

Attitudes Toward Dating Violence in Early and Late Adolescents in Concepción, Chile

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Abstract

This study compares attitudes toward teen relationship (or dating) violence (TRV) between early and late adolescents in the province of Concepción, Chile. The sample consisted of 770 adolescents, aged between 11 and 19 with an average age of 14.8 years old, of which 389 were female (50.5%) and 381 were male (49.5%). An adapted version of the Scale of Attitudes Towards Intimate Violence was used. Results found greater justifying attitudes toward violence in early adolescents than in late adolescents, in 6 of 12 items of the scale, with a statistical significance of $p \leq .001$ in 4 items and in the overall score, and $p \leq .05$ in 2 items. In the comparison according to sex, male adolescents tended to justify violence more than female adolescents did in one item ($p \leq .001$). In dating/no dating comparison, statistically significant differences were found in just 2 items, in favor of those who are not in a relationship ($p \leq .05$). These results are analyzed and discussed in relation to previous literature. Finally, orientations to future interventions are proposed, and it is suggested that aspects related to sampling and possible modulating variables such as cognitive development and moral development be considered for future investigations.

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Keywords

dating violence, early adolescents, late adolescents, justification of violence

Introduction

Dating violence in adolescents, also known as teen relationship violence (TRV), has slowly been deemed a public health problem. In fact, in the United States, it is a recognized legal and social problem that involved the creation of laws and regulations to address curricula, prevention programs, and training, among other school-based interventions (De La Rue, Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2016). The psychosocial factors involved (lower socioeconomic status of victims, no knowledge regarding legal proceedings, higher resistance to parental disclosure in victims) play against an accurate legal approach to the problem (Cornelius, Shorey, & Kunde, 2009).

Although ample information on TRV exists (Morris, Mrug, & Windle, 2015; Nardi-Rodríguez, Pastor-Mira, López-Roig, & Ferrer-Pérez, 2017), there is not yet a unified theoretical and empirical corpus to account for the particularities of this problem in early adolescence. Most research has been conducted on participants over the age of 15 years old, which is a striking oversight considering the general consensus in the field that TRV requires determining how certain specific variables (e.g., age and gender) can influence prevention (Ali, Swahn, & Hamburger, 2011).

TRV is a health issue present in many societies, and it is prone to vary under the influence of certain cultural changes: for example, the increasing onset of dating at an early age (Close, 2005). In terms of prevalence, violence can range from 0.8% for sexual violence (Valdivia Peralta & González Bravo, 2014) to 97.5% for psychological aggression, as shown in a study of 375 undergraduate students in the United States (Riggs & Leary, 1996; Valdivia Peralta & González Bravo, 2014). Studies by Riggs and O'Leary (1996) show percentages higher than those found recently by Copp, Giordano, Longmore, and Manning (2015), who reported on a cohort of 1,321 schoolchildren in Ohio that approximately 35% of the violence occurred in their current or most recent relationship. In 2012, Bonomi et al. (2012) reported higher percentages of some incident of dating violence between the ages of 13 and 19: 64.7% in women and 61.7% in men. In Chile, psychological victimization in women (67.3%) has been reported as well as in men (79.9%). In the case of physical violence, between 15.1% and 25.4% of women have suffered in the last 12 months or since the age of 14 years old, respectively (Lehrer, Lehrer, & Zhao, 2009).

In the case of TRV in early adolescence, girls are less likely to be dominated by boys; this is largely because at that age, women tend to be the same height

or even taller than men. In addition, early adolescents are less likely to engage in romantic relationships with commitment, and, therefore, they do not tend to avoid behaviors that cause conflict, such as provoking jealousy or exercising overcontrol (Windle & Mrug, 2008). In a trend in the opposite direction, Haglund, Belknap, and Garcia (2012) found in a qualitative study on 20 females (average age: 14.5 years old) many unfounded beliefs, for example, that jealousy and controlling behavior would stop if the female behaved in a reliable way for the male, or that jealousy in the relationship was a sign of care. Along the same lines, S. S. Johnson et al. (2005) found in 120 urban youth and young adults aged 14 to 22 that female participants think that females sometimes wanted males to hit them, understanding this TRV as a sign of commitment.

In terms of age, there is evidence, too, that TRV decreases with age. For example, Nabors, Dietz, and Jasinski (2006) found that acceptance of the use of physical violence toward a dating partner was greater among participants aged under 35 than in any other age group. Young people who start to have sexual intercourse earlier tend to show higher rates of TRV (Aparício, Lopes, Ferreira, & Duarte, 2014), this being an additional element that supports investigating TRV in early adolescence. In addition, according to what was found in the systematic review carried out by Rubio-Garay, López-González, Carrasco, and Amor (2017), there are slightly higher rates of aggressive behavior among adolescents than among young adults. And, Bowen et al. (2013), with a focus group methodology developed with 86 adolescents aged between 12 and 17 years in Europe, found that even when TRV is not tolerated, if it is exercised by women in an involuntary way or in retaliation for infidelity, it is perceived as acceptable (Bowen et al., 2013). In this same line of research, an investigation where 5,040 sixth-graders of both sexes were surveyed in several U.S. cities, there was a higher acceptance of being attacked physically by a partner among those who were dating, and 30% of that sample indicated that they had committed violence. It was also discovered that there is a correlation between acceptance of dating violence and the execution of it (Simon, Miller, Gorman-Smith, Orpinas, & Sullivan, 2009).

In contrast, values and personal ethics are often developed during adolescence (Sturdevant & Spear, 2002): In fact, it has even been reported—in populations of children suffering social deprivation—how certain cortical activation patterns associated with moral decisions are consolidated in adolescence (Escobar et al., 2014). The understanding of these socio-moral changes must be considered in the approach to adolescence, especially if these changes are dynamic and cause psychological vulnerability. The construction of personal identity has a central role in the development of a teenager, so it becomes relevant to study thought, emotion, and moral action

(Tapia-Balladares, Castro-Castro, & Monestel-Mora, 2007). Regarding teenagers' age and their stage of moral development, it is likely that, as certain levels of cognitive development are acquired, some levels of moral development are probably more associated with certain ages (Fraedrich, Thorne, & Ferrell, 1994). For it is in adolescence when autonomous moral concepts begin to emerge, gradually replacing the morality of conformity (Elorrieta-Grimalt, 2013; Kohlberg, 1984; Posada & Parales, 2012).

In addition, in adolescence, influences of both the concrete and abstract environment (social institutions, value systems, social norms, etc.) are important, and a young person must be given support from their immediate environment to facilitate transition from childhood to insertion into a broader social environment (Martin, Sokol, & Elfers, 2008). Some authors have already brought attention to this evolution, to the extent that different risk factors interact with maturation through adolescence. For example, McNaughton Reyes, Foshee, Bauer, and Ennett (2012) reported that as adolescents grow older, moderating factors play an increasingly important role in explaining individual differences in interaction between the use of alcohol and dating violence. Accordingly, the overall effect of excessive alcohol consumption tends to be weaker during late adolescence than at an earlier stage, because in late adolescence, this phenomenon is only a risk factor for violence if teens have aggressive behaviors associated with a violent upbringing, or if they belong to groups with violent peers. In a longitudinal study developed by Chiodo et al. (2012) whose objective was to predict the degree of violence present in a span of 2.5 years carried out with 519 teenagers, it was found that—although the predictive capacity was limited—delinquency, parental rejection, and the perpetration of sexual harassment predicted mutual TRV, just as delinquency predicted belonging to groups of perpetrators.

In this way, the meaning of certain behaviors and attitudes changes through the different stages of adolescence: Lower levels of violence or early sexual behaviors can mean immaturity in early adolescence, while in late adolescence, they can reflect interpersonal domination and control. There might be a continuum from “immature” attitudes to violence in early adolescence, to violent behavior in late adolescence—for example, overcontrol (Windle & Mrug, 2008)—, and then to early adulthood (for example, being violent within an “official” couple).

However, as the course of adolescence consolidates moral development and incorporation of cultural models for gender, it is feasible to assume that there may be differences between early and late adolescents in relation to evaluations about violent acts they make in their relationships. However, it is not clear whether this difference would lead to being critical about TRV

(associated with moral development) or to a justification of it (associated with the incorporation of cultural gender-role models).

The importance of this transition is also observed in first couple relationships. With first courtships, the support relationships and skills built with peer group are expanded toward couple relationships, and it is important to know whether attitudes toward violence change at this point, to the extent that attitudes are one of the most consistent predictors of TRV (Machado, Martins, & Caridade, 2014). There are authors who have made the point that, in most cases, TRV does not begin until a certain degree of commitment has been established (Bethke & DeJoy, 1993).

Despite this theoretical interest, there is not enough research on adolescents for this topic. Although a higher prevalence of aggression has been found within committed relationships (Machado et al., 2014), it also occurs within occasional sexual relationships/experiences, including passing encounters (Kaura & Lohman, 2009; Klipfel, Claxton, & van Dulmen, 2014). It has been described that TRV is associated with the number of relationships (Toscano, 2007) and that the extension of them increases the likelihood of TRV (Wiersma, Cleveland, Herrera, & Fischer, 2010).

The theory of cognitive dissonance explains why those who are in a relationship justify TRV more, because adolescents can alter their beliefs about the acceptability of TRV in an attempt to justify their own perpetration: It generates a greater correspondence between beliefs and actions. This has also been a mechanism observed in the victims (Jouriles, McDonald, Mueller, & Grych, 2012). Other affective processes are associated with these cognitive processes: Downey, Feldman, and Ayduk (2000) proposed the concept of rejection sensitivity (RS), to explain the willingness of young people to expect to be rejected, reacting with defensive emotions and maladaptive/aggressive interpersonal strategies, while participating in violent romantic relationships. Subsequently, relational insecurity (RI), which involves desperation to maintain an intimate relationship at all costs, exposes them to victimization (Purdie & Downey, 2000; Volz & Kerig, 2010). This, added to the rapid commitment and intensification of romantic relationships in adolescence, puts them at greater risk of TRV.

Within this general framework, the present study compares the attitudes toward dating violence between early and late Chilean adolescents, with three specific objectives: (a) to compare attitudes toward dating violence between early and late adolescents, (b) to examine if there are differences in attitudes toward this violent behavior among adolescents according to gender, and (c) to examine if there are differences in the attitudes toward this violent behavior among adolescents whether or not they are in a dating relationship.

Materials and Method

Participants

By means of incidental sampling, 772 adolescents from the province of Concepción, Chile, were selected. They belonged to 22 educational centers from seventh grade of elementary school to fourth grade of secondary education. Their ages were between 11 and 19, with an average of 14.8 years old ($SD = 1.54$). A total of 330 were between the ages of 11 and 14 years old (42.9%, early adolescents) and 440 between 15 and 19 years old (47.1%, late adolescents). In terms of sex, there were 391 females (50.5%) and 381 males (49.5%). In addition, 516 adolescents (73.1%) were not in a dating relationship, while 190 (26.9%) were.

Measures

The *Scale of Attitudes Towards Intimate Violence* (Vizcarra Larrañaga & Póo Figueroa, 2011) allows researchers to assess justification of violence in couples. It consists of 9 self-report items, with a Likert-type response format of 5 options (*Strongly disagree, Disagree, Indifferent, Agree, Strongly agree*), ranging from 9 to 45 points. This scale has shown adequate psychometric properties in young populations over 17 years old, with a reliability estimated by Cronbach's alpha at .90, and its construct validity has been assessed by expert judges (Vizcarra Larrañaga & Póo Figueroa, 2011). For this research, an adaptation of the original version was made by one of the authors of this study, with expert judgment incorporated, yielding a 12-item Likert-type version. A pilot study was conducted using an online format delivered through social networks (Facebook) with 41 adolescents belonging to urban centers. Also, the *Module of Attitudes Towards Violence* (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2014) was used as a criterion test to assess convergent validity. After piloting, no problems in understanding instructions or contents remained, and it obtained an internal reliability of .837 (Cronbach's alpha) and a convergent validity of .581 (Pearson) for the criterion test (*Module of Attitudes Toward Violence*; UNICEF, 2014). Finally, one of the questions (number 6) was inversely formulated, with the scores ranging between 12 and 60 points.

Procedure

Ethical considerations were taken prior to application of measures and were read by the pedagogical administration of each educational center to approve adequacy of the instrument and allow participation of their students. In addition,

each teenager was informed about the objectives of the study and its ethical aspects, and gave their informed consent (and that of their parents). Contact with teenagers involved in the study was carried out directly by the main investigator or by a collaborator. Participation was voluntary, and application of measures was carried out collectively. There were no rewards for participating.

Data Analysis

The Mann-Whitney U test was used to analyze differences between scores on attitudes toward violence among early and late adolescents, as well as differences between gender and relationship status. The statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Version 19 (IBM, 2010) was used for data processing.

Results

Attitudes Towards Intimate Violence

Table 1 shows average scores for each item and for the overall score of the Scale of Attitudes Towards Intimate Violence, according to stage of adolescence (early or late). As shown, early adolescents showed more favorable attitudes toward violence, reflected on 10 of 12 items of the scale, in contrast with late adolescents.

Comparison of Attitudes Toward Violence Between Early and Late Adolescents

To compare attitudes toward violence between two stages of adolescence (early and late), the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used (see Table 2). As shown, statistically significant differences were found in 6 of 12 items and in the overall score ($U = 59,203.5$; $p \leq .001$).

It was found that early adolescents tend to justify violence more often, when one member of the couple talks too frequently to people of the opposite sex ($p \leq .001$), in couples with low level of education ($p \leq .001$), when one or both of the members experienced child abuse or had seen violence in their family upbringing ($p \leq .043$), when one or both had emotional problems such as impulsivity, anxiety, depression ($p \leq .001$), or when one of the partners refused to engage sexual intercourse ($p \leq .001$). Item 6, "the use of violence is not justified under any circumstances," reaches significance of $p \leq .025$. This inversely recoded item shows that early adolescents justify violence more than late adolescents under some circumstances.

Table 1. Average Scores (From 1 to 5 According to Increasing Degrees of Agreement) in Each of the Items and in the Total Score on the Scale of Attitudes Towards Intimate Violence, According to Stage of Adolescence (Early or Late).

	Early Adolescents		Late Adolescents		Total	SD	Kurtosis
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
1. When a member of the couple is unfaithful	1.60	0.92	2.50	0.88	1.50	0.90	3.21
2. When a member of the couple talks too often to people of the opposite sex	2.00	1.11	-0.87	0.96	1.90	1.04	-0.45
3. When a member of the couple makes the other one feel uncomfortable or embarrassed in front of people (e.g., common friends)	1.60	0.98	2.27	0.80	1.50	0.88	2.99
4. When a member of the couple makes the other one feel uncomfortable or embarrassed in front of their family	1.50	0.93	2.90	0.85	1.50	0.89	3.06
5. When a member of the couple insults the other one	1.60	1.01	2.61	0.91	1.60	0.95	3.22
6. The use of violence is not justifiable under any circumstance ^a	2.50	1.69	-1.40	1.57	2.30	1.63	-1.10
7. In couples having a low level of education	1.80	0.95	.23	0.93	1.70	0.94	1.23
8. When one or both members of the couple had experienced child abuse or had witnessed violence in the family where they were raised during childhood	1.60	0.94	1.99	0.90	1.60	0.92	2.38
9. When one of the members of the couple has emotional problems, such as impulsivity, anxiety, or depression	1.90	0.98	0.22	0.91	1.80	0.95	0.66
10. When one of the members of the couple drinks too much alcohol, or they are on drugs	1.60	1.12	1.94	0.93	1.60	1.02	2.64
11. When one of the members of the couple refuses to engage sexual intercourse	1.90	1.16	-0.13	0.97	1.70	1.07	0.97
12. When one of the two members of the couple is frequently jealous and manipulative toward the other one	1.60	0.97	2.47	0.84	1.60	0.90	2.96
Total score	21.00	7.18	1.03	7.01	19.90	7.14	1.43

^aItem number 6 has been inversely recoded to maintain sense of the scale, that is, the higher the score, greater justification of violence.

Table 2. Comparison of Means of Scores on the Attitude Scale to Violence, by Stage of Adolescence (Early or Late).

Items	Sampled Adolescents	n	Range	Media	SD	U	p																																																																																																																																																									
1. When a member of the couple is unfaithful	Early	327	388.10	1.6	0.920	69,944	.511																																																																																																																																																									
	Late	438	379.19	1.5	0.881			2. When a member of the couple talks too often to people of the opposite sex	Early	328	418.87	2.0	1.110	59,902.5	≤.001	Late	437	356.08	1.7	0.964	3. When a member of the couple makes the other one feel uncomfortable or embarrassed in front of people (e.g., common friends)	Early	327	391.87	1.6	0.980	68,712	.258	Late	438	376.38	1.5	0.803	4. When a member of the couple makes the other one feel uncomfortable or embarrassed in front of their family	Early	329	386.90	1.5	0.933	71,097	.704	Late	438	381.82	1.5	0.852	5. When a member of the couple insults the other one	Early	322	382.80	1.6	1.014	67,846.5	.497	Late	432	373.55	1.5	0.905	6. The use of violence is not justifiable under any circumstance ^a	Early	316	392.44	2.5	1.689	61,956.5	≤.05	Late	430	359.58	2.2	1.568	7. In couples having a low level of education	Early	315	405.54	1.8	0.949	57,475.5	≤.001	Late	430	349.16	1.6	0.929	8. When one or both members of the couple had experienced child abuse or had witnessed violence in the family where they were raised during childhood	Early	325	394.90	1.6	0.936	65,034	≤.05	Late	432	367.04	1.5	0.900	9. When one of the members of the couple has emotional problems, such as impulsivity, anxiety, or depression	Early	325	409.56	1.9	0.980	60,592.5	≤.001	Late	433	356.94	1.7	0.907	10. When one of the members of the couple drinks too much alcohol, or they are on drugs	Early	329	384.50	1.6	1.121	70,898	.790	Late	435	380.98	1.5	0.931	11. When one of the members of the couple refuses to engage sexual intercourse	Early	327	420.35	1.9	1.158	58,091	≤.001	Late	434	351.35	1.5	0.973	12. When one of the two members of the couple is frequently jealous and manipulative toward the other one	Early	325	389.88	1.6	0.969	66,013.5	.124	Late	430	369.02	1.5	0.838	Total score	Early	330	426.10	2.10	7.182	59,203.5	≤.001	Late	440
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	Late	430	359.58	2.2	1.568			7. In couples having a low level of education	Early	315	405.54	1.8	0.949	57,475.5	≤.001	Late	430	349.16	1.6	0.929	8. When one or both members of the couple had experienced child abuse or had witnessed violence in the family where they were raised during childhood	Early	325	394.90	1.6	0.936	65,034	≤.05	Late	432	367.04	1.5	0.900	9. When one of the members of the couple has emotional problems, such as impulsivity, anxiety, or depression	Early	325	409.56	1.9	0.980	60,592.5	≤.001	Late	433	356.94	1.7	0.907	10. When one of the members of the couple drinks too much alcohol, or they are on drugs	Early	329	384.50	1.6	1.121	70,898	.790	Late	435	380.98	1.5	0.931	11. When one of the members of the couple refuses to engage sexual intercourse	Early	327	420.35	1.9	1.158	58,091	≤.001	Late	434	351.35	1.5	0.973	12. When one of the two members of the couple is frequently jealous and manipulative toward the other one	Early	325	389.88	1.6	0.969	66,013.5	.124	Late	430	369.02	1.5	0.838	Total score	Early	330	426.10	2.10	7.182	59,203.5	≤.001	Late	440	355.05	1.9	7.014																																																														
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^aItem number 6 has been inversely recoded to maintain sense of the scale, that is, the higher the score, greater justification of violence. Note: p values ≤.05 or ≤.001 are in bold faced.

Sex Comparison

In the comparison of sex using the Mann-Whitney U test, statistically significant differences were found only in item 6 (recoded inversely): “the use of violence is not justified under any circumstances,” in favor of males ($p \leq .001$).

Dating/No Dating Comparison

In the comparison of dating/no dating using the Mann-Whitney U test, statistically significant differences were found in only 2 items (see Table 3): Item 1 = “When one of the members of the couple drinks too much alcohol or they are on drugs” and 2 = “When one of the members of the couple refuses to engage sexual intercourse,” in favor of those who are not in a relationship ($p \leq .05$).

Discussion

The present investigation found more favorable attitudes toward violence in early adolescents than in late ones. In statistical comparison, these more favorable attitudes were found in 6 of 12 items included in the *Attitudes Towards Intimate Violence Scale*, and in the overall score.

This finding is in line with evidence provided by many authors in the last two decades about the statement that couple violence decreases with age (Archer & Haigh, 1997; Carlson, 1999; Nabors et al., 2006; Simon et al., 2001; Straus, Kantor, & Moore, 1997). However, these studies were, in most cases, developed with adult samples, and, therefore, cannot be linearly extrapolated to an adolescent population. Exceptions to this trend are the studies conducted by W. L. Johnson, Giordano, Manning, and Longmore (2015), which consider ages between 13 and 28 years. The authors found that perpetration of partner violence begin to decrease in the 20-year-old subgroup, after an increase in adolescence. However, Garaigordobil, Aliri, and Martínez-Valderrey (2013) observed a decrease in justification as age progressed in their study of 1,423 adolescents from 11 to 17.

Higher justification of TRV in early adolescents must be analyzed from the perspective of cognitive development and advances in moral values that are expected to occur from one stage of adolescence to the next, given that it is possible that certain levels of moral development are more likely to occur at certain ages (Fraedrich et al., 1994). Thus, it would be expected that early adolescents have a more concrete morality, close to stage 3, which is characterized, among other aspects, by an interest in matters that benefit others or are rejected by them, so a strong influence of peer groups would be expected. In late adolescence, closer to stage 4, interest in fulfillment of social norms is consolidated, as more abstract principles that regulate social life take place.

Table 3. Comparison of Means of Scores on the Attitude Scale to Violence, Depending If They Are or Not in a Dating Relationship.

Items	Sampled Adolescents	n	Range	Media	SD	U	p
1. When a member of the couple is unfaithful	Not in a dating relationship	516	355,97	1,54	0,892	47,744	.526
	In a dating relationship	190	346,78	1,53	0,941		
2. When a member of the couple talks too often to people of the opposite sex	Not in a dating relationship	516	353,02	1,85	1,047	48,771	.911
	In a dating relationship	190	354,81	1,85	0,994		
3. When a member of the couple makes the other one feel uncomfortable or embarrassed in front of people (e.g., common friends)	Not in a dating relationship	516	359,18	1,59	0,911	46,091	.152
	In a dating relationship	190	338,08	1,47	0,834		
4. When a member of the couple makes the other one feel uncomfortable or embarrassed in front of their family	Not in a dating relationship	518	358,96	1,56	0,937	46,899,5	.249
	In a dating relationship	190	342,34	1,44	0,779		
5. When a member of the couple insults the other one	Not in a dating relationship	508	349,19	1,59	0,964	47,401	.861
	In a dating relationship	188	346,63	1,56	0,954		
6. The use of violence is not justifiable under any circumstance ^a	Not in a dating relationship	507	348,86	2,32	1,627	43,167	.242
	In a dating relationship	180	330,32	2,18	1,591		
7. In couples having a low level of education	Not in a dating relationship	502	346,25	1,70	0,943	45,303	.583
	In a dating relationship	185	337,88	1,66	0,948		
8. When one or both members of the couple had experienced child abuse or had witnessed violence in the family where they were raised during childhood	Not in a dating relationship	510	352,61	1,60	0,902	46,351,5	.436
	In a dating relationship	188	341,05	1,57	0,942		
9. When one of the members of the couple has emotional problems, such as impulsivity, anxiety, or depression	Not in a dating relationship	511	356,73	1,81	0,979	44,595	.113
	In a dating relationship	188	331,71	1,66	0,871		
10. When one of the members of the couple drinks too much alcohol or they are on drugs	Not in a dating relationship	516	364,28	1,65	1,065	42,939	≤.05
	In a dating relationship	189	322,19	1,42	0,917		
11. When one of the members of the couple refuses to engage sexual intercourse	Not in a dating relationship	515	360,62	1,74	1,074	43,457	≤.05
	In a dating relationship	187	326,39	1,59	1,076		
12. When one of the two members of the couple is frequently jealous and manipulative toward the other one	Not in a dating relationship	511	352,12	1,58	0,936	46,441	.504
	In a dating relationship	187	342,35	1,50	0,845		
Total score	Not in a dating relationship	519	364,74	20,25	7,332	45,286	.06
	In a dating relationship	192	332,36	18,98	6,755		

^aItem number 6 has been inversely recoded to maintain sense of the scale, that is, the higher the score, greater justification of violence.

Note. p values ≤.05 or ≤.001 are in bold faced.

When responses are analyzed by stage of adolescence, early adolescents justify violence when a member of the couple talks too frequently to people of the opposite sex, in couples with low level of education, when one or both had experienced child abuse or had witnessed violence in their family during childhood, when one or both had emotional problems such as impulsiveness, anxiety, depression, or when one partner refuses to engage sexual intercourse. So, they were prone to agree that there would be certain circumstances in which violence could be justified.

Talking to people of the opposite sex was declared as a focus of tension in early adolescence, to the extent that complex dynamics associated with influence of peer group are generated. In summary, the balance between the value of friendship in highly valued broad groups, and emerging love relationships is an intense focus of conflict (Roth & Parker, 2001). In contrast, a greater passive acceptance of stereotypes such as the victim “causes” the aggression has been described as apparent in children (Graham-Bermann & Brescoll, 2000), and it would involve some behaviors stated above, considered as justifications by the participants. For example, Fosco, DeBoard, and Grych (2007) reported that children who had witnessed violence between parents consider, according to their explanations, that the perpetrator has temporarily lost control, that the partner provoked the perpetrator in some way, that the victim refused to do something that the aggressor wanted, that alcohol had generated it, or even that there were particular characteristics—impossible to be managed—inside the aggressor, that had caused the violence episode. This could also be associated with findings that maintain that from earlier stages such as preschool, children who are exposed to violence between parents develop distorted views about acceptance of violence, and start to believe that it is a usual behavior, justifiable, and often the only way to solve problems (Howell, Miller, & Graham-Bermann, 2012; Jouriles et al., 2012; Miller, Gorman-Smith, Sullivan, Orpinas, & Simon, 2009). Even though these studies are contextualized in families where children have witnessed violence among their parents, these data are consistent with the findings of the present research.

Following this line of analysis, two additional important elements are combined, related to item, “the use of violence is not justified under any circumstances,” recoded inversely, and, therefore, implying acceptance of some hypothetical circumstances where violence would be admissible. In the first place, there is evidence that young children may have a greater tendency to view aggression as an acceptable way to solve disagreements than older children (Fosco et al., 2007; Graham-Bermann & Brescoll, 2000), who in turn are more able to solve social problems and conflicts with socially acceptable means. Second, even though children are taught from an early age to not hurt others and to criticize the use of violence, they admit exceptions when violence

is legitimate or justifiable: when the aggressor has been harmed by the victim or partner (Fosco et al., 2007). Late adolescents, however, are able to be more critical, as they are in a better position to accept certain abstract universal principles that regulate social life: Use of violence toward the partner is not justifiable under any circumstance. However, it is reasonable to expect that early adolescents with higher levels of favorable attitudes toward violence will move to late adolescence as an at-risk population, for they can consolidate some of the justifications or explanations generated in previous stages, so it would be important to focus on prevention programs for this particular age group.

In relation to differences according to sex, there was slightly more support for favorable attitudes toward violence in males only in item 6. This global finding is in line with other research conducted in nonadult populations (Fosco et al., 2007), but against others that find greater justification of violence by male adolescents, compared with female ones (El Abani & Pourmehdi, 2018; Garaigordobil et al., 2013). However, it is important to highlight that item 6, “the use of violence is not justified under any circumstances,” implies an acceptance of violence in certain circumstances. This hypothetical acceptance is in line with the findings of Próspero and Vohra-Gupta (2007) in a mixed-methodology study that supports gender differences: It was found that, facing an analogous situation of violent victimization in courtship, women tended to judge the situation as inappropriate, while men declared themselves more likely to react in a violent way. Also, in an investigation carried out with 1,395 university students of both sexes Ferrer Perez, Bosch Fiol, Ramis Palmer, Torres Espinosa, and Navarro Guzmán (2006) concluded that gender conditioned the beliefs and attitudes of young people toward TRV against women, men being the ones who showed more favorable attitudes. This is related, according to Próspero and Vohra-Gupta (2007), to gender socialization where men are more validated to become violent in response to a hypothetical “provocation” than are women, and associated, according to Ferrer Perez et al. (2006), with high levels of misogyny or acceptance of the traditional stereotype of blaming women for being victims of abuse, or acceptance of violence as an adequate way to solve conflicts so as to minimize perpetrator’s responsibility.

The fact that there are no differences according to sex in the other items of the scale is in accordance with the point of the authors, and associated with an unfinished gender socialization process and, therefore, gender stereotypes, which are found in adulthood, are not fully observed (Stoltz, 2005).

Regarding the findings associated with no statistically significant differences in overall score, depending on whether they were in a relationship or not, should be analyzed in detail. In the first place, for all the variables, the scores were higher for those who are not in a relationship. In other words,

they justified violence to a greater degree. However, it should be noted that most of the participants who are in a relationship are late adolescents (71.4%), and, therefore, it could be the age/stage of adolescence (and not whether or not they are dating) as the factor correlated with the responses. In this way, younger adolescents tend to justify violence more, following the pattern observed in the previous analysis.

Regarding the two items where these differences were significant, justification in a context of refusing to engage in sexual intercourse appeared in the previously mentioned analysis between adolescence stages. The other item, associated with abuse of alcohol or drugs as a justification for violence in adolescents who are not in a relationship, is a new finding not reported in the analysis by stage, and requires a more detailed account.

Mahlstedt and Welsh (2005) found that students did not automatically recognize alcohol as a cause of TRV, but recognized its role when explicitly mentioned. This suggests that alcohol (or drugs) are not perceived linearly as a cause, and there is a cognitive process involved in the attribution. The authors, in addition, reported that alcohol is barely mentioned when participants supplied their own explanations of dating violence. Although adolescents stigmatize alcohol abuse significantly more than the other illnesses (Corrigan et al., 2005), DeBoard-Lucas and Grych (2011) found that in qualitative research with 34 children (ages 7-12), just one of them identified alcohol use as the cause of the violence in their parents' marriage. It follows that explanations about alcohol as a cause of dating violence are used when there is no better explanation, and better reasons are provided by those adolescents who are in a relationship (sex, jealousy, etc.).

If it is considered that most intervention programs are focused on secondary school (Janardhana & Manjula, 2018) and that many TRV patterns begin to manifest before the age of 14, it becomes necessary to understand the particularities of this phenomenon in that age range. In fact, the concept of dating itself may not make sense to a teenager, perhaps being a distinction coming from the world of adult researchers (Glass et al., 2003).

These active processes of meaning, of interpretation of violence, that take place in adolescence (Sanhueza Morales, 2016) and that are influenced by age and by the status of a relationship, will directly influence the intervention that takes place. The importance of considering age to plan a successful intervention is key in an effective approach to this problem, either in terms of what an adolescent considers a relationship or not, or what he or she considers as violence. In the words of Klem, Owens, Ross, Edwards, and Cobia (2009), in the context of improving interventions on TRV, "it can be especially important to investigate if, and how, the meaning changes for an adolescent between early adolescence and late adolescence" (p. 61).

To the extent that early adolescents justify TRV to a greater degree, particular interventions focused on this age group must to be designed with concrete examples and more targeted education, performing activities that will allow them to anticipate situations and show them consequences that will live on in later stages (from a cognitive-behavioral perspective). However, in the case of late adolescents, examples of their own incipient relationships or those of their peer group must be included.

Although it is possible and necessary to specify the role of mediating variables such as the ones mentioned above, or sex or age in attitudes toward TRV, future research should take into account aspects related to normal distribution of the sample, the stratified distribution at different ages (e.g., proportional allocation), and, what is even more fundamental, the nature of variables.

In terms of future research, age, stage of adolescence, and variables of development (e.g., abstract thinking, moral development) are constructs that do not always align univocally: For example, a 14-year-old teenager can reason cognitively or morally equally to a 16-year-old teenager. Thus, it is advisable in the future to incorporate such mediational variables in analysis with ANCOVA or MANCOVA.

Finally, it must be noted that the limitations of this research are the characteristics of the sample and the fact that it was carried out in merely one region of Chile. In addition, only self-report-style measuring instruments were used, with their usual limitations.

Conclusion

This research mainly found,

1. Greater justifying attitudes toward violence in early adolescents than in late adolescents, in 6 of 12 items of the scale, with a statistical significance of $p \leq .001$ in 4 items and in the overall score, and $p \leq .05$ in 2 items.
2. In sex comparison, male adolescents tended to justify violence more than female adolescents did in one of the items of the scale ($p \leq .001$).
3. In the dating/no dating comparison, statistically significant differences were found in only 2 items of the scale, in favor of those who are not in a relationship ($p \leq .05$).

Authors' Note

This research is part of a doctoral thesis for the University of Oviedo, Spain, titled "Aggressiveness, Violence in Dating, Justification of Violence, and Moral Development in Adolescence," which is being developed by one of the authors in Concepción, Chile.

This study aims to contribute toward the understanding of this complex phenomenon occurring in early adolescence.

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