

Relations of power and violence between thesis advisors and tutored students

Relaciones de poder y violencia entre consejeros de tesis y estudiantes de posgrado

Rosalva Ruiz-Ramírez*  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0845-5945>

Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, México, rosalva.ruiz@uas.edu.mx

Emma Zapata-Martelo  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1623-3322>

Colegio de Postgraduados, Estado de México, México, emzapata@colpos.mx

María del Rosario Ayala-Carrillo  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1198-6026>

Colegio de Postgraduados, Estado de México, México, madel@colpos.mx

Original article
language:spanish
Translated by
Luis Cejudo
Espinosa

Author for
correspondence:
Rosalva Ruiz-Ramírez,
rosalva.ruiz@uas.edu.mx

Received:
February 14th, 2022

Approved:
July 08th, 2022

Abstract: The objective is to analyze power relations and violence between thesis advisors and tutored students in a postgraduate institution. The methodology was quantitative; a questionnaire was applied to one hundred students, univariate descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were used. Tutoring professors exercise psychological, social, gender violence, verbal and cybernetic. The consequences are stress, impotence and fear of damage to their academic and research progress. In conclusion, the hypothesis was not rejected because students accept power relations and violent actions from their advisors, finding themselves in a hierarchical and patriarchal power system.

Key words: violence, thesis advisors, scholarship students, hierarchy.

Resumen: El objetivo fue analizar las relaciones de poder y violencia entre consejeros y consejeras de tesis y el estudiantado en una institución de posgrados. La metodología fue cuantitativa, se aplicó un cuestionario a cien estudiantes, se utilizaron estadísticos descriptivos y análisis de correlación. En resultados, los consejeros y las consejeras ejercen violencia psicológica, social, de género, verbal y cibernetica; las consecuencias son: estrés, impotencia y miedo, en perjuicio del progreso académico e investigativo. En conclusión, la hipótesis no se rechazó porque el alumnado acepta las relaciones de poder y las acciones violentas de sus consejeros/as, encontrándose en un sistema de poder jerárquico y patriarcal.

Palabras clave: violencia, consejeros de tesis, estudiantes becarios, jerarquías.



Introduction

Studies on school violence have been carried out in basic, intermediate and higher education institutions. The problem, considered multidimensional, multicausal, structural, grave and full of nuances and subjectivities, has grown in spaces such as these. For Romero and Plata (2015), school violence is present in all schools with no distinction for academic level, regime, modality, context and geographic location. Men and women participate as victims, harassers and witnesses. The main victims are indigenous (Ruiz-Ramírez *et al.*, 2016) and homosexual individuals, as well as women and men who do not follow the compulsory heteronormativity (Peña and López, 2011; Saénz de Tejada, 2019).

School violence is reproduced by structural, cultural, social, familial or personal patterns; likewise, power relations are crossed by power relationships that cause discrimination and various sorts of violences (Zapata-Martelo *et al.*, 2018). In the sphere of universities, school violence is characterized by social and institutional practices which recreate power relations and unavoidably constitute a source of conflict (Carrillo-Meráz, 2015). A problem in the study of school violence is its naturalization and embeddedness in culture because the administrative, academic or student community “normalize” it as acceptable or unavoidable behaviors (Peña and López, 2011; Zapata-Martelo *et al.*, 2018) and consider school violence is part of *habitus*.¹

At university level, Ruiz-Ramírez and Ayala-Carrillo (2016), Mingo and Moreno (2017), Zapata-Martelo *et al.* (2018), and Maceira-Ochoa and Medina-Rosas (2021) report on aggressions via gender (exclusion, discrimination, sexist language and sexual harassment). Zapata-Martelo *et al.* (2018) show that 81.9% of the students has been violated in university. In postgraduate institutions, research works are scarce; only the study by Peña and López (2011) is noticeable; these authors found that violence takes place owing to the supremacy between subordinates (students) and superiors (councilors) and that involves subtle and masked aggressions.

For their part, Méndez-Cadena *et al.* (2016) report open insults, disqualification, verbal aggressions, ironies or threatening body language. Peña and López (2011), and Méndez-Cadena *et al.* (2016) explain that students who receive a scholarship are more

¹ *Habitus* “is an element to recognize the acquisition, transmission, and preservation of culture in time” (Bourdieu, 2000: 28).

vulnerable because subventions are their only economic income and owing to this they do not respond to the aggressions they receive.

Education institutions are recipients of power, they exercise it and domesticate the students; in this way, the students reproduce the actions that subordinate them, recognizing and legitimating the power represented by the institutions. For Hernández *et al.* (2015), and Vázquez-Ramos *et al.* (2021), the school environment is the ideal space to exercise power in an authoritarian manner or by means of sophisticated and subtle mechanisms.

In this regard, Bourdieu (2000: 131) speaks of symbolic power, which "is exercised when power relations are not seen, in all the places of the social body, allowing the powerful to retain such power". People who represent the institution symbolize power (principals, professors and administrative staff). In this regard, Carrillo-Meráz (2015) mentions that at school, professors have the power and they have to be obeyed; students interiorize such domination and abide by the rules, accept the exercise of power as a part of their training and aspire to eventually dominate. In this way, even though they are postgraduate students and professionals, they submit to the power of the institution, exposing themselves to discrimination, domination and violences.

Foucault (1991) states power is built and functions on the basis of multiple factors, which configure relations of actions and intangible wills that are personally and socially interiorized. For Foucault (1999), power incarnates in the bodies of human beings; its visibility or invisibility depends on reasoning, behaviors, gestures, thoughts, representations and the individuals' self-recognition. In like manner, he points that power strategies are imbricated into human relationships, which are multiform and have a conditioning and conditioned role; therefore, power is enigmatic, present and hidden, it is not known who has it, though who does not is. Foucault (1988) considers it is linked to authority and the capabilities and skills of those who exercise. For Castells (2009), power is a relationship in which there is always a greater influence from an actor upon another individual. Segato (2003) explains that power practices have a goal that benefits those who execute them.

Morley (1999) establishes that power relations in institutions occur because the bureaucratic hierarchy visualizes competence, power and domination. The author considers that the exercise of power may be open and recognizable, or complex and confusing; some of its manifestations are: sabotage, manipulation, denial of power, sexual harassment, intimidation, disparaging comments, gossip and sarcasm.

Segato (2003: 107) calls moral violence power relations that are not visible; which entail “the set of mechanisms legitimated by custom to preserve systems that ensure the permanence of hierarchies”. For the author, moral violence is the subtlest and most efficacious instrument to control, dominate and reproduce inequalities; some instances of legitimated mechanisms are: derision, moral coercion, intimidation, censorship of sexuality and devaluation of women (their personalities, labor, psychological and intellectual capabilities as well as moral value are subjugated). In this way, moral violence refers to the oppressive behavior of tutors on the students.

These statements allow approaching power relationships in education institutions, since classrooms represent a small world where teachers and students concur, each with specific functions and different hierarchies, which are established on the basis of an individual that grades, rewards or punishes (Hernández-Méndez, 2006; Maceira-Ochoa and Medina-Rosas (2021). For Foucault (1984), docents exercise power upon students by means of disciplinary strategies such as surveillance, control, discourses, and exams. Hernández-Méndez and Reyes-Cruz (2011) consider that docents exercise power-knowledge, which manifests as control, subordination, domination, and repression.

For Hernández-Méndez (2006), students as a whole have been domesticated for obedience and discipline. Bodies become docile when they are static in the chairs and do not make a sound; moreover, their aligning facilitates a panoptic vision to invigilate. In this regard, surveillance is a strategy of power and is defined as “the gaze that represses and coerces the students’ behavior” (Foucault, 1984: 99). The strategies of power make use of violence, discrimination and domination regardless of schooling level; as Castells (2009) underscores, institutions are the main sources of the reproduction of the hegemonic discourses that maintain power.

Due to the foregoing, and because of a lack of studies at postgraduate level, it is important to research on such level. Therefore, the goal of the article is to analyze power relations and violence between tutors (thesis advisors) and the advised students, in the context of hierarchical relationships, in *Institución de Posgrados en Ciencias Agrícolas*, IPCA [Agricultural Sciences Postgraduate Institution]. The hypothesis is that there are acts of violence in postgraduate levels because the students have a subordinate position whereby they accept power and violence relationships from their tutors, since they are within a hierarchical and patriarchal power system represented by the education institution.

It is important to specify that in the tutor/student relationship, each of them performs various functions. The tutor is the person that guides the students over the entire academic term, coordinates research activities, advises on the draft of the thesis and scientific research articles. Hence, tutors are in charge of formally guiding the students so that they timely and fully cover the curriculum; the institution delegates them this function which places them at a higher hierarchical position. Meanwhile, the students' role is to put forward a research topic, which has to be approved by the tutor; they also have to satisfactorily perform their studies so that they are eligible to receive (in Mexico) a scholarship from *Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología*, Conacyt [National Council for Science and Technology].

Materials and methods

To meet the stated goal, a nonexperimental qualitative research with descriptive and correlational scope was carried out.

Population and sample. The population was 663 students enrolled in 16 programs of Master and Doctorate in Sciences, which are comprised in *Programa Nacional de Posgrados de Calidad*, PNPC [Quality Postgraduate National Program], in *Institución de Posgrados en Ciencias Agrícolas*, IPCA, located in eastern State of Mexico. The sample was non-probabilistic, it comprised one hundred students (52 men, 48 women) and was not balanced regarding gender because the sex of the participant individuals was not controlled, as the students collaborated voluntarily. The students' age ranged between 23 and 47 years of age.

Instrument to gather data. The information was obtained by means of a self-produced questionnaire with 44 questions (24 closed, 8 open, 5 multiple option, and 7 on a Likert scale) and was divided into five sections: 1 – Socio-academic data; 2 – School violence before postgraduate studies; 3 – Violence in postgraduate studies; 4 – Violence between nonpeers; 5 – Violence between peers. The present article is a product of a broader study, here we only present information regarding power relations between nonpeers, specifically, tutors and students who received advice.

For reliability, the questionnaire was submitted to be revised by experts in violences, harassment, gender, and education, for content validation contrasting goals and items. Later on, a pilot test was run with 10 students, who suggested changes in the drafting; finally, a Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis was carried out and produced 0.822 out of a maximum value of 1, which, according to Hernández-Sampieri *et al.* (2014), is reliable.

Data collection process. The research was transactional because the questionnaire was self-applied from July 2nd – 27th, 2018, in various places of IPCA (libraries, cafeteria, study rooms, gardens, classrooms, greenhouses, and stables); it lasted from 15 to 20 minutes, and the confidentiality of the information gathered was ensured.

Data analysis process. Univariate descriptive statistics and Spearman correlation analysis (0.05%) were utilized on Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, 2016) version 24. The answers to the open questions underwent a hermeneutic analysis and the results are shown as testimonies, which do not mention the students' names to respect confidentiality.

After applying the questionnaires (July 2018), their compiling and processing and also drafting the article were carried out as of August 2021 because of two reasons: 1) from 2019 and up to June 2020, work was carried out for another research, the doctorate thesis of the first author; and 2) from July 2020 to May 2021, work was paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Results and discussion

Out of the one hundred surveyed students, 79% has a male tutor and 21%, a female one. Table 1² shows the relationships established between thesis advisors and the students in academic life activities.

The students indicate that their tutors frequently treat them well (69%), are kind (64%) and patient (63%), qualities the tutors need so that the students meet the learning and research objectives.

However, 49% of the students states that their advisors are not tolerant (30%, occasionally; 13%, seldom; and, 6%, always); so is expressed in a testimony: "little tolerant, doesn't accept my mistakes". Likewise, 37% of tutors is not patient with students (23%, occasionally; 9%, rarely; and, 5%, never); 36% is not kind (22%, on occasion; 12%, rarely; and, 2%, never); 31% does not treat students well (24%, on occasion; 5%, rarely; and, 2%, never).

Mistreatment is attributed to the bad mood of the tutor, as a female student wrote: "I've been told off, he treats me badly because of his mood and problems". 52% of the tutors does not respect the students (13% mentions they rarely respect their opinions; 34%, occasionally; and, 5%, never). 43% of the students feels their tutors do not listen to them because they are working on their own academic projects and do not consider what students need. Owing to this, the students' stance is subordinated, submitted and obedient.

2 All Tables are at the end of the article in Annex.

Peña and López (2011), and Curiel *et al.* (2019) concur with the above, as they point out that violent relationships between professors and young adults are characterized by a discriminatory and prejudicial coexistence devoid of respect, which produces academic, mental and psychosomatic affectations.

An important aspect that contributes to the control of students is the economy; particularly, keeping the economic support from Conacyt as well as other institutional supports such as the annual IPCA support for the tutor to transfer to the students to use it on their projects; 10,000 MXN for Master degree, and 15,000 MXN for doctorate. 11% comments that their tutor never gives them any money; 10%, rarely; and, 17%, occasionally. That is to say, some tutors do not deliver such support because they spend it on their own research projects or on their participation in congresses.

The postgraduate programs that largely deny budget are Botany and Genetics, as expressed by two students: "He doesn't deliver the research budget"; "he tells us we don't need it, that's our scholarship for". 62% of the students does receive such resource, and the program in which this resource is delivered the most is Entomology and Acarology. As observed, not only do professors have academic control over the students, but also economic; which means, that indirectly, they also control other aspects of the students' personal life such as support and maintenance. Professors know this and use the economic factor as an element of control and exercise of power.

As regards the academic aspect, at postgraduate level, the publication of an article that comes from a thesis research is required, and although it is part of the training, it is an element of prestige because it means it may be the beginning of recognition in the field of study; i.e., it means power. In this regard, 24% of the respondents stated that their tutors never give them due credit as main authors (4%), rarely (7%), and occasionally (13%). Despite the students carry out all the fieldwork or in laboratory, gather, capture, analyze the information and draft an article, the advisers downplay such arduous tasks. A female student expresses this as: "My tutor told me: I decided to be the main author because you drafted poorly and I had to redo it'. She did not consider that I invested time and money on the fieldwork, nor all that I had written and captured".

Tutors have to accompany the student, and together they have to develop, draft, correct, and publish the articles; in this way, they nurture and develop the abilities of future researchers. This problem was exposed more frequently by students in the postgraduate courses of Livestock

Rearing, Phytopathology and Water Sciences. 14% of the students did not answer this question, as they have not written a research article yet.

As regards lectures presented at national or international congresses, 31% mentions that their authorship is recognized (2%, never; 5%, rarely; and, 24%, on occasion). A female student wrote: "My tutor became the single author because I couldn't go to the congress I have neither passport nor money".

This testimony shows that some advisers take advantage of the economic lacks of their students and take their research credits. Such circumstances occur more frequently in Livestock Rearing, Phytopathology and Water Sciences. It is worth pointing out that 18 students did not answer these questions as they have not reached this stage in their research projects.

In this regard, Foucault (1991) mentions that knowledge transmitted has a sense of repression and exclusion. From this standpoint, the tutors possess knowledge, experience, prestige, economic resources and institutional recognition, which the students do not have; therefore, power is in the hands of the professors and students have to submit.

The responding students (52%) expressed that their tutors deliver their observations and correction to their works in time; distinguishable in the sample are tutors from Forest Sciences and Water Sciences. For its part, 48% of the students mentioned that observations and corrections are not timely delivered, and they have to constantly insist in order to carry on with their research works. It was thus expressed by a male student: "he never has time for my work". This testimony was repeated on a number of occasions by Biology and Phytopathology students. Likewise, two students expressed: "doesn't show interest nor pays due attention to my research"; "doesn't have time for me because [the tutor] has a post in the institution". Because of this, 42% of the students feels their tutors are not available when they ask for help; such cases frequently occur in Phytopathology and Livestock Rearing.

The negative evaluation of the tutors' daily academic activities is that they perform multiple tasks: teaching, tutoring, having bureaucratic activities, holding chair positions, reviewing articles and projects, conducting their own research, and lacking empathy and teaching-learning strategies. All of the above diminishes their human quality and performance as tutors; owing to this, it is fundamental they receive training in teaching strategies, learning styles, empathy, values, time management, among others.

Likewise, it was found that 46% of male and 14% of female tutors impose their criteria in research topics, mainly in Livestock Rearing, Phytopathology and Water Sciences; two students expressed as follows: "he is very prepotent and wants to do what he wants with my research"; "the tutor imposes his research agenda and blocks my potential as a young researcher".

The advisers are figures of power in the institution and subject the students not only because of what they represent as professors, but because they are nationally and internationally recognized; they project their power upon their tutored and impose all manner of demands and pressures on them during the lessons, research and personal time; that is to say, they do not let them enroll to the courses they need or change their research topics. Two students expressed: "My tutor told me to chose another place for my research; or else, to look for another tutor". "He wants me to take the course of... so a friend doesn't lose that course". According to Segato (2003) and Varela (2020), the exercise of power does not imply impetuous actions, but behaviors with pretensions of legitimacy to preserve the hierarchical order of the system.

Adding to the above, 56% of the students states (22% rarely; 14% occasionally; and, 20% frequently) that their tutors demand they work on days off, on vacation, and at weekends. One student wrote: "They want to control you because you're a fulltime student". In this context, being a fulltime student is to be enrolled in one of the *Programas Nacionales de Posgrado de Calidad*, PNPC [National Programs for Quality Postgraduate Studies], which means commitment and exclusive dedication (i.e., no paid activities); however, a female student declared: "Tutors believe being fulltime [student] is being available 365 days a year", therefore, power relations and hierarchy are heavily marked. According to Peña and López (2011, and Méndez-Cadena *et al.* (2016), students that hold a Conacyt scholarship –for fears of losing the economic support– are vulnerable to suffering power relationships that imply violence. The postgraduate courses with the highest valuation are Livestock Rearing and Phytopathology

Power relationships and violence

Some of the actions performed by tutors on the postgraduate students are framed in the exercise of the power that dominates, subordinates and discriminates; this is why they frequently resort to symbolic, moral and

direct violence. Their aggressions are under the cover of the legitimate power represented by professors and the very patriarchal institutional structure they represent.

In this regard, Table 2 shows that 39% of the postgraduate students (21% men and 18% women) considers being victims of various sorts of aggressions by their male (31%) and female (8%) tutors. The result concurs with reports at university level by Zapata-Martelo *et al.* (2018) that state violence is intra- and inter-gender, men and women partake as victims and/or harassers. Out of the 39% of the victims, 23% was reading for a master, while 16%, for doctorate.

The highest violence levels were in postgraduate studies on Livestock Rearing (7%) and Phytopathology (5%). Students in Applied Computing and Statistics do not perceive aggressions. Data on violence can be a “dark figure” because the percentage of victims might be greater, due to the subjectivities and “normalization” of violent practices, deemed acceptable or inevitable by some people, as pointed out by Peña and López (2011), and Maceira-Ochoa and Medina-Rosas (2021).

Aggressions inside the institution take place because the prevailing culture expresses forms of relating that potentiate and trigger conflicts, supports the existence of authoritarian environments; adding to discrimination, prejudice, gender stereotypes that contribute to reproduce and perpetuate violence, which concurs with reports by Peña and López (2011), and Vázquez-Ramos *et al.* (2021).

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ($\alpha = 0.05$), with high significance, defined that female tutors attack more male students ($\text{Rho}=-0.212$, $\text{P-value}=0.035$). we agree with Trujano *et al.* (2010) on the fact that women who live or lived violent relationships turn their anger on a man with less power; another reason is the sorority generated among women, who support and defend one another from men's aggressions.

In the face of these results, it is worth mentioning Castells (2009) and Varela (2020), who state that the exercise of violence is a weapon of power. In this way, tutors exercise violence because they have the power while students do not. In this regard, Table 3 presents the students' perception of the frequency with which their tutors attack them.

Psychological aggressions

Psychological aggressions are the most received by the students at postgraduate levels; they are the main method to subordinate and

intimidate because while physical aggression is easy to identify, psychological is indirect and underhand, as mentioned by Segato (2003).

The main manifestation of psychological violence is that 66% of the tutors are constantly upset by their students. Two students told: "gets angry often, and those close pay the price"; "gets angry because I'm talkative and have friends; [the tutor] says I waste my time with them, and told me not to hang out with them, it even seems like jealousy". The postgraduate courses with the most easily-angered tutors are Livestock Rearing and Phytopathology.

Likewise, 37% of the tutors make negative comparisons between students, they privilege the qualities of some and deprecate others' work; here come into play ridicule, intimidation, and other aggressive expressions which generate negative competition and rivalries between students. The postgraduate courses with most comparisons are Livestock Rearing, Water Sciences, and Phytopathology.

A percentage of 24 of the students feels underappreciated, mainly in Livestock rearing and Phytopathology. Two students stated: "My work is unappreciated"; "there is constant contempt and it gets me down". Advisors look over their shoulders to demonstrate and affirm their power, authority and command on the students, which is detrimental to psychological, social, and academic development. 23% of the students considers their tutors attack them psychologically. Those who receive these attacks the most are in Agro-ecology and Sustainability, Phytopathology and Livestock Rearing. According to Segato (2003), psychological aggressions produce academic and social control and reproduce inequalities.

Social aggressions

Forty-three percent of the students states that tutors have favorites; which Segato (2003) calls "the demoralization of the minorized". The largest number of cases were students of Livestock Rearing, Rural Development, and Botany. Favoritism is noticed because they underscore their partners' qualities, while they had their flaws exposed. According to Segato (2003), subordinates become vulnerable if they are denied their self-confidence and daily harming their self-esteem. Favoritism hinders regular school coexistence and collaborative work, permeates the existence of a number of conflicts between students out of envy for the preferred ones.

Likewise, 35% of the students feel excluded by the tutor, with higher intensity in Botany, Livestock Rearing, and Rural Development; 32%, isolated, mainly in Livestock Rearing and Phytopathology. A male student wrote: "I feel isolated, the professor ignores me, doesn't include me in the activities". Other aggressive relationships are reported by 34% of the students, basically in Agroecology and Sustainability, Botany, and Entomology and Acarology, for they comment their tutors gave them unrelated tasks. On occasion, they have to perform the functions of secretaries, messengers, errand-runners, drivers, which entail work and less time for academic and research activities.

Fourteen percent of the postgraduate students expressed there is discrimination, mainly by tutors in Rural Development, Livestock Rearing, and Water Sciences. Discrimination takes place around three lines: 1) sexual preference [a male student commented: "mocks at a transgender, and even refused to be the tutor, the student was discriminated"]; 2) gender [a female student said: "I'm discriminated because I'm a woman and single mom"]; and, 3) being indigenous [a student expressed: "I get discriminated because I'm an indigenous individual, makes me feel inferior"]. This testimony concurs with Ruiz-Ramírez *et al.* (2016), as regards that "being an indigenous" is a source of discrimination, based on stereotypes and prejudices.

For two years in master and four in doctorate, tutors are in control of the students' academic and research lives; they exercise their power through pressure, discrimination or academic support, and though it depends on them that people finish their courses timely, occasionally tutors take advantage of such power to execute various sorts of violence naturally and daily.

Spearman correlation analysis ($\alpha = 0.05$) did not show any significant difference by gender in social aggressions; in this way, there is disagreement with Méndez-Cadena *et al.* (2016), Mingo and Moreno (2017), and Curiel *et al.* (2019), who point out that women are the main victims of social aggressions such as discrimination and exclusion.

In the present research, men and women are victims of exclusion, discrimination and isolation due to the subjectivity of the tutors, who consider that their tutored do not meet the *ideal characteristics* (intelligence, ingenuity, responsibility, English language command, among others). A testimony expressed: "my tutor attacks me and isolates me as I don't meet the academic expectations".

Verbal abuse

Table 3 shows that 39% of the students point out that their tutors made them afraid with their comments. Two students wrote: “threatens me saying he will no longer be my tutor”; “told me I wasn’t graduating if I didn’t return an equipment, which according to him, I stole, then he found it and didn’t even apologize”; postgraduate courses with the most verbal abuse are Phytopathology and Livestock Rearing. By means of threatening comments, the tutors communicate their authoritarianism; impose their rules, minimize the students’ contributions and feelings, coerce communication, learning processes and academic achievements, which concurs with Reyes *et al.* (2018). According to Carrillo-Meráz (2015), symbolic violence is exercised on the students, which accept the exercise of power and do not resist.

Twenty-nine percent of the students expressed that their tutors yell at them. Two studies commented: “yells at me in irrelevant arguments”; “I’ve been told off, shouted at, or ungrounded scolding out of place”. Most of the tutors who behave like this belongs to Livestock rearing and Rural Development. According to Peña and López (2011), shouts are the manifestation of asymmetric power relations, between tutors and students, it is a usual and “normal” attack, socially accepted because it is in the *habitus*.

The respondents said that their male tutors (19%) and female tutors (7%) laugh at them; this is more often reported in Livestock rearing and Phytopathology. A female student expressed “my [male] tutor mocks of my personal appearance, he is very misogynistic”. According to Ruiz-Ramírez *et al.* (2020), mockery on the basis of physical characters is a consequence of the colonial power because colonialists coded their phenotypic features of domination within the Eurocentric hegemony (white / tall / fit); and people who do not match these stereotyped characteristics of beauty are attacked. Moreover, the students comment that male (18%) and female tutors (6%) are aggressive, which is supported on their authoritarian and academic power; this concurs with Peña and López (2011), Hernández *et al.* (2015), and Reyes *et al.* (2018). The institution has conferred them power from the hierarchical structure and from the domination they exercise on the students.

The students reported offences (21%) mainly from tutors in Water Sciences, Livestock Rearing and Rural Development, who consciously or unconsciously express comments that damage their self-perception. Some

testimonies are: “offends us for not working fast, and not knowing the right answers”. “I’m attacked according to the tutor, because of the poor quality of my work”; “I’m attacked because of my ethnicity”. One of the causes of the offences are the ideas and subjectivities of the tutor, based on academic performance, as they want to have excellent students, and if the students do not meet such expectations, tutors attack them, but they do not incentivize them to improve their performance.

Particularly, indigenous students are targets for insults, discrimination, mistreatment and contempt. Some testimonies ratify this: “I have witnessed verbal and psychological abuse, linked to ethnicity”; “tutors attack because of the ethnical background”; “my [female] tutor attacks me because I’m indigenous”. Discrimination against indigenous students reproduces and consolidates the chains of social inequality and intolerance toward ethnicity, which concurring with Ruiz-Ramírez *et al.* (2016), are based on racism, with which rejection and offense to indigenous people are justified. According to Segato (2003), racism becomes visible as a result of the addition of quotidian actions of discrimination and moral violence.

Sixteen percent of the students is attacked with insults; this situation takes place more often in Rural Development and Water Sciences and the following quotations attest to it: “my tutor insults me because I don’t know the answers to her questions”. Insults come because the tutors try to show that their knowledge is above the students’ and thus reaffirm their position of power. By contrast to Peña and López (2011), and Méndez-Cadena *et al.* (2016), who mention that the most frequent aggressions are insults, in this research it was found that psychological (constantly angry) and social (favoritism) aggressions were the most recurrent.

Spearman’s correlation analysis ($\alpha = 0.05$), with high significance, defined that female tutors largely insult male students ($\text{Rho}=0.225$, $\text{P-value}=0.024$). a student commented, “She tells me off rudely, insults me, despises me and takes her personal problems off on me”. This result concurs with Trujano *et al.* (2010), who ascertained that women discharge their anger on men with less power. Some factors that influence the construction and reproduction of aggressions between hierarchies are individual characteristics such as class, ethnicity, race, age, gender, sexual preference, which agrees with Ruiz-Ramírez *et al.* (2016).

Aggressions by gender

Sexual aggressions are one the most common manifestations of power relationships within gender hierarchies. Male (20%) and female (3%) tutors, mainly in Botany and Phytopathology, tell the students not to have a partner or become pregnant over the term. A student expresses: “the tutors do not let them have a partner or become pregnant because that is a waste of time and I won’t graduate in time”; “I was assigned to a female tutor who rejected me because I was pregnant and had to leave for a term”. The tutors take undue attributions, supposedly with a view to keeping their students on the academic goals, therefore, they influence their private life and affect their rights to freely decide on parenthood and marital life.

At master and doctorate levels, male (19%) and female tutors (3%) make sexist comments to male (6%) and female (12%) students, mainly in Botany and Water Sciences. Some female students pointed out: “he makes sexist comments”; “he tells me I shouldn’t study in a male postgraduate course”; “he makes Machista comments”. There is agreement with Méndez-Cadena *et al.* (2016), Curiel *et al.* (2019), and Vázquez-Ramos *et al.* (2021) in which men, mainly, have androcentric and patriarchal attitudes.

Table 3 indicates that 59% of the tutors, to a greater extent in Statistics and Fruit Farming, do not use inclusive language during the lesson or in public. By speaking in masculine, they reproduce the existing inequality between men and women, as it makes women invisible and excludes them. As stated by Méndez-Cadena *et al.* (2016), Mingo and Moreno (2017), and Maceira-Ochoa and Medina-Rosas (2021), we live in a sexist society that teaches and promotes inequalities, in which nonexclusive gender language is unconsciously learnt, supporting a discourse that supports patriarchy and is part of structural violence.

Seven female and two male IPCA students confess that their tutors harass them sexually. Postgraduate courses where this takes place are: Entomology and Acarology, Water Sciences, Livestock Rearing, Economy and Phytopathology. These are some testimonies: “he’s overcontrolling, pressures me, harasses me with his sexual innuendos”; “he tells me his sexual innuendos, but I just do as if I didn’t listen, I’m not gay”. Such situation concurs with reports from Méndez-Cadena *et al.* (2016), and Zapata-Martelo *et al.* (2018), who state that sexual harassment affects both genders. However, women are the main victims, which is “an open secret”, which the school community denies and hides. According to Ruiz-Ramírez and Ayala-Carrillo (2016), Mingo and Moreno (2017), and Zapata-Martelo *et*

al. (2018), sexual harassment is a social practice of patriarchy, in which women are considered sexual objects and can be harassed and degraded. These aggressions are grave and, according to Rovetto and Figueroa (2017), and Vázquez-Ramos *et al.* (2021), produce “intellectual insecurity” because they condition the human potential of female students.

As stated by Ruiz-Ramírez and Ayala-Carrillo (2016), and Maceira-Ochoa and Medina-Rosas (2021), sexual harassment is one of the most harmful and widespread gender violence actions in universities; and, in this research it is noticed at postgraduate levels. Therefore, there is agreement with Rovetto and Figueroa (2017), and Maceira-Ochoa and Medina-Rosas (2021) on the visualization of gender violence, as well as measuring and understanding it with a view to being able to banish androcentric and heteropatriarchal ideologies such as those supported in IPCA.

Spearman’s correlation analysis ($\alpha=0.05$) was highly significant as regards female students are the main victims of sexist comments ($\text{Rho}=0.281$, $\text{P-value}=0.005$) for they contest the spaces deemed masculine, which concurs with Méndez-Cadena *et al.* (2016), and Vázquez-Ramos *et al.* (2021). The stereotype that women shall not study because of their reproductive role, mother and wife, is reinforced, and that is the reason for receiving sexist comments that devalue, exclude and subordinate them, as argued by Mingo and Moreno (2017).

After such analysis, it is stated that tutors take advantage of their hierarchy to maintain the gender order in academic and research interactions; in them, the patriarchal ideology that exposes sexism in postgraduate studies prevails.

Cyber aggressions

The various sources of social power —violence, intimidation, persuasion and domination— changed with the use of the Internet, and have taken form in the spheres of power in the network-society. According to Castells (2009), from such society violence is exercised. In the present study, it was found that two students were attacked by their tutors over the Internet. A student wrote: “he sends me threatening emails, with a lot of demands to draft articles; when I saw one of his mails, I got belly and headaches, I was afraid of opening them”. This sort of aggression harms the victim even further because of the possibility of experiencing it at any place and time.

The students experience the tutors' power of domination, as it transgresses and limits their opportunities for integral development. In this case, between the dominator and dominated because the former has the power of evaluation, which is vital for postgraduate students. In the face of this circumstance, personally and academically surviving entails the students' submission.

Consequences of power relations and violence

Power relationships and violence at master and doctorate levels have a number of consequences; 8% of the respondents expressed academic stress. A male student pointed out: "I pressure myself a lot to please the tutor". This information is important because there are reports of student suicides due to stress, as it was the case in *Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México* [Technological Autonomous Institute of Mexico] (Expansión política, 2019). According to Vázquez-Ramos *et al.* (2021), other consequences are interrelated and increase the risk of suicide with sadness (2%) and depression (2%).

Five students told they felt impotent before the aggressions, though they do nothing because of fear: "I feel frustrated and impotence because I can't do anything"; "I have to put up with it, I can't complain or denounce". On the basis of these testimonies, it is verified that students do not defend themselves because of fear that their tutors consider them troublemakers and lose their grants. Being a grant holder renders them vulnerable to aggressions as explained by Peña and López (2011), and Méndez-Cadena *et al.* (2016).

According to Segato (2003), Méndez-Cadena *et al.* (2016), and Varela (2020), students tend to keep quiet because they think aggressions are normal, part of the *habitus*, and sometimes they think they deserve them. In like manner, they accept symbolic violence as a practice incorporated into the work of tutors and do not resist (Carrillo-Meráz, 2015; Maceira-Ochoa and Medina-Rosas, 2021).

Fear is another consequence mentioned by three students. One of them expressed: "I'm afraid of not answering his questions correctly". The tutors' aggressions become negative experiences, produce angst and fear, which hinders from searching for alternatives to defend themselves. In some cases, in order to escape from aggressions, the students temporarily suspend their studies (2%). In this regard, a female student said: "I was seriously thinking of stepping down, I was fed up with his insults and aggressions".

However, in the face of the need for an economic subvention, they do not give up (Peña and López, 2011; Méndez-Cadena *et al.*, 2016).

According to Ruiz-Ramírez *et al.* (2018) and Guarderas *et al.* (2018), aggressions toward the students affect their academic performance because they damage their skills for research, the development of their human potential and capability to face the world. In IPCA, the tutors' abuse of power is visualized; power is neither good nor bad, it depends on how and what it is used for; the tutors may use them to support the student to successfully conclude their postgraduate studies, nevertheless they abuse this power by means of violence via symbolical, moral and even sexual actions.

Conclusions

The stated hypothesis was met because it was noticed that 39% of the students at master and doctorate in sciences holds a subordinate position, in which they accept power relationships and violent actions from their tutors, since the education institution is a hierarchical and patriarchal power system.

Power relations and violent actions produce and reproduce due to four reasons: 1) the supremacy that exists between subordinated people (students) and their superiors (tutors); 2) students have been domesticated so that domination becomes part of their *habitus*, not realizing it reproduces the actions that make them subordinate themselves, recognizing and legitimizing the power of tutors; 3) students need to keep the economic subvention from the grant, which places them in a subordinate position, owing to this they neither contest nor denounce aggressions; 4) tutors use the economic factor, their knowledge, experience, prestige and institutional recognition to control and exercise power.

The mechanisms for the exercise of power may be open and recognizable, though subtle, complex and confusing at once. The present research shows that students in postgraduate courses are victims of various sorts of violence from their tutors: psychological (being constantly angered), social (having favorites), verbal (uttering ominous comments), gender (excluding women, as they do not use ender inclusive language and making sexist comments), and online (sending threatening emails).

Postgraduate students have not put forward any sort of resistance to reject power relations because they accept domination in order to survive in the academic, research and personal-life spheres. The results of the present work are the tip of the iceberg as they disclose power relations and violence

in postgraduate studies, as it is undeniable it shares some features in previous school levels and in other spaces such as the households, workplace and society.

References

Bourdieu, Pierre (2000), *La dominación masculina*, España: Anagrama.

Carrillo-Meráz, Rosalía (2015), *Violencia en las universidades públicas. El caso de la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana*, México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.

Castells, Manuel (2009), *Comunicación y poder*, España: Alianza.

Curiel, Charlynne *et al.* (2019), “Discriminación hacia las mujeres en Instituciones de Educación Superior: notas para una reflexión urgente”, en *Tequio*, vol. 3, núm. 7, México: Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca.

Expansión política (2019), “El suicidio de una alumna abre un debate sobre el sistema educativo del ITAM”. Disponible en: <https://politica.expansion.mx/sociedad/2019/12/12/el-suicidio-de-una-alumna-abre-un-debate-sobre-el-sistema-educativo-del-itam> [12 de diciembre de 2019].

Foucault, Michael (1984), *Vigilar y castigar*, Argentina: Siglo XXI.

Foucault, Michael (1988), “El sujeto y el poder”, en *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, vol. 50, núm. 3, México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Foucault, Michael (1991), *Microfísica del Poder*, España: La Piqueta.

Foucault, Michael (1999), *Estrategias de poder*, España: Paidós.

Guarderas Albuja, Paz *et al.* (2018), “Acoso sexual en las universidades ecuatorianas: validez de contenido de un instrumento de medición”, en *Alteridad, Revista de Educación*, vol. 13, núm. 2, Ecuador: Universidad Politécnica Salesiana de Ecuador.

Hernández-Méndez, Griselda y Reyes-Cruz, María del Rosario (2011), “Los alumnos: adversarios en las relaciones de poder dentro del aula. Testimonios de profesores”, en *Perfiles Educativos*, vol. 33, núm. 133, México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Hernández-Méndez, Griselda (2006), “El ejercicio del poder del maestro en el aula universitaria”, en *CPU-e, Revista de Investigación Educativa*, núm. 2, México: Universidad Veracruzana.

Hernández *et al.* (2015), “La percepción del hostigamiento y acoso sexual en mujeres estudiantes en dos instituciones de educación superior”, en *Revista de la Educación Superior*, vol. 4, núm. 176, México: Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior (ANUIES).

Hernández-Sampieri, Roberto *et al.* (2014), *Metodología de la Investigación*, México: McGraw Hill.

Maceira-Ochoa, Luz y Medina-Rosas, Andrea (2021), “Igualdad y acceso a la justicia en las instituciones de educación superior: discusiones pendientes”, en *Revista de Investigaciones Feministas*, vol. 12, núm. 2, España: Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

Méndez-Cadena, Esther *et al.* (2016), “Prácticas generadoras de violencia en un espacio académico de posgrado”, en *Ra-Ximhai*, vol. 12, núm. 1, México: Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México.

Mingo, Araceli y Moreno, Hortensia (2017), “Sexismo en la universidad”, en *Estudios Sociológicos*, vol. 35, núm. 105, México: El Colegio de México.

Morley, Louise (1999), *Organising Feminisms: The micropolitics of the Academy*, Reino Unido: MacMillan Press.

Peña, Florencia y López, Juan (2011), “Acoso docente: maltrato psicológico de profesores hacia alumnos en contextos universitarios tóxicos”, en Peña, Florencia y Fuentes, Rocío [eds.], *Tras las huellas del asedio grupal en México (mobbing)*, México: Ediciones Eón.

Reyes, Miguel *et al.* (2018), “Ser docente: entre la autoridad y el autoritarismo”, en *Revista Electrónica Científica de Investigación Educativa*, vol. 4, núm 1, México: Red de Investigadores Educativos de Chihuahua A.C.

Romero, Angélica y Plata, Juana (2015), “Acoso escolar en universidades”, en *Enseñanza e Investigación en Psicología*, vol. 20, núm. 3, México: Consejo Nacional para la Enseñanza e Investigación en Psicología.

Rovetto, Florencia y Figueroa, Nora (2017), “Que la universidad se pinte de feminismos para enfrentar las violencias sexistas”, en *Descentralizada*, vol. 1, núm. 2, Argentina: Universidad Nacional de la Plata.

Ruiz-Ramírez, Rosalva y Ayala-Carrillo, Rosario (2016), “Violencia de género en instituciones de educación”, en *Ra-Ximhai*, vol. 12, núm. 1, México: Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México.

Ruiz-Ramírez, Rosalva *et al.* (2016), “Bullying en una Universidad Agrícola del Estado de México”, en *Ra-Ximhai*, vol. 12, núm. 1, México: Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México.

Ruiz-Ramírez, Rosalva *et al.* (2018), “Relación *bullying*-deserción escolar en bachilleratos rurales”, en *Revista electrónica de investigación educativa*, vol. 20, núm. 2, México: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California.

Ruiz-Ramírez, Rosalva *et al.* (2020), “Manifestaciones del *bullying* docente en la Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo, México”, en *Revista de El Colegio de San Luis*, vol. 10, núm. 21, México: El Colegio de San Luis.

Saénz de Tejada, Ana (2019), *Estudio exploratorio sobre al acoso sexual en la Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala. Evidencias para la toma de decisiones*, Guatemala: Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios “Oliverio Castañeda de León” y Entidad de las Naciones Unidas para la Igualdad de Género y el Empoderamiento de las Mujeres.

Segato, Rita (2003), *Las estructuras elementales de la violencia*, Argentina: Prometeo.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (2016), Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Release 2016 (versión 24) [Software de cómputo]. Chicago, Illinois: IBM.

Trujano, Patricia *et al.* (2010), “Varones víctimas de violencia doméstica: un estudio exploratorio acerca de su percepción y aceptación”, en *Diversitas*, vol. 6, núm. 2, Colombia: Universidad de Santo Tomás.

Varela Guinot, Helena (2020), “Las universidades frente a la violencia de género. El alcance limitado de los mecanismos formales” en *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales*, núm. 238, México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Vázquez-Ramos Aurelio *et al.* (2021), “La violencia de género en las instituciones de educación superior: elementos para el estado de conocimiento”, en *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Educativos*, vol. 51, núm. 2, México: Universidad Iberoamericana.

Zapata-Martel, Emma *et al.* (2018), *Violencia en universidades: sociedad, Estado, familia y educación*, México: Colegio de Postgraduados.

Annex

Table 1

Percentage of daily relationships between tutors and students

Characteristics	Never	Seldom	On occasion	Frequently
Treats me well	2	5	24	69
Is kind	2	12	22	64
Is patient	5	9	23	63
Lets you use your research resources	11	10	17	62
Gives you the credit in research articles	4	7	13	62*
Gives you the credit in lectures product of my research	2	5	24	60*
Is available	2	13	27	58
Listens to you	1	9	33	57
Delivers observations in short time	3	11	34	52
Is tolerant	6	13	30	51
Explains the research process	4	12	35	49
Is respectful	5	13	34	48
Demands you to work on days off	44	22	14	20
Imposes their will on your research	40	23	25	12

Source: Own elaboration based on fieldwork.

*It does not reach 100% because some students have neither written articles nor taken part in lectures.

Table 2

Frequency of tutors who attack by postgraduate course

Postgraduate	Have you felt attacked?		Who has attacked you?	
	No	Yes	Male tutor	Female tutor
Livestock Rearing	4	7	6	1
Phytopathology	2	5	4	1
Botany	3	4	4	0
Water Sciences	5	4	3	1
Forestry	7	3	3	0
Rural Development	3	3	0	3
Vegetal Physiology	3	3	2	1
Economy	4	2	2	0
Edaphology	5	2	2	0
Entomology and Acarology	8	2	2	0
Agroecology and Sustainability	1	1	0	1
Fruit Farming	2	1	1	0
Genetics	4	1	1	0
Seed Production	2	1	1	0
Applied Computing	1	0	0	0
Statistics	7	0	0	0
Total	61	39	31	8

Source: Own elaboration based on fieldwork.

Table 3
Aggressions the tutors perform against students

Manifestations of violence	No	Yes	Percentage		
			Rarely	On occasion	Frequently
Psychological					
Gets angry	44	66	29	16	11
Compares you with others	63	37	13	7	17
Despises you	76	24	10	11	3
Psychologically attacks	77	23	11	6	6
Social					
Has favorite students	57	43	21	8	14
Excludes you	65	35	20	9	6
Makes you do unrelated activities	66	34	21	6	7
Isolates you	68	32	17	9	6
Discriminates you	86	14	6	7	1
Gender					
Uses inclusive language	59	41	8	11	22
Has told you not to marry or get pregnant while you study	77	23	6	8	9
Makes sexist comments	78	22	9	9	4

Manifestations of violence	No	Yes	Percentage		
			How often was yes your answer?		
			Rarely	On occasion	Frequently
Sexually harasses you	91	9	5	2	2
Verbal					
Makes ominous comments	61	39	19	13	7
Yells at you	73	27	12	11	4
Laugh at you	74	26	15	8	3
Is aggressive	76	24	11	11	2
Offends you	79	21	15	4	2
Verbally abuses you	84	16	8	7	1
Insults you	84	16	9	6	1
Online					
Electronic messages	98	2	0	1	1

Source: Own elaboration based on fieldwork.

Rosalva Ruiz-Ramírez. Doctor in Sciences in Rural Development Studies. Researcher-professor in *Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa*, Mexico. Research lines: education sociology, bullying, school desertion, violences and gender. Recent publications: 1) Ruiz-Ramírez, Rosalva, Zapata-Martelo, Emma and García-Cué, José Luis (2021), “Contexto social y *bullying* en preparatorias rurales. El Fuerte, Sinaloa”, in *Voces de la Educación*, vol. 6, no. 11, Mexico: Voces de la Educación; 2) Ruiz-Ramírez, Rosalva, Pérez-Olvera, Antonia, Zapata-Martelo, Emma and Martínez-Corona, Beatriz (2020), “Análisis del *bullying* en tres escuelas del nivel medio superior”, in *CPU-e, Revista de Investigación Educativa*, vol. 31, Mexico: Instituto de investigaciones en Educación de la Universidad Veracruzana; 3) Sánchez-Romero, Cristina, López Berlanga, Carmen, Martínez Sánchez, Isabel and Ruiz-Ramírez, Rosalva (2019), “Las medidas disciplinarias como predictor de comportamientos violentos en el centro escolar”, in *Contextos Educativos. Revista de Educación*, vol. 2, no. 24, Spain: Universidad de la Rioja.

Emma Zapata-Martelo. Doctor in Sciences in Sociology. Researcher-professor in *Colegio de Postgraduados*, Montecillo Campus, Mexico. Research lines: gender, migration, childhood, education, violence and rural women. Recent publications: 1) Ruiz-Ramírez, Rosalva, Zapata Martelo, Emma; Ruiz Martínez, Fortunato and García Cue, José Luis (2020), “Manifestaciones del *bullying* docente en la Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo, México”, in *Revista de El Colegio de San Luis*, vol. 10, no. 21, Mexico: El Colegio de San Luis; 2) Ruiz-Salazar, Grisel, Zapata Martelo, Emma, Martínez-Corona, Beatriz, Pérez-Hernández, Luz, Arras-Vota, Ana and Garza-Bueno, Laura (2020), “Entre la sierra y la ciudad: Artesanas rarámuri en la ciudad de Chihuahua y sus contextos migratorios”, in *Frontera Norte*, vol. 32, Mexico: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte; 3) Cortés-Cortés, Ramón, Zapata Martelo, Emma and Ayala-Carrillo, María del Rosario (2019), “Narrativas del despojo y destrucción. La megaminería en México a 30 años del capitalismo neoliberal”, in *Política y Cultura*, no. 52, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.

María del Rosario Ayala-Carrillo. Master in Sciences in Studies on Rural Development. Researcher-professor in *Colegio de Postgraduados*, Montecillo Campus, Mexico. Research lines: gender, child labor, violences, education, migration, care. Recent publications: 1) Ayala-Carrillo, María del Rosario, Pérez-Fra, María do Mar and Zapata-Martelo,

Emma (2020), “Conciliación entre el trabajo de cuidados-doméstico y artesanal-familiar en México”, in *La Manzana de la Discordia*, vol. 15, no. 1, Colombia: Universidad del Valle; 2) Jacinto-Hernández, Carmen, Coria-Peña, Marisol, Contreras-Santos, Georgina, Martínez-López, Liliana, Zapata-Martelo, Emma and Ayala-Carrillo, María del Rosario (2019), “Azúcares totales y proteína en frijol nativo de la región Triqui Alta, Oaxaca”, in *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Agrícolas*, vol. 10, no. 7, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Forestales, Agrícolas y Pecuaria; 3) Zapata-Martelo, Emma, Ayala-Carrillo, María del Rosario, Suárez-San Román, Blanca, Lázaro-Castellanos, Rosa and López-Cabello, Arcelia (2018), *Violencia escolar en universidades: sociedad, Estado, familia y educación*, Mexico: Colegio de Postgraduados.