	86,1
Sexual	27	11,2	18	14,4	45	18,3	9	5,2	5	8,6	14	6,1
Economical	39	16,2	28	22,4	67	12,3	8	4,6	5	8,6	13	5,6

Source. Prepared by the authors. Note. ct. = count

Table 5 shows that the most prevalent type of violence upon completion of the last part of the questionnaire was psychological abuse, which was experienced by 94.8 percent of couples in Santo Domingo and 76.2 percent in Tijuana, regardless of gender in both countries. Nevertheless, when comparing violence of the physical type, which is the one that stands in second place of occurrence in both countries and also without sex

differences, it shows a high incidence for the case of Santo Domingo (with 86.1 percent vs 29.8 percent in Tijuana), also without significant differences between men and women.

Men reported experiencing psychological violence and felt undervalued by their female partners in instances when they could not afford to invite their women out on a date or when economic hardship prevented them from assuming the traditional role of financial provider in their relationships, associated with learned and expected patterns of masculinity. It was surprising for the authors to find that economic violence did not significantly stand out in the Santo Domingo sample.

This study reveals the high number of both men and women who suffer intimate partner violence without knowing it.

In this regard, we believe it's relevant to add some results found in previous studies made with this project, related to being victims or victimizers by sex: In the Santo Domingo Study Sample (Rosales & Florez, 2016), even though many women did not recognize being abusers at the beginning of the survey, at the end this changed, as it's shown in table 6.

Table 6

Victims and victimizers: comparative evaluation by sex and type of violence in Santo Domingo

Type of violence	Victim		Victimizer	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Physical	28,9%	29,3%	24,9%	19,0%
Psychological	55,5%	62,1%	56,6%	60,3%
Sexual	24,3%	25,9%	31,8%	18,9%
Economic	28,9%	41,4%	16,8%	15,5%

Source. Own translation based on Rosales & Florez (2016, p. 44)

In Table 6 we can see that there were no significant differences between man and women in Santo Domingo regarding being victim or victimizer. And, in both cases, psychological violence predominated.

On the other hand, in a previous study carried out for this purpose in Tijuana (Fernández et al., 2016) it was highlighted that almost 80 percent of

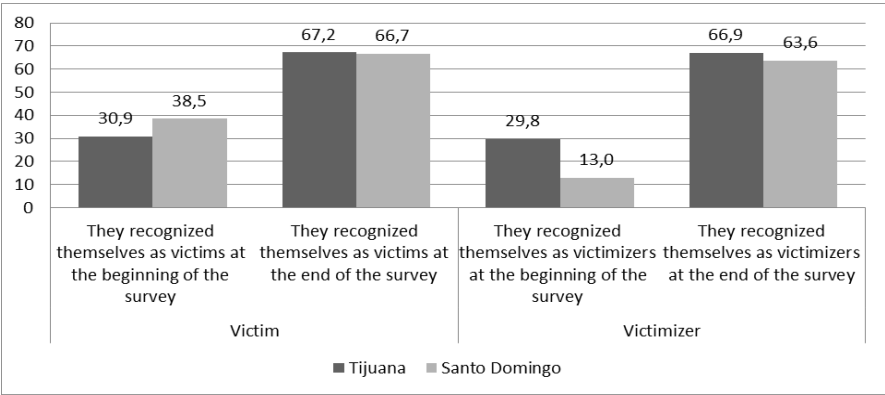
the sample had suffered or exerted violence in their relationship, with no difference between both sexes, being the tendency that men were the most abused and least aggressors, as well as those who were both victims and victimizers, as shown in [Table 7](#).

Table 7
Relationship between being victim or victimizer by sex in Tijuana

	Male	Female
Victims	72,8%	64,3%
Both victim and victimizer	60,0%	53,9%
Victimizer	65,6%	67,6%

Source. Own translation based on Fernández, Martínez, Unzueta & Rojas (2016, p. 258).

At the end of the survey it was also evident, as expressed by Fernández & González (2018), the high number of those who recognized to be suffering or to exert violence (victims or victimizers) in their relationship in both countries, without sex differences. To illustrate this we reproduce a graph elaborated for that study:



Graph 1. Comparison of victims and victimizers in Tijuana and Santo Domingo, before and after the survey (percentages)

Source. Own translation. Based on Fernández & González (2018, p. 324)

It is important to consider the role that guilt plays in the lack of visibility of violence. Escudero, Polo, López and Aguilar (2005), Scott and Straus (2007) and Abelino and Monroy (2016), among others, pointed out that when a person is in the midst of a violent dynamic, the belief tends to be that he or she alone is to blame for the other's reaction and feels guilty as a result. Although it has been observed that men often use this as a tool to exert power, this is not unique to the male sex. In our study, Tables 8 and 9 show the principal causes referenced in both countries.

Table 8

Principal causes identified by respondents as the origin of intimate partner violence in Santo Domingo

Cause	Female (173)		Male (58)		Total (231)	
	ct.	%	ct.	%	ct.	%
Education/culture/machismo/feminism	85	49,1	16	27,6	101	43,7
Jealousy/insecurity	58	33,5	17	29,3	75	32,5
Poor communication	54	31,2	12	20,7	66	28,6
Financial problems	41	23,7	12	20,7	53	22,9

Source. Prepared by the authors. Note. ct. = count

In Santo Domingo education and culture (with its underlying *machismo*) are seen as the most common causes of intimate partner violence along with jealousy and insecurity, poor communication skills and financial hardship. Among the women, the perceived causal factors for violence appeared in the following order:

- Nearly half, (49.1 percent), attributed violence to the patriarchal culture and education imbued with the *macho* prototype;
- 33.5 percent identified jealousy and insecurity on behalf of their intimate partner as the cause;
- 31.5 percent blamed poor communication;
- 23.7 percent felt that financial hardship was responsible.

These results are consistent with the study conducted by the Fondo de Población de las Naciones Unidas (United Nations Population Fund) (UNFPA, 2017) in Santo Domingo about women, according to which:

- 60 percent felt that their partner attempted to control them;
- 40 percent complained that their male partner exploded into jealous fits when the woman spoke to other men;
- 34 percent said that what originated the violence was their partner's insistence in knowing where they were at all times;
- 27 percent said that their male partner did not allow them to meet with girlfriends;
- 27 percent attributed violence to their partner's mistrust of their management of money.

In contrast, 29.3 percent of male interviewees indicated insecurity and jealousy as a cause of intimate partner violence, while 20.7 percent blamed poor communication and financial hardship.

In a study on violence in married couples in the Dominican Republic, Bogaert (2014) concluded that there is a direct correlation between child abuse and violence in married couples. The study suggests that a male subject who was exposed to domestic violence during his childhood has a higher propensity to becoming abusive toward his spouse as an adult. This is a repetitive finding in research carried out in other countries, which suggests that in order to discover the motives for intimate partner violence in Santo Domingo it is necessary to interpret the nature of domestic violence in the context of the matrifocal family dynamic.

Table 9

Principal causes identified by respondents as the origin of intimate partner violence in Tijuana

Cause	Female (241)		Male (125)		Total (366)	
	ct.	%	ct.	%	ct.	%
Jealousy/insecurity	92	38	53	42	145	40
Poor communication	41	17	31	25	72	20
Education/culture/machismo/feminism	49	20	22	18	71	19,4
Financial problems	23	10	9	7	32	9

Source. Prepared by the authors. *Note.* ct. = count

The sum total of responses in the Tijuana sample show the following root causes of violence: jealousy and insecurity account for 40 percent of the causes identified by respondents; poor communication for 20 percent, followed by 19.4 percent for reasons of education and culture.

Thirty-eight percent of the women identified jealousy and insecurity as the principal causes of violence while 20 percent blamed education and culture. However, 42 to 45 percent of the men named jealousy, insecurity and communication respectively, as the cause of abusive behavior. We are reminded of the research study conducted by Chávez and Rodríguez (2015) in Mexican universities which found that when asked whether "demanding explanations is considered violence", there was a major difference in men's and women's answers. Thirty-five percent of men strongly noted that "demanding explanations is not considered violence", while 70 percent of women replied that "the behavior was in fact, a violent act." Ramírez and Núñez's case study (2010, p. 282) of Mexican university students suggests that: "Developing studies with a multifactorial focus that take into consideration couples' perception about violence may help to reduce risk factors for intimate partner violence".

In contrast with our expectations of finding a higher predominance of ideas associated with the hegemonic masculinity perspective, the results of this study show few differences between both sexes. The latter concurs with Glass, Fredland, Campbell, Yonas, Sharps, and Kub (2003), who states that the abuser-abused pattern cannot be assumed, given the equal distribution

of power. This study shows that women not only consider themselves equal but they tend to surpass men in some types of abuse.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that there exists, not only a high degree of violence between couples in universities in Santo Domingo and Tijuana, but that violence occurs without showing significant discrepancies between both sexes associated with psychological and physical abuse.

Although some research has been carried out in Tijuana (Fernández, 2014; González & Fernández, 2014; Fernández et al. 2016) about this subject, in the case of the Dominican Republic this approach of the matter is completely new⁷, and no previous studies have taken place to explore violence of women towards men as far as we know.

The findings of high rates of abuse in both sexes are consistent with other researchers', such as those documented by Swahn, Alemdar, and Whitaker (2010). These studies have pointed out that it is appropriate to think about these intimate couples as implicated in aggressive behaviors rather than as static victim-aggressor roles (Nocentini, Menesini, & Pastorelli, 2010; Adam, 2013; Zamudio, 2014).

A very low percentage of the students, even in the context of higher education, tend to be unaware of having experienced intimate partner violence regardless of sex, whereby they often do not consider themselves either victims or abusers in their couple relationships.

Soriano highlights the frequency with which abuse and offenses are misidentified as love and interest on behalf of romantic partners:

We believe that this is one of the reasons why they [...] do not break off their relationship. This normalization of violence in patterns of daily interactions is one of the factors that cause violence to seep into relationships, are consented to, and thus become perpetuated. (Soriano, 2011, p. 96)

These findings are consistent with those found by Zamudio, Ayala and Andrade (2011, p.4) in their study on students from the Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo (Autonomous University of Chapingo, in Mexico).

According to data obtained by a survey conducted by these authors, "when asked if while at Chapingo they had ever been attacked, only 36 percent of the men and 28 percent of the women answered affirmatively." However, after walking them through the process of identifying the different types of violence, both sexes confirmed having been victims of violence. This study also found that both men and women experience violence in similar percentages (84 percent of men vs. 83 percent of women). In a study carried out in 2005 with 500 students from the Universidad de Colombia - Bogotá (National University of Colombia in Bogotá) Amórtegui-Osorio (2015) also found that couples involved in violent acts (without distinction between sexes) tended to believe that in many instances violence was acceptable and justified.

The type of violence most detected at the end of the survey was psychological with a high percentage in both countries, followed by the physical type (mostly in the case of Santo Domingo), also without difference between men and women.

Other studies with Mexican couples (Rojas-Solis, 2013) also found psychological violence to be the most prevalent (Ramírez & Smithey, 2008) in coexistence with other types of abuse (Olvera et al. 2012) experienced almost equally by men and women (Rangel & García, 2010).

Soriano (2011) found that amongst the group of women who acknowledged being victims of violent behavior, all reported having been subjected to different subcategories of psychological abuse. A significantly higher incidence (32.1 percent) of these cases involved situations associated with controlling behaviors. Studies by Abelino and Monroy (2016) found that most of the young women who experienced psychological violence by their intimate partners attributed it to their partners' lack of appreciation for their professional careers. They reported feeling undervalued by their male partners who held their own professional goals in higher regard than theirs. This was consistent with their internalized beliefs associated with the patriarchal model.

Men reported experiencing psychological violence and felt undervalued by their female partners in instances when they could not afford to invite their women out on a date or when economic hardship prevented them from assuming the traditional role of financial provider in their relationships, associated with learned and expected patterns of masculinity. As has been

ratified by the Dominican psychologist Soraya Lara, President of the Patronato de Ayuda a Casos de Mujeres Maltratadas (Board of Trustees in Support of Battered Women) (cited by Mejía, 2011), Dominican women usually see men mostly as providers. Consequently, when men fail to meet this expectation, they are subjected to more pressure than was observed within this sample. It is often for this reason that women tolerate violence from their male partner and do not report incidents to specialized centers, where statistics would otherwise be recorded on the subject, and made available for research.

Chávez and Rodríguez (2015) also found evidence of this perception in their samples but showed that a higher number of men (30 percent) rather than women (10 percent) were convinced that being the primary financial provider is an essential part of being a man. We concur with Rodríguez (2014) that this worldview, encompassing the traditional patriarchal model that upholds the belief that men should support women financially (and that women should take care of men in return for being supported by them), is entrenched in both men and women. He quotes Molina (cited by Tubert, 2003, p. 143), who emphasizes that a key and multifaceted feature that enables the perpetuation of the patriarchal model is "the recognition, and to a certain degree, the complicity of women." The latter has proven to influence mutual appreciation and greater self-esteem on behalf of both sexes (Fernández, Pérez, & Anguiano, 2000). This also reinforces the female's deeply ingrained belief regarding "women as the perennial caregivers of men" (even when the male fails to succeed as the primary household provider) which is also present in other cultures (Formental et al. 2014). Chávez and Rodríguez (2015) found that more than half of the interviewees regardless of sex, held the belief that "women were born with a maternal instinct". This "motherhood mystique," referred to by Rodríguez (2014, p. 175) becomes the safeguard of the accepted patriarchal traditions supporting and validating the oppression to which women are subjected. Furthermore, 20 percent of the sample (Chávez & Rodríguez, 2015) stated their agreement that "being a man means being aggressive."

Regarding the students' perception of their personal experience, Soriano (2011) found that only 2.6 percent of female students reported having been mistreated or abused by their intimate partner. This data indicates that a significant amount of women are subjected to abuse without being aware of

it, which is reflected in 97.4 percent of the sample in Soriano's case study. Only 1.2 percent of the men consider they are being abused by their intimate partner, while the other 98.8 percent, according to Soriano, are being subjected to abuse without recognizing it as such. These findings reveal the large number of both men and women who are unknowing victims of intimate partner violence, which is consistent with the findings in this binational study.

Fonseca and Quintero (2008) refer to the lack of visibility of violence against women as a product of their learned tolerance towards abuse, which serves to promote its acceptance and their submissiveness. Furthermore, Chávez and Rodríguez (2015) research developed at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico) and at the Universidad Autónoma de México - Xochimilco (Autonomous University of Mexico - Xochimilco) both located in Mexico City, found that more than half of both sexes experienced violence in their daily lives.

Our astonishment is shared with Montesinos and Carrillo (2011) of Universidad Autónoma de México-Azcapotzalco (Autonomous University of Mexico-Azcapotzalco) who found the coexistence of high levels of violence in all of its forms, along with low visibility of violence in a university setting where its prevalence would be least expected, also belonging to a middle-upper socioeconomic stratum. In this aspect our findings coincide with the research of Dr. Luis Verge, Director of the Centro de Intervención Conductual para Hombres de Santo Domingo (Center for Behavioral Intervention for Men in Santo Domingo), that in an interview with Maria Isabel Soldevila (2011)⁵ pointed out that only 4 percent of men cared-for at this facility were illiterate; 84 percent of violent men were employed; 94 percent did not use drugs, and only three percent had a psychiatric disorder. The latter emphasizes the fact that there is a distorted and stereotyped idea (similar to the results in our study) that men who exert violence have low economic status, are uneducated, use drugs, and are unemployed or have mental disorders.

We believe there is an urgent need to work on developing preventive strategies to help change the perception of what being a man and a woman entails and what is expected of each of their gender roles outside of, and within their intimate partner relationships.

In agreement with Vélez (2011) and other authors who have pointed out that women have fixed ideas about masculinity, as much as men have preconceived expectations about women's behavior. The need for a change in mindset in members of both sexes is critical, given that, as Cucco (2010, p. 15) states: "socio-political transformations do not move forward if they are not executed along with the liberation of the individual psyche." In our opinion, this requires a deep sexual re-education, beginning with an attitude change on behalf of the trainers themselves. Therefore, the authors of this study agree with Trujano, Martínez and Camacho (2009, p. 352):

Precisely because relationships are socially and historically determined, it is essential to emphasize that a gender perspective implies that relationships that are harboring inequality, domination, discrimination and violence between men and women, can and should change. Hence, the importance of embracing a multiplicity of ways to be masculine as we have recognized the right to a plurality of ways to be feminine. Building new bridges between our differences will open possibilities for complementing the roles of men and women and searching for alternatives and relationships with a sense of equality between men and women.

Few differences were noted from a cultural perspective, despite the fact that the study compared data from two different cultures with distinctive cultural variables that constitute a fundamental ingredient in identity development (Rocha, 2009). Both samples showed resemblances, especially regarding the alarming degree of unawareness of the presence of violence. Even when violence was recognized as such, the results of the survey indicate no significant differences across sexes with regard to psychological abuse, which was most prevalent, or in physical violence, which was less frequent.

We advise being mindful of Folguera's work (2014, cited by Rojas, 2016) which explores the development of masculine identity within the context of significant and rapid socio-cultural transformations that have brought about dissent against traditional imposed values, further complicating men's perspective. When men attempt to live within these new parameters of masculinity without a clear narrative to adhere to, they

become vulnerable to victimization within their couple relationships in a manner that was previously either non-existent or less visible.

Conclusion

These results, put to light not only the high level of violence between couples in both countries, even when it relates to a sample composed of students of higher educational level (and this aspect does not appear to be crucial to palliate this problem), in addition it was evident the lack of awareness about gender violence between men and women.

Despite the fact that other studies have observed outstanding awareness gaps about violent behavior associated with the hegemonic masculinity worldview, this study observed a similarity in patterns of violent behavior across sexes, similar to that found by McDonell, Ott & Mitchell (2010), Kaukinen, Gover y Hartman (2012) y Karakurt and Cumbie (2012), even if it studied different countries and age groups. These findings suggest an alarming trend toward normalization worldwide, across cultural and gender differences.

We agree with Castro-Borunda, Naranja-Cantabrana and Ayala-Bobadilla (2015) that this evidence indicates a need for permanent sex education programs designed from a gender-specific perspective, in order to help male and female students identify and differentiate between the various types of violence. Given the rise of violence in young couples, this kind of program would serve as a preventive measure. We recommend an interactive and experiential approach to instruction, directly involving facilitators and participants alike.

As we have seen, prior to the completion of the last part of the questionnaire, the male and female respondents in both countries who admitted to having personally experienced intimate partner violence were less than half of the sample. There were relatively slight differences by sex, whereby more men than women in Santo Domingo and more women than men in Tijuana, felt abused. However, when comparing their responses in the first and last parts of the questionnaire, the majority of respondents (almost 77 percent) of both sexes in the two countries admitted to experiencing intimate partner violence. This coincides with findings by other authors from different parts of the world who have been mentioned in this article.

This study clearly shows that there is a high degree of unawareness, lack of visibility, normalization and ignorance with regard to the occurrence of partner violence and types of abuse among the respondents, regardless of sex, age and country, notwithstanding the fact that the respondent's knowledge about intimate partner violence might have been distorted before participating in the survey.

The insignificant differences in the results for the traits analyzed in this study demonstrate the predominance of traditional masculinity and femininity patterns in the mindset across genders and cultures. This suggests that the perpetuation of abusive behavior, whether by inflicting it or allowing it to happen may be contributing to the lack of visibility and cultural normalization of intimate partner violence.

Psychological abuse was found to be the predominant type of violence (94.8 percent in Santo Domingo and 76.2 percent in Tijuana) upon completion of the last part of the questionnaire, regardless of gender in both countries. The next type of violence in order of importance was physical violence (especially in the case of Santo Domingo), also showing no differences between men and women.

Dasgupta (2002) claims that the number of women who exert physical violence against their partners is comparable to that of men in terms of context, motivation, results and consequences. However, it is also true, as indicated by Alegría and Rodríguez (2015) that physical violence perpetrated by females is less likely to result in injury. Therefore, when discussing bi-directionality of violence, it is important to consider that women, as compared to men, are much more likely to suffer a serious injury during physical altercations (Archer, 2000; Chiodo, Crooks, Wolfe, McIsaac, Hughes & Jaffe, 2011; Dasgupta, 2002; Desmarais, Reeves, Nicholls, Telford & Fiebert, 2012; Muñoz *et al.* 2007). The prevalence of female deaths perpetrated by their male companions has become a matter of great social concern in recent years, as shown by current research (Adam, 2013). Alegría and Rodríguez (2015) who also emphasized that when women caused serious injury to men, it was usually in self-defense (see also Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Echeburúa, 2003; Miller & White, 2003; Hernández, 2014). Although this study did not measure the frequency of abusive behavior (a deficiency in the questionnaire which would have provided further insights), research which has considered this variable (the

case of UCM, 2013) showed a higher percentage of repeated abuse by men toward women.

In both countries, the principal causes that unleashed violent episodes cited by the survey respondents were jealousy and insecurity, followed by the influence of education imbued with patriarchal cultural values, (machismo), poor communication, and finally, financial hardship.

The predominance of these four fundamental causes presents some variations by country and gender. While men in both Tijuana and Santo Domingo primarily identified their jealousy and insecurities as the causes of their violent manifestations, women in Santo Domingo pointed at cultural and educational elements along with machismo as the principal causes of the abuse they received. In contrast, women from Tijuana highlighted jealousy (and a lack of trust by their partner) as the primary motivator of violence. Ultimately, all of these assumed causes are associated with insecurity and low self-esteem, of which the former is not only associated with internalized patriarchal patterns, but also with a sense of uncertainty about the relationship. Economic hardship and poor communication occupy the last places in the order of predominance but are nevertheless present and associated with the men's image as the principal provider.

This study, groundbreaking, among other things, for studying the abuse from women against men in the Dominican Republic, demonstrates its relevance and importance in the sense that it has affected in many aspects the general idea about gender violence which is believed to be only exerted by men against women, which constitutes a barrier to undertake new studies in this bidirectional way, and that in turn we break with the rigid gender roles, and identify other types of violence that, although no of the physical type, in the long run could result in dramatic consequences.

To deepen this kind of studies, we could consider the inclusion of a "frequency" variable in regards to abusive conducts so that it may be further measured and analyzed (as in the case of UCM, 2013), that would enrich this type of research.

Finally, it should also be noted that taking in to account the results obtained by this research project, there are already prevention programs for both sexes scheduled to be undertaken at the Universidad de la Tercera Edad (UTE) in Santo Domingo.

Notes

1. *The Adult as an Object and Subject of Violence*; a collaborative effort between Universidad de la Tercera Edad (UTE) de Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic and El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (El Colef), 2003-2018.
2. This study has rigorously followed the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences *International ethical guidelines for health-related research involving humans* (CIOMS, 2016), especially Nos. 5 and 6.
3. Where physical violence is characterized by physical acts of abuse, such as punching, kicking, slapping, pushing, biting and strangulation attempts, the psychological type includes any event that diminishes the integrity of the person, such as verbal attacks, power and control actions such as the isolation from family and friends, persecution and harassment, verbal threats, degradation and blackmail, sexual violence involves forced sex actions (genital, anal or oral from the woman towards the aggressor or the aggressor towards women, objects inserted in vagina or anus), sex in public, physical violence during intercourse, threats or degradation for rejecting sex, and forced use of pornographic films. And the economic happens when the couple takes away the money they earn, is prevented from spending it for their benefit or that of their family, its use is controlled or denied to diminish their independence.
4. Being a victim of violence or perpetuating a specific type of violence against another person does not exclude him or her from being a victim of, or perpetuating, other types of violence by or towards that same person.
5. In both countries, the participation in the study was completely voluntary, that is, once the application of the anonymous survey was agreed upon with the universities, all students who wished to participate did so once they expressed their informed consent.
6. Instances when, with slight differences, those respondents belonging to the age group from 41 to 63 years of age showed higher percentages, followed by age groups between 31 to 40 years.
7. Excluding the article by Rosales *et al.* (2017), which is an extension of this same study.

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