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COPE



## Measurement of Intimate Partner Violence in Psychology

**ABSTRACT:** In psychology, assessing with self-report scales is a central issue. To use them properly they must have certain characteristics of validity and reliability; however, this does not guarantee that they are interpreted without prejudice or common sense, biased, as in the case of the assessment of intimate partner violence (IPV), to blame or revictimize the female victims. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate some of the problems generated by analyzing IPV in a decontextualized way. Some situations of violence described by Mexican men and women from different groups of origin with similar IPV scores are analyzed. The violence reported by men and women is diverse and permeated by gender issues. A gender perspective analysis is proposed to avoid revictimization processes while assessing these phenomena.

**KEYWORDS:** Measurement; violence; partner.

## Medición de la violencia en las relaciones de pareja en psicología

**RESUMEN:** En psicología, la evaluación a través de escalas de autorreporte es un tema central. Para emplearlas adecuadamente deben contar con determinadas características de validez y confiabilidad; sin embargo, ello no garantiza que se interpreten fuera del prejuicio o el sentido común, llegando, como en el caso de la evaluación de la violencia en las relaciones de pareja (VRP), a culpabilizar o revictimizar a las mujeres víctimas. El presente escrito tiene por objetivo ilustrar algunos de las problemáticas generadas al analizar de manera descontextualizada la VRP. Se analizan algunas situaciones de violencia descritas por hombres y mujeres mexicanos de diferentes grupos de procedencia con puntajes similares de VRP. Las violencias referidas por hombres y mujeres son diversas, permeadas por cuestiones de género; se propone el análisis con perspectiva de género para evitar procesos de revictimización al medir fenómenos como éste.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Medición; violencia; pareja.

### HOW TO QUOTE

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In psychology, measuring Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is always a complex process, both ethical and methodological aspects; measuring implies making a numerical model that represents some pre-existing reality (Muñoz, 1998). From the methodological aspect, the first obstacle to appropriately measuring lies in possessing clear conceptual and operational definitions of the phenomenon. Regarding ethics, it is important to question the political implications that will have the inputs that are established from the operationalization of the phenomenon (Eagly, 2013); it is not strange that, based on supposed academic objectivity, some texts blame the victims of violence for remaining in the relationship, or reduce the phenomenon to a personal decision (Zarco, 2009), lack of self-esteem or lack of empowerment (Aiquipa Tello, 2015).

Assessing/measuring the IPV in an ethical manner implies doing an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon, not only to show that the instrument measures that which is supposed to (validity) with consistency (reliability) (Kerlinger y Lee, 2008), but also to try to understand the complexity of the phenomenon (Morín, 2004), recognizing the context where it occurs. Ignoring these factors helps interpret valuable information with mere ahistorical and acculturated numerical symbols that could favor or perpetuate stereotypes or revictimization.

Due to this, in the assessment of IPV, it is important to have analyzed data from a perspective that, as suggested above, can provide an analysis of the sociocultural dynamics that underlie partner interactions.

### Assessment of intimate partner violence: conceptualization

The phenomenon of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is widely documented; nonetheless, this was not possible until the 90s when, in theory, at least, it began to be recognized as a public health issue (World Health Organization, 2013). The Women and Development unit of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (Almérás, Bravo, Milosavljevic, Montaña, & Rico, 2002) points out that before that date, the literature regarding the phenomenon was scarce, for it was considered that what happened between partners was private, and that it did not fall within the State's responsibilities (Almérás *et al.* 2002; Arrom, 1976; Federici, 2015; Lagarde, 2005). And so, historically, the voice of victims has been made invisible, silenced, and underestimated (Ramos, 1996). For example, in Cuba, it was not until 2019 that the femicides that occurred on the island began to be talked about in public (Torres, 2019).

The behaviors that comprehend the phenomenon have been explored from different areas and disciplines, including law and psychology, but there is still much work to be done in each of them, as there are gaps or omissions that, if not addressed, could be considered acceptable behaviors that violate the rights of others.

An example of the long way to go is in the inconsistency regarding the criminalization of rape between spouses in Mexican territory; while the Federal Criminal Code has considered this act as a crime since 1997, in the local codes of the states of Colima, Jalisco, Quintana Roo, Sonora, Tabasco, and Zacatecas, it had not been criminalized in 2015. States such as Oaxaca and Puebla consider it an aggravating circumstance for the crime of rape to occur between spouses, while in Coahuila and Michoacán, it was a mitigating factor in

their 2015 penal codes (National Human Rights Commission (CNDH, per its acronym in Spanish), 2015).

In this text, IPV is understood as all those actions or omissions carried out with the purpose of, or without it, but that in the end achieve, harming, hurting, or controlling the person with whom one has or had some sex-affective bond (Cienfuegos-Martínez, 2014; Dirección General de Igualdad and Diversidad Social, n.d.; Torres, 2001; Trujano, 2007).

In Mexico, in the National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships from 2016, it is estimated that 43.9% of women were victims of violence at the hands of their partners at some point in their lives, and 25.6% were within the 12 months prior to the survey, emotional violence being more frequent. 78.6% of the victims did not report to authorities or sought out help; some of the reasons for this were: thinking that it was not of importance (25.8%), fear of the consequences (19.8%), they did not know where to report (14.8%), because of their children (11.4%), they did not want their family to find out (10.3%), for lack of trust on authorities (6.5%) (National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI per its acronym in Spanish), 2017).

Said fears can be confirmed through the analysis of the reports done by the work groups that have evaluated the requests of the Gender Violence Alert in Mexico, which recount the problems women face when filing a report (Lagunes, 2018); cases such as "*La Manada*" (the wolf pack) in Spain (Angulo, 2019) or "*Los Porkys*" in Mexico (Ortuño, 2017; Zavaleta, 2019) help exemplify the revictimization of women that decided to file reports, not only from public opinion but also from institutions (Bjørnholt, 2019). Furthermore, according to the Secretariat of the Interior, the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES

per its acronym in Spanish), and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2017) in Mexico, in 2015, 34% of women murdered were killed by their partner.

Violence against women is an unparalleled phenomenon, whose most serious expression is femicide, a transcendental issue, in a country where 10 women are murdered every day, simply because they are women and, in most cases, it is committed by their partners or an acquaintance (Executive Secretary of the National System of Public Security (SESNSP per its acronym in Spanish), 2019). To say that men and women have the same probability of being abused in a couple relationship is a decontextualized and ahistorical statement, which assumes that dyadic interactions occur in the hollow, is to ignore the ways in which bodies are treated, the tortures to which they are subjected, generally by those who claim to love them.

### **Violence against men, studies with mixed samples**

The lack of data regarding IPV against men prevents the consideration of its real dimensions, and, at the same time, this scarcity helps the phenomenon to be understood from prejudice and from common sense; both are strongly marked by the patriarchal culture, which generates a cycle of problems. The fact that studies on violence are generally conducted with samples composed only of women (Eternod, 2013; National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), 2017; Hudson and McIntosh, 1981; Saunders, 1992) is not a fortuitous event or a way of perpetuating the victimization of women at the hands of men, as referred to by Dutton (2010), but rather responds to a long-standing work

done by women's groups and the feminist movement that fought to make this phenomenon visible, whose documentation began to massify approximately 30 years ago (Alm eras *et al.*, 2002).

In an effort to solve this lack of data and theoretical analysis regarding male-directed IPV, the use of mixed samples (men and women), or only men, has been chosen, but this has not been sufficient to address the problem ethically. Some studies that focus on IPV towards men tend to disqualify those that have prioritized documenting the experience of women. For Dutton (2010), for example, making the experience of women visible overestimates the violence perpetrated against them; he also states that including users of care centers raises the rates of violence that the general population "really" experiences and that the path should now be the study of IPV against men, due to the high number of studies that include samples of women.

Under this same approach, other authors indicate that studies focused on women aim to invisibilize and denigrate the situations experienced by men at the hands of their partners, placing women in the role of victims and men as aggressors in a deterministic manner (Montesinos, 2014; Moral de la Rubia & L pez, 2012) and that theories focused on socio-structural factors for understanding violence "over-dimension" aspects of patriarchal culture and gender power asymmetry in intimate partner violence (Moral de la Rubia & L pez, 2012, p. 61).

Concerning the findings of these studies, similar patterns of violence are observed in men and women (Armenta-Hurtarte *et al.*, 2016; Hern andez, 2015); or even greater victimization in men (Cienfuegos-Mart nez, Arella nez, & D az Loving, 2008; Gonz lez-

Galbán & Fernández de Juan, 2014; Moral de la Rubia & López, 2012). Through said data, some authors come to consider it incomprehensible and excessive that public policy, at least in discourse, focuses on specific actions to guarantee women's access to a life free of violence (Ruiz-Bautista, 2018; Dutton, 2010; López et al., 2013; Moral de la Rubia & López, 2012).

Regarding the interpretation of the data, some studies describe the findings in a general way and discuss the differences and similarities with previous studies (see Méndez & García, 2015); in others, however, it is suggested that the victims are also responsible for the act of violence, pointing out as part of their findings that there are "attitudes that women assume and for which they should take responsibility to reduce or eliminate the violence to which they are subjected [...] they distance themselves from their partner and become irresponsible (with their household chores)" (Vargas et al., 2008, p. 358).

In other studies, it is noted that the existence of higher scores in women on the victim scale responds more to a cliché than to a reflection of reality, a scheme that prevents them from seeing themselves as aggressors; Ramos et al. (2014) points out that there are "... premises intrinsic to Mexican culture, where women perceive themselves as victims, privileging that position and moving away from their individual and social ecosystem the possibility of projecting themselves as women who exercise violence against their male partners" (p. 881), they also add, "In women, depression, probably coming from an irritable mood, is a risk factor for violence, when depression leaves men more vulnerable and sensitive to violence exercised by their female partner" (p. 882). All of these conclusions

are based on scores obtained from Cienfuegos-Martínez's scale (2004, 2014), used in this study.

Linked to the lack of data on IPV towards men is the underreporting of cases and low rates of reporting, it is noted that it is extremely complicated for them to recognize themselves as victims of violence since, if they do, they will encounter disbelief or will be mocked (Instituto Mexicano de la Juventud 2017; Trujano, Sánchez, & Yoseff, 2013). It is important to note that such fears are not exclusive to men; as pointed out above, almost 80% of women do not report or ask for help for the same reasons.

Violence against men is usually perpetrated by other men, generally strangers in public spaces (National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) and National Institute for Women (INMUJERES), 2006). According to Frías (2016), regarding the murders of men and women linked to family violence, for every man, 8.6 women are registered, without specifying the type of bond between the parties involved. On the other hand, the National Survey on Victimization and Perception of Public Safety (ENVIPE) from 2018 (INEGI, 2018) indicates that, on average, in the period from 2012 to 2017, 84.8% of the crimes where the victim was present, the aggressor(s) were only men, in 5.3% of the cases only by women, and in 7.3% committed by both men and women.

The above are examples of how an analysis, supposedly objective, could use an evaluation instrument, valid and reliable, as a tool to naturalize<sup>1</sup>, trivialize, or blame the victims of violence exercised at the hands of their partner (Segato, 2014; Zarco, 2009). This

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<sup>1</sup> For López (2017, p. 114), the naturalization of violence refers to "... the process of becoming used to those actions characterized by aggression, in its various forms of expression; this allows violence to span in the culture and spread silently, that is to say, not only does no one protest, but it ends up being justified".



shows that the interpretation of data is not alien to the culture or to the prejudices of the researcher; to talk about the mood and volatile character of women, their vulnerability, or to show themselves as victims at any given moment, while men's objectivity and reasoning are highlighted, forces us to question why the score reported by a man is the only necessary input to affirm that men experience intimate partner violence, while the same score in women qualifies them as exaggerated or victimizing.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the experiences reported by men and women with similar scores on a violence scale. Based on the assumption that the same score on the violence scale can be indicative of very different situations depending on whether the respondent is male or female, with gender as the category of analysis. It is hypothesized that women can underestimate situations of violence at the hands of their partner, like jealousy or humiliation, due to its naturalization, while men could overestimate situations of disagreement with their partner, pointing out that actions such as not being listened to or the partner going out with friends (women) are actions that the partner does to cause them harm.

For this purpose, the experiences of IPV referred by men and women from different groups of origin (support centers in general, support centers for women that are victims of violence, support centers for men who recognize themselves as violent) will be analyzed on the basis of their score on the violence scale (high, medium or low). The IPV scale (Cienfuegos-Martínez, 2014), employed in several of the works referred to above, will be

used;<sup>2</sup> this scale has robust data that is valid and reliable, and has been validated in mixed samples.

## Methodologies

### *Instruments*

To evaluate the IPV the Violence Scale in Couples by Cienfuegos-Martínez (2014) was used, divided into four factors with a Cronbach's Alpha of .94 and an explained variation of 67.7%. It evaluates the frequency of violent acts on a five-point Likert scale (in the year: never, rarely, sometimes, often, always). The scale is composed of 28 questions divided into four areas: economic violence, psychological violence, physical violence and intimidation, and sexual violence. To obtain the narratives of violence, two open-ended questions were used based on the concept of violence 1) Describe a situation with your partner that caused you any harm, and 2) the perceived intentionality of that act.

### *Participants*

The sampling was non-probabilistic, for convenience. The sample was comprised of 568 people, men and women from three groups: 1) Psychological support unit, part of the services offered in a public university in Mexico City, the problems treated there are diverse, there were no groups for intervention or prevention of violence (97 people), 2) Specialized institutions, female users of care units for victims of violence and men who went to civil society organizations that work with men who recognize themselves as violent

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<sup>2</sup>Even though some studies were made prior to the year 2014, it is important to note that the first version of the Cienfuegos-Martínez scale is from 2004.

(257 people), 3) Open population (214 people). The average age of the participants was 35.5 years (DE = 12), and the average length of the relationship was 11.2 years. Regarding the levels of schooling, most of them have a bachelor's degree (39.2%), followed by high school (25.4%) and secondary school (19.9%).

### *Procedure*

The total score on the IPV Scale (Cienfuegos-Martínez, 2014) was calculated for each of the participants, with the minimum score being 28 and the maximum 140. The sample was divided into equal parts (tertiles), and three groups were formed: a) Low violence score, from 28 to 36; b) Medium violence score, from 37 to 68; c) High violence score, from 69 to 140. Subsequently, the cases in which the participants did not answer the open-ended questions were eliminated.

### *Ethical concerns*

Participation was voluntary in both the institutions and the open population. In the specific case of the institutions, it was made explicit that participation in the study did not condition, in any way, the different support received within the institutions. It was also indicated that the participants could withdraw or stop whenever they considered it convenient. In the narratives where they specified names or dates were modified to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

## **Results**

The situations shared by the participants were diverse, even within the same groups, considering the population of origin, sex, and violence score. Said differences are important, for they suggest new questions regarding the study of violence and, at the same

time, they question some prejudices regarding the exercise of violence and the criticism done towards studies about IPV that focus on exploring violence directed towards women.

To begin with a gender analysis of the violence data, the first step is to disaggregate by sex. A Student's t-test was performed to identify differences by sex; a higher mean was observed in women ( $M = 63.14$ ) than in men ( $M = 49.80$ ), and there was a significant difference between the two ( $t = 57.28$   $gl = 566$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Nonetheless, as Lagarde (1969) mentions, in order to speak of a gender perspective, such data, although illustrative, is not enough and requires further analysis.

After the differences by sex, the distribution was analyzed according to sex and the score on the violence scale. Among men, 44.1% reported a medium score on the Violence Scale exerted by their partner, while 41.8% of women were in the high violence score group (Table 1).

**Table 1.** *Distribution of the sample according to sex and score in the violence scale*

		Level of violence			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
Men	N	72	89	41	202
	%	35.6%	44.1%	20.3%	100.0%
Women	N	110	103	153	366
	%	30.1%	28.1%	41.8%	100.0%

**Source:** Own elaboration.

After this first analysis, the variable of group of origin was included (Table 2). In the psychological services group, more than 90% of the men and women in the sample

presented low and medium violence scores. In the group of specialized institutions, about 80% of men place themselves at low and medium levels of violence, and 18.2% reported high levels. In the case of female users of institutions, 70% report high levels of violence, and almost 26% report medium levels of violence. In the case of the open population, most men and women indicate low scores on the violence scale. However, it is noteworthy that in comparison with the other groups of men (psychological services and institutions), they are the ones who most frequently report high rates of intimate partner violence.

**Table 2.** Distribution of the sample according to group of origin, sex, and score on the violence scale

		Level of violence			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
Psychological services - men [1]	N	15	14	2	31
	%	48.4%	45.2%	6.5%	
Psychological services - women [2]	N	36	24	6	66
	%	54.5%	36.4%	9.1%	
Institutions - men [3]	N	16	47	14	77
	%	20.8%	61.0%	18.2%	
Institutions - women [4]	N	8	46	126	180
	%	4.4%	25.6%	70.0%	
Open population - men [5]	N	41	28	25	94
	%	43.6%	29.8%	26.6%	
Open population - women [6]	N	66	33	21	120
	%	55.0%	27.5%	17.5%	
<b>Total</b>	N	182	192	194	568
	%	32.0%	33.8%	34.2%	

Source: Own elaboration

### Experiences of violence reported by men and women

Once these 18 groups of participants were formed, the experiences narrated in the open-ended questions were explored, and a diversity of expressions of violence was observed. While the experiences referred to are only a snapshot of the relationship, they show some of the dynamics that are ignored or taken for granted when interpreting a score on the violence scales.

There are symbolic and invisible forms of violence, but even physical violence often goes unnoticed or is interpreted as a joke. The normalization of violence may influence non-users of care centers, that is to say, the general population, to consider such actions as habitual within the relationship. In a study by Del Castillo and Castillo (2010), it was found that when asked directly whether they had been victims of violence, only 3% reported having been victims; the percentage rose to 43% for verbal violence and 34% for physical violence when asked about specific acts of violence. It is feasible that those who attend such centers are more aware of what can and cannot be considered violence. Furthermore, one of the open population participants, with a low level of violence, said they did not have a situation to share for the open-ended questions; however, in the scale, upon being asked the question "Has your partner ever hit you?" wrote: "that's how we play, we both like it :)".

"My partner insulted me, I entered the house livid, I did not speak to her, and to get even, I was hitting the things she was cleaning; she confronted me, we got into an argument, and she insulted me again, then I wanted to leave, and she did not let me, I pushed her, she put herself back in front of the door, I pushed her, she shouted for me to calm down and we started hitting and insulting each other." (Male, Psychological Support Unit, Low Level of Violence)

"Six months ago, I was with my family, and I was not in a position to see him, but he wanted to fix a problem we had, and I told him that we would talk the next day, but he insisted that it had to be at that moment. Since I was stubborn, he even went to the house and pulled me, but I refused, so he told me that he didn't want to have anything to do with me; he called me 'stupid'..." (Female, Psychological Support Unit, Low Level of Violence)

It is observed in the reports that men who go to Psychological Support, as well as those in the open population, do not recognize their actions as violent or as generating violence, in contrast to men who go to specialized institutions in favor of equality. Even situations in which they were the generators of violence are narrated as acceptable responses to their partner's "faults", such as not having the meal ready. Infidelity or comments such as "I have offended her and hit her a few times" emerge as side notes to the violence exercised by women, which consists of "not valuing" what men do for the children, not agreeing with them, or being indifferent.

"She did not value what I was doing because I was going out alone with my children. She always questioned my going out with my children and my ex-wife, even though we were already undergoing treatment with a psychologist, and she always questioned why I had to depend on my ex-wife... Out of jealousy and because she had the background that I had had sex with my ex-wife, she thought that this time I would have sex with her again. Even though I showed interest in having my children go out with me and my partner." (Male, Psychological Support Unit, Medium Level of Violence)

"She offended me, she humiliated me in front of her family, she always contradicts me, she behaves indifferently with me and with others she smiles all the time. I receive insults, and she has a friend who incites her to leave me, and that bothers me a lot... I lost affection for her, I distanced myself a little from her because of work, I think I became very cranky, and I

feel very stressed, I have also offended her and hit her on some occasions." (Male, Psychological Care Unit, High Level of Violence)

"She says that I always interrupt her and that I am only interested in talking about myself or things that have to do with me. If she doesn't like me, why is she with me?... She is envious of me because I am successful, I have a job and topics of conversation that are not about chores or my son." (Male, Open Population, High Level of Violence)

"We argued because she doesn't respect herself around men and flirts with them... I think she doesn't realize what she's doing." (Male, Open population, Medium Level of Violence)

In the case of male users of specialized institutions, it should be noted that they recognize that they have committed violent acts and do not blame their partners, assuming their responsibility in the relational dynamic.

"She hadn't done anything when I came home from work (laundry, food, cleaning, ...). She probably had something urgent to do, something sudden at our son's school. It was my own anger." (Male, Specialized Institutions, Medium Level of Violence)

"I, as a man, thought that she had to be in charge of the cooking and to satisfy my need to eat [...] It was not her, but my lack of responsibility to satisfy my own needs." (Male, Specialized Institutions, Low Level of Violence)

"She lied to me, she told me that she had not gone to the mall and she did ... because she is traumatized of how I have treated her for so many years she no longer knows whether to tell me or not ..." (Male, Specialized Institutions, Low Level of Violence)

"Called me out for having left home, she would tell me that I had always abandoned her when she needed me the most... She did it because when she got sick, I did not take care of her or provide her with medicine or food, I was not sensitive." (Men, Specialized Institutions, Low Level of Violence)



The women who come to specialized institutions have diverse experiences with violence; it is not possible to claim that there is a single profile of “the woman” who comes to such spaces, as they report different intensities and consequences of violence experienced, the thresholds of each one are influenced by factors such as personal history and the psychosocial resources they have (National Center of Injury and Control, n.d.; World Health Organization, 2013). Some of them also suggest the existence of mutual violence.

“He got angry because I asked him some questions and because, according to him, I treated him as if he were a child, to which he replied that I am not his mom... Because he got annoyed that I always asked him: Where are you? What are you doing? With whom? etc.” (Female, Specialized Institutions, Low Level of Violence)

“He crashed the car into the fence of my house, and we had a very heated argument... Because we were already arguing before, and I broke the lever of the car lights first, and then he got angry, and that happened.” (Female, Specialized Institutions, Low Medium Level of Violence)

“In the morning, while he was taking a shower, I went into the bedroom for my sandals, he came out of the bathroom and yelled at me as to what I was doing, to get out, that he didn’t want to see my face, I told him to calm down and showed him my sandals, telling him that I was going to take a shower and had gone in for them. He took off his towel, and stood naked, shaking with rage, and told me to get out, that he didn’t know what he was capable of doing to me if he got more violent, that he didn’t want to see my face and to not get near my son. I got out of there quickly, and he yelled at me to continue slutting myself... we had sex the previous weekend and he had asked me if I liked it, I told him that not much, that only he had climaxed, and that I also wanted to have more pleasure during sex; he also was doubtful of me, he thought I was with another man. When I arrived from work, he had locked himself in the room, didn’t even come out, it came to the conclusion that he thought

that I had gone with another man, and that's why he got violent with me." (Female, Specialized Institutions, Medium Level of Violence)

"Alcoholism. He prefers alcohol to his family. His attitude, he acts like he's 14 years old and prefers the drunks over us, it makes me feel alone, abandoned, and fearful that something might happen to him...and I don't know if I can face such a hard life without him, and with my child so young..." (Female, Specialized Institutions, High Level of Violence)

An analysis that leaves aside the context in which the couple is immersed, that assumes as equal the rights and responsibilities that men and women have in practice, could be unethical and risky since it would not be recognizing the socio-structural inequalities between people based on sexual materiality, nor the socialization processes through which they are reproduced and perpetuated. The same fact is interpreted in very different ways by the members of the dyad; part of these differences can be understood through postulates of attribution theories, but there are also elements linked to gender, a marking regarding how violent behavior is considered an appropriate, or even necessary for conflict resolution in the couple, to maintain a hierarchy within the couple. There were a few cases in which it was possible to interview the couple, and this is one of them.

"My wife made up that I hit her even though only once she hit me and I hit her, from there she began to tell my son Noe that I hit her regularly. Until that day, January 17, she hit me in the face, headbutting me and fracturing a rib because I was drunk [...] because she is afraid that I would hit her when I came home drunk." (Male, Psychological Care Unit, Medium Level of Violence)

"He made me get angry and many more things, he does things he knows I don't like; he's done it in the last 15 years. On January 17, he drank a lot of alcohol, and he punched my 21-year-old son, I got so nervous they had to rush me to the hospital [...] because he knows no

limit to his drinking, and he says he is free to do as he pleases, he even wanted a knife to kill my son.” (Female, Psychological Care Unit, Medium Level of Violence)

## Discussion

The objective of the present study was to learn about the experiences of IPV reported by men and women with similar scores on a violence scale, which has adequate psychometric characteristics. The results highlight the complexity of IPV and its evaluation through self-applicable scales that are assumed to be objective.

Measuring instruments in psychology have been essential elements to approach sciences such as medicine, transforming subjectivity into interpretable numerical facts. Ana Amuchástegui (2001, p. 103) points out that “the only reality we know is stained by the methods we follow to know it, and these, in turn, are marked by the subjectivity of the researcher”. In psychology, the use of measurement scales, whose validity and reliability have been demonstrated, is associated with the belief that any conclusion emanating from them is a source of objective and hardly questionable information. In this regard, Field (2013) points out that despite the widespread belief that factor analyses are a reflection of the real world, they are usually only a statistical reality, but a fiction of the real world, so if contextual elements are not taken into account, the findings may lead to generalizations or premises that, rather than approximating the social world, may serve more as a way of perpetuating prejudices and stereotypes.

In this sense, the application of a scale must be based on the premise that the numbers are estimates of the underlying phenomenon, the interpretation of which will inevitably be biased by the eye of the researcher. Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (2007,

p. 19), when discussing multivariate analysis, say: “many researchers become myopic by focusing only on the significance achieved with the results without understanding their interpretations, good or bad” They point out that, although the results are obtained by a sort of magic in statistical programs, it is essential not to lose the practical significance, to question what those results were for.

For Hattery (2009), the violence experienced within couple relationships must be explained through a careful analysis of the dyad, seeking to understand the subjectivity and the elements that lead both partners to manifest certain behaviors. The use of mixed samples does not make sense without an in-depth analysis of the social dynamics between men and women where different socio-historical constructions are intertwined based on their sexed bodies (Trujano, 2007); in the study of heterosexual couples, it is essential to consider the gender category for the analysis, not only for the disaggregation of the data but also as a relational and historical category (Scott, 2011).

The diversity of IPV narratives of men and women with similar scores in the violence scale shows the different dimensions of violence, their dynamics, and the way these are understood by their victims and aggressors, sometimes without a clear difference in said roles. Although a male may be a victim of violence, in many cases, it was observed as a reactive element on the partner’s part or in situations related to the fact that women did not fulfill a stereotypical role. As hypothesized, women tend to underestimate the seriousness of intimate partner violence, while men tend to interpret as violence the fact that their partners do not comply with care work or traditional gender roles (not going out, not having food ready...); this dynamic is usually seen in the different groups that

conformed the sample. It is important to note that in the case of men who go to specialized institutions, there is an explicit acknowledgment of having committed violent acts, in addition to taking responsibility for them; they do not blame their partner, as occurs with the men in the other two groups. This differentiation shows the results in favor of equality of the groups of men working to eradicate their violence.

To analyze these data, it is important to highlight that, in cultures such as the Mexican one, it is not strange that women are taught, from an early age, to have as a priority the search for a couple relationship, and later motherhood, both shown as symbols of their fulfillment as persons, they are taught that any sacrifice is minimal if one manages to be a good wife and mother (Herrera, 2017; Lagarde, 1996, 2005; Moore, 2009). On the other hand, men are educated to value and defend their freedom, personal security, and autonomy, with couple relationships being an extra, but not the center of their self-realization (Herrera, 2017; Lagarde, 2005, Tena, 2012). For Madson and Trafimow (2001), the way in which men and women have been socialized makes them form different subcultures<sup>3</sup>, since there is a cultural assignment of roles, skills, and abilities that permeate a myriad of interactions, including, of course, couple relationships. In a society with such a structure, it is worth asking whether the experience of violence is similar among people who have been socialized to look at the same interaction from such different points of view and whether such socialization may favor the tendency to overvalue or undervalue the violent actions exercised by the partner.

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<sup>3</sup> García Naharro (2012) mentions that the term “subculture” can be understood as a system of values that materializes only a part of the extensive system from which it comes. In the case of men and women, it is said that they will adopt as their own only some values of the dominant culture: roles, preferences, and attitudes that have been socialized as optimal for each sex.

With the latter, rather than denying the violence experienced by men, urges to work on its evaluation and registration, recognizing the context in which these processes take place and the social structure that encourages and legitimizes this practice as an acceptable exercise of power within a bond that is named as egalitarian, the couple.

In addition, in each one of the groups, the violence scores varied greatly: there were women in the institutions specializing in violence with very low scores on the scale, and men and women in the open population with very high scores. Not all women who experience violence usually go to care centers; in fact, there is a dark figure of reports on acts of violence (INEGI, 2018), it is feasible that many of them are in the open population. There are people who, despite being victims of violence, either out of fear, ignorance, minimization of the violent act, believing that they are guilty of the violence they experience, or fear of retaliation, etc. (INEGI, 2017), choose not to report or even to remain silent before their closest support networks; in addition to the fact that specialized care centers are the last resort. With the above, it is possible to question the proposal of Dutton (2010), who argues that studies that include self-selected samples (women who attend specialized violence centers) tend to raise the rates of violence that the general population “really” experiences.

The aforesaid raises some questions: Is it pertinent to evaluate men and women in a similar way in a dynamic where there is a tendency to romanticize socio-structural inequality? To know the dynamics of violence, is it enough to know a score without analyzing the contents of the reported scores? Is the fact that the partner does not have dinner ready equated with denying the possibility of the partner continuing to study or

work? Can a violent act be of equal magnitude in people who have lived different situations of oppression/privilege as belonging to the category (subculture) of male or female? In the face of such questions, the gender perspective can provide some answers.

The gender perspective, according to Lagarde (1996), is a scientific, analytical, and political approach that, based on feminism, recognizes not only the diversity of men and women but also takes into account gender domination as an articulating axis of society, culture, politics, and history. To assume that the inclusion of men and women in a study is to have a gender perspective is to empty this approach of its content, Lagarde (1996) also points out a “disguised and superficial” interpretation of the gender perspective, a “theoretical and philosophical mutilation of its subversive and transgressive assumptions by converting this perspective into something neutral, almost charitable” (p. 8).

When analyzing the dynamics between men and women, this should be done from a perspective that questions the hegemonic acultural theories, the methodologies used, what is or is not susceptible to knowledge or doubt, and the purpose of this (Ariño *et al.*, 2011 Scott, 2011). Answering questions in a way that challenges common sense, which is generally based on the patriarchal order (Blazquez, 2012; Harding, 2006, Scott, 2011).

From ignorance and/or Manichean interpretation, the theoretical-political bases of the gender perspective in the analysis of the IPV are interpreted as “unilateral positions” (López Rosales *et al.*, 2013, p. 7) where men are seen as aggressors and women as the only victims (Dutton, 2010; Hernández, 2015). For other authors, the gender perspective implies only including men and women in the studies (see Montesinos, 2014), without even questioning the socio-structural factors that could underlie the results nor the ways in

which violence is exercised on sexed bodies. They say that a study has a “true gender perspective” or speaks of “true equity” when the status quo is not questioned but is reflected in the interpretation of results.

Ariño *et al.* (2011), in order to know if a project has a gender perspective, it is necessary to explore all its components, from the introduction and development of the theory to the methodology, results, and conclusions; she proposes, among other things, to identify whether the proposal talks about the magnitude of the phenomenon in men and women, to know from the theory some gender determinants such as social roles and the sexual division of labor, among others, and to know their impact on the evaluated variable; to question whether biases such as assuming equality between men and women have permeated the objectives, hypotheses or even the samples and the final conclusions.

For Pateman (1986 p. 109), statements such as “relationships between men and women can be analyzed in the same way, using the same categories” deny sexual domination and the patriarchy, understanding it as a system of oppression, exploitation, violence, and discrimination that affects both men and women (Paredes & Guzman, 2014), but that it is in the materiality of women’s bodies where it is embodied in a bloodier way. For Pateman (1986, p. 109), assuming equality as a fact and not as an ideal is an expression of a “domesticated feminism” that must be eradicated. Finally, despite the general belief that activism and academia cannot coexist, Eagly (2013) points out that “science and politics are completely intertwined in the study of gender” (p. 11). Doing an analysis with gender perspective on issues as relevant as IPV is an ethical duty.



### *Scope and limitations*

It is of the utmost importance to emphasize that, when using an evaluation scale, it is crucial to consider the context of its application; a number cannot be uncritically translated into text without considering the type of interaction in which it occurs, the participants, the type, the frequency, the constancy, the intensity and/or its effects.

The scale used for this study considers violence as the frequency in which certain types of violence are perceived; like most scales that evaluate violence in intimate partner relationships, it does not have items that can minimize perceptual biases or evaluate the intensity of the violence experienced. These aspects do not in themselves constitute an obstacle to the use of the scale; once all scales are dedicated to apprehending specific aspects or phenomena, they must be interpreted, taking into account the limitations of the instrument applied.

The scientific method seeks to isolate variables by testing hypotheses and the procedures used to obtain results. In this sense, when applying a self-report test, it is important to recognize its limitations and the biases that its indiscriminate use may entail, explaining its benefits and limitations, but, above all, giving an account of the context in which, it is applied.

The above does not advocate prohibiting the use of self-report scales in social problems such as violence in intimate partner relationships, but urges us not to trivialize or reduce these problems to a number, not to assume that men and women live in the same context of violence in our relationships just because they have similar scores; but above all, it proposes not to interpret these scores through anachronistic theories or gender

stereotypes that tend to see violence against women as something expected, for not speaking up, for not reporting, for believing that they want to be there even if they have other options; that any behavior carried out by women can be a trigger for male violence. Nor does the study seek to deny the existence of IPV experienced by men, but rather invites us to analyze it in greater depth. It is in this sense that gender analysis in public health issues, such as in the case of intimate partner violence, is essential.

The study of this phenomenon, like others centered on the couple (love, conflict, negotiation styles, just to mention a few), has consistently ignored the sexual preference of the persons interviewed, elaborating its conclusions based on heterosexual dynamics, but generally lacking a gender perspective; that is, they point out differences between men and women, but do not use gender as a category of analysis.

One of the limitations that stood out the most in the present study was assuming the heterosexuality of the participants as a fact since they were not questioned about the sex of their partner. However, such obviousness is interesting since in the different articles that have used the Cienfuegos-Martínez (2014) scale, and in whose conclusions tend to blame women for violence, the heterosexuality of the participants has been assumed; in none of them is it even questioned. We opted to start from the same premise, although in the cases where it was possible to identify them, same-sex couples were eliminated.

One of the narratives made by a woman who reported a low level of violence at the Psychological Support Center was the following:

"I became jealous because she talked a lot about a friend, who on one occasion asked us to go with him to dinner. I had to go to the library, and it bothered me that she

preferred going with him than with me...Because he is her friend, and they go to many classes together..."

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