



SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE

Dating violence and nursing student well-being

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KEYWORDS

Violence;
Dating;
Nursing students

Abstract

Background: Violence in dating relationships involves dimensions such as physical, psychological and sexual abuse, requiring strategies for prevention and early intervention.

Objective: To identify the socio-demographic variables that influence violence in dating relationships; to identify whether having been a victim and/or witnessing violence in childhood has significant effect on violence in dating relationships; to verify the correlation between violence in dating relationships and psychological well-being.

Material and method: Quantitative non-experimental, cross-sectional, descriptive correlational study. Data collection conducted by a socio-demographic characterisation questionnaire; Dating Relationship Victimization Practices and Behaviours Scale and Demonstration of Psychological Well-Being Measurement Scale. The non-probabilistic, convenience sample consisted of 203 students from the Health School of Viseu.

Results: Mostly female students gender; Mean age of 18.85 years, minimum of 18 and maximum of 34; Gender and having been a victim or witness of violence against children and sexual violence are variables that seem to intervene in dating violence and psychological well-being. Age has an influence on psychological well-being. Stalking violence and psychological violence were more prevalent in the study sample. It was found that the presence of any type of violence is associated with a decrease in student psychological well-being.

Conclusion: By analysing the results we can infer the need to include this topic in education/training, active methodologies and effective participation of all stakeholders in the process, with a view to promoting and developing relationship and affective skills.

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Introduction

This academic study focuses on dating violence and its correlation with nursing student well-being at the Health School of Viseu.

Violence, defined as an intentional threat or the use of force or power, includes acts physical, psychological and sexual aggression grounded in social and cultural stereotypical conceptions.¹

The existence of dating violence is opposed to the conviction that this phase of young people's lives is the best stage of the couple's relationship.²

Generally speaking, dating violence is expressed in the form of psychological violence, including threats of ending the relationship, emotional blackmail and destruction of self-esteem. This type of violence is more common in girls than in boys.³

However, some studies show that girls also engage in acts of violence and that young men can also be victimised in the context of their romantic relationships. Thus, Ventura et al¹ report that some studies with samples of students and couples in dating relationships reveal that a significant percentage of men experienced situations of violence by their partners.

Violence within intimate relationships became specific social problem in the mid-twentieth century (the 60s) and in Portugal, more attention to this phenomenon emerged in the early 1990s.⁵ Studies on this subject were initially developed for marital violence with research into violence in young people (dating violence) being recent.⁶ Scientific attention on dating violence originated from the results of studies on the topic, demonstrating the existence of high levels of youth violence in intimate relationships. This type of violence was thus shown not to be limited only to marital relationships.⁶

That said, not only knowledge about the phenomenon is considered important, but also intervention with young people to prevent violence and promote healthy relationships.

Material and method

Perpetrating dating violence and victimizing young people contain identical risk factors: witnessing violence between parents; being a direct victim of violence by parents; suffering from sexual abuse; spending time with friends who are violent with their intimate partners; having sexist beliefs; recognizing violence as a natural form of conflict resolution and having deficits in assertive social skills and lacking emotional self-control.⁷ It should be noted that social skills and secure bonds with parents were recognized as protective factors for victimization in in dating violence.

In Portugal studies on college students, aged 18 to 23, revealed that many students reported having been victims during the past year of at least one abusive act committed by their girl/boyfriend. They also assumed having adopted violent conduct towards their intimate partners.⁸

In a national study on the prevalence of dating violence involving 4,667 young people, aged between 13 and 29, 25.4% admitted to having been victims of at least one abusive act and 30.6% reported having been the aggressors. The emotionally abusive behaviours are in the lead (19.5%),

followed by physical abuse (13.4%) and severe physical violence (7.6%).⁹

Given these results, the following questions emerged:

- How do the variables of age, gender, area of residence, family income, having been a victim and/or witness to violence in childhood and dating, interfere with dating violence and nursing student well-being?
- Is there a correlation between violence in dating relationships and nursing students' psychological well-being?

With the aim of answering some of these and other questions, the objectives of this research were outlined as:

- To identify the socio-demographic variables which interfere in violence in dating relationships.
- To identify whether having been the victim and/or witness of violence in childhood has significant effect on violence in dating relationships.
- To verify if there is a correlation between violence in dating relationships and psychological well-being.

Type of study

Quantitative and non-experimental, cross-sectional, descriptive a correlational.

Participants

Non-probabilistic convenience sample based on 203 nursing students attending the Health School of Viseu (Table 1).

Instruments

A protocol was used for data collection consisting of: a questionnaire of socio-demographic and contextual characteristics with six questions, which allowed some variables to be measured, such as gender, age, area of residence, family income, having already been a victim and/or witnessing violence in childhood and if currently dating, the Dating Relationship Victimization Practices and Behaviours Scale.¹⁰ We also used the Demonstration of Psychological Well-Being Measurement Scale for College Students ("Échelle de Mesure des Manifestations du Bien-Être Psychologique" – EMMBEP)¹¹ validated for the Portuguese population.¹²

The two-scale psychometric study mentioned above shows that there is internal consistency in various dimensions that comprise each:

- The Cronbach's alphas for each dimension of the Dating Relationship Victimization Practices and Behaviours Scale demonstrate that the sexual violence dimension has a much lower value than what is considered acceptable. All other values are above 0.60, indicating a reasonable and good internal consistency among the items of the respective dimension.
- The results of the internal consistency of the Demonstration of Psychological Well-Being Measurement Scale show that the values of Cronbach's alpha range between 0.681 and 0.965, mostly considered indicative values of good and very good consistency.

Table 1 Distribution of the sample according to the socio-demographic data

| Variables | % | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | SD |
|---|------|---------|---------|-------|---------|
| Age | — | 18.00 | 34.00 | 18.85 | 1.58092 |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Male | 29.6 | | | | |
| Female | 70.4 | | | | |
| Has a girl/boyfriend at the moment | | | | | |
| Yes | 84.7 | | | | |
| No | 15.3 | | | | |
| Area of residence | | | | | |
| Rural | 38.9 | | | | |
| Urban | 61.1 | | | | |
| Household incom | | | | | |
| < 500 euros | 4.9 | | | | |
| 500 to 1500 euros | 77.8 | | | | |
| > 1500 euros | 17.2 | | | | |
| Have you been a victim and/or witnessed violence in your childhood? | | | | | |
| Yes | 7.4 | | | | |
| No | 92.6 | | | | |

Results

In the inferential data analysis we used analytical statistics, in order to determine whether or not there is a significant relationship between the variables, from which we will present the most significant results.

Gender, victimization practices and behaviours in dating relationships and psychological well-being

There are statistically significant differences between gender and all of the scale's dimensions ($P < .005$). Female students have the highest mean values, so that we can infer that gender is a variable that interferes with the prevalence

of victimization practices and behaviours in dating relationships, with girls being the most highly victimized, particularly in stalking violence ($M = 1.74$), followed by psychological violence ($M = 1.30$), with sexual violence ($M = 1.06$) being the least experienced (Table 2).

Regarding psychological well-being, males had significantly higher levels of control of self and events ($P = .000$), social surroundings ($P = .000$) and self-esteem ($P = .046$). In other psychological well-being dimensions no significant differences were found.

As for general well-being, although a slight difference in favour of males was found, it did not prove to be statistically significant. In terms of mean ranking, the male students showed better psychological well-being, which is shown by the higher values.

Table 2 Mann-Whitney U – Gender, victimization practices and behaviours in dating relationships and psychological well-being

| Dimensions | Gender | | | | Mann-Whitney U <i>p</i> |
|-------------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------------------------------|
| | Female | | Male | | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | |
| Physical violence | 1.08 | .16 | 1.04 | .15 | 0.016 |
| Psychological violence | 1.30 | .26 | 1.22 | .21 | 0.033 |
| Sexual violence | 1.06 | .17 | 1.02 | .13 | 0.017 |
| Stalking violence | 1.74 | .48 | 1.57 | .48 | 0.023 |
| EMMBEP - Happiness | 4.21 | .45 | 4.35 | .52 | .185 |
| EMMBEP - Sociability | 4.20 | .51 | 4.26 | .51 | .527 |
| EMMBEP - Control of self and events | 3.81 | .65 | 4.13 | .64 | .000 |
| EMMBEP - Social surroundings | 3.79 | .67 | 4.19 | .58 | .000 |
| EMMBEP - Self-esteem | 4.16 | .56 | 4.35 | .55 | .046 |
| EMMBEP - Balance | 4.21 | .49 | 4.11 | .61 | .177 |
| General well-being | 102.53 | 11.92 | 106.52 | 12.25 | .084 |

These empirical data are in line with those obtained in studies by authors such as Saavedra and Machado.¹³ These authors mentioned that there are significant differences in violence perpetrated by male students were, compared to females, psychological violence is the most evidenced and the least is sexual violence, which is in line with data found in this work.

Age, victimization practices and behaviours in dating relationships and psychological well-being

We found that at the level of significance of 0.05, there is no significant relationship between age and dating violence. Relating age with the dimensions of the Psychological Well-Being Scale, there are only statistically significant differences between age and Self-Esteem ($P = .010$). The relationship between age and the dimension of control of self and events is also weak, but it is on the threshold of significance ($P = .056$). The same is true in the relationship between age and social surroundings ($P = .006$) and between age and general well-being ($P = .007$).

As for the mean values, their ordering shows that with respect to practices and behaviours of dating victimization, stalking violence is more evident in all age groups, with the highest mean for students aged between 20 and 34 ($M = 1.74$). Sexual violence is less punctuated, as the mean values are lowest on the whole (Table 3).

Having been a victim and/or witnessing violence in childhood, victimization practices and behaviours in dating relationship and psychological well-being

There are statistically significant differences between the fact that students have been victims and/or witnesses of violence against children and sexual violence ($P = .000$), suggesting that this variable affects victimization practices and behaviours in dating relationships, particularly in terms of sexual violence. There were higher values in stalking violence, most notably for participants who were not

victims and/or witnesses of violence in childhood, followed by psychological violence.

With respect to the psychological well-being, no statistically significant differences were found in any of the dimensions of the scale ($P < .005$). Overall, students who had already been victims and/or witnesses of violence in childhood scored the highest means in the psychological well-being (Table 4).

In fact, some authors suggest that dating violence is almost always characterised by acts of (less serious) physical violence, such as insults, slander or making serious claims so as to humiliate, yelling or threatening with the intent to frighten, breaking or damaging objects intentionally or slapping. It was also found that adolescents/young people who have witnessed acts of violence or have been victims have been assumed as a risk factor for dating violence.⁵

In intersecting the dimensions of violence with the dimensions of psychological well-being, by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient, using a bilateral p-value, we found statistically significant negative correlations between dimensions of victimization practices and behaviours in dating and relationships and the Psychological Well-Being Scale, meaning that the presence of any type of violence is associated with a decrease in students' psychological well-being (Table 5).

These results corroborate those obtained by other authors, according to whom young victims of dating violence have reduced psychological well-being, especially when stalking violence and psychological violence predominate.¹⁴

According to the same authors, with increased age, the frequency of sexual violence worsens and the frequency of contact and the future of dating are not related to victimization practices and behaviours.¹⁴

Conclusion

Violence in intimate relationships happens from adolescence and throughout adulthood, too often in marriage and/or cohabitation, having begun with dating, encompassing

Table 3 Kruskal-Wallis – Age, victimization practices and behaviours in dating relationships and psychological well-being

| Dimensions | Age | | | | | | Kruskal-Wallis |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|----------------|
| | 18 years (n = 94) | | 19 years (n = 88) | | 20-34 years (n = 21) | | |
| | MR | SD | MR | SD | MR | SD | |
| Physical violence | 1.07 | .16 | 1.07 | .17 | 1.06 | .12 | .469 |
| Psychological violence | 1.29 | .27 | 1.26 | .24 | 1.28 | .16 | .593 |
| Sexual violence | 1.05 | .16 | 1.05 | .17 | 1.00 | .00 | .601 |
| Stalking violence | 1.68 | .47 | 1.68 | .50 | 1.74 | .49 | .839 |
| EMMBEP - Happiness | 4.18 | .41 | 4.33 | .54 | 4.23 | .44 | .010 |
| EMMBEP - Sociability | 4.19 | .50 | 4.24 | .51 | 4.29 | .53 | .314 |
| EMMBEP - Control of self and events | 3.83 | .63 | 3.96 | .72 | 3.98 | .55 | .274 |
| EMMBEP - Social surroundings | 3.77 | .66 | 4.07 | .66 | 3.90 | .62 | .006 |
| EMMBEP - Self-esteem | 4.08 | .51 | 4.35 | .59 | 4.29 | .53 | .000 |
| EMMBEP - Balance | 4.11 | .52 | 4.26 | .55 | 4.16 | .45 | .080 |
| General well-being | 101.57 | 11.19 | 105.86 | 13.02 | 104.24 | 11.08 | .007 |

Table 4 Mann-Whitney U – Having been a victim and/or witness of violence in childhood, victimization practices and behaviours in dating relationships and psychological well-being

| Dimensions | Have you been a victim and/or witnessed violence in your childhood? | | | | Mann-Whitney U <i>p</i> |
|-------------------------------------|---|-------|--------|-------|----------------------------|
| | Yes | | No | | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | |
| Physical violence | 1.14 | .29 | 1.06 | .14 | .536 |
| Psychological violence | 1.25 | .26 | 1.27 | .24 | .358 |
| Sexual violence | 1.22 | .33 | 1.03 | .13 | .000 |
| Stalking violence | 1.58 | .51 | 1.69 | .48 | .328 |
| EMMBEP - Happiness | 4.28 | .52 | 4.24 | .47 | .950 |
| EMMBEP - Sociability | 4.25 | .56 | 4.22 | .51 | .895 |
| EMMBEP - Control of self and events | 4.11 | .63 | 3.88 | .67 | .250 |
| EMMBEP - Social surroundings | 3.91 | .77 | 3.91 | .66 | .697 |
| EMMBEP - Self-esteem | 4.28 | .55 | 4.21 | .56 | .783 |
| EMMBEP - Balance | 4.22 | .54 | 4.18 | .53 | .972 |
| General well-being | 105.13 | 13.46 | 103.60 | 12.04 | .637 |

Table 5 Pearson Correlation Coefficient - victimization practices and behaviours in dating relationships and psychological well-being

| | | Physical violence | Psychological violence | Sexual violence | Stalking violence |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| EMMBEP - Happiness | R | -.445** | -.633** | -.270** | -.500** |
| | <i>p</i> | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| EMMBEP - Sociability | R | -.450** | -.554** | -.262** | -.331** |
| | <i>p</i> | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| EMMBEP - Control of self and events | R | -.307** | -.574** | -.196** | -.616** |
| | <i>p</i> | .000 | .000 | .005 | .000 |
| EMMBEP - Social surroundings | R | -.273** | -.475** | -.184** | -.514** |
| | <i>p</i> | .000 | .000 | .009 | .000 |
| EMMBEP - Self-esteem | R | -.437** | -.607** | -.307** | -.423** |
| | <i>p</i> | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| EMMBEP - Balance | R | -.349** | -.535** | -.248** | -.462** |
| | <i>p</i> | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| General well-being | R | -.438** | -.647** | -.281** | -.538** |
| | <i>p</i> | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |

physical, psychological and sexual violence. This form of violence is often perpetrated by boys against girls, but can also be perpetrated by girls against boys. It mostly affects young women and is transversal to all races, ethnic groups, cultures and socioeconomic or educational levels and has historical and cultural roots.

The empirical study was conducted with a sample of nursing students with a mean age of approximately 18.85, with a minimum of 18 and a maximum of 34. It was established that the majority of participants are currently dating and are mostly residing in urban areas. The most significant household income was between 500 and 1500 euros. It was also found that almost all of the subjects had never been a victim and/or witnessed violence in their childhood.

The results showed statistically significant differences between gender and all dimensions of the scale of dating violence with female students having higher average values.

It is therefore inferred that gender is a variable that interferes with the prevalence of victimization practices and behaviours in relation to dating with girls being the most victimized, particularly in stalking violence followed by psychological violence. The form of violence least experienced is sexual violence. It was found that gender and age were variables that affect the psychological well-being of students. It was also concluded that stalking violence was the most highly evidenced, followed by psychological violence. Physical and sexual violence were less prevalent.

Greater experience of stalking and psychological violence was found in students who are dating at present in terms of mean ranking. As for the mean ranking of the dimensions of psychological well-being, it was found that the highest were for students who do not date, meaning that they were subjects of the sample who revealed a higher psychological

well-being. Another aspect that was found has to do with the interference of the having been a victim and/or witness of violence against children and sexual violence variable. The presence of statistically significant negative correlations between the victimization practices and behaviours scale in dating and relationships dimensions and those of psychological well-being, denoting the presence of any type of violence is associated with a decrease in student psychological well-being.

Given these findings, we can suggest a greater investment in education for health sessions, in order to promote a healthy dating relationship among adolescents and young people. Neither partner should exercise power over the other, and both should show mutual affection, respect and support. It is normal for conflicts to arise between couples, but it is important to distinguish a conflict from a violent situation, since this tends to occur repeatedly and to worsen over time. In a violent situation, one partner tries to exert power and control over another, not respecting their ideas and opinions. This is a situation worth pondering. Being in violent relationships is often accepted, also considering that these occur between other dating couples, because certain myths and beliefs that influence behaviours and choices are believed, even though they do not correspond to reality. Therefore, it is necessary to demystify these preconceived notions in order to intervene early, aiming at guaranteeing a positive psychological well-being.

Intervention by health professionals in partnership with other educators, integrated into school health projects is very important so as to have a decisive role in promoting healthy behaviours in students, with the aim of positive changes in cognitive and behavioural variables, in order to avoid situations of dating violence. Empirical results demonstrate the need to prevent and intervene in this issue early in adolescence, when the first affectionate and loving relationships are being established.

It is also important to empower adolescents to make decisions consciously, autonomously and responsibly and to adopt positive, healthy and rewarding behaviours within intimate relationships. It is essential to maximize students' understanding of the phenomenon of dating violence, to

clarify the relationship of intimacy and deconstruct myths, beliefs and gender stereotypes, leading them to believe that it is feasible to build a society where women and men can live their intimate relationships free of gender stereotypes and other forms of violence.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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What we know about the theme

Violence in dating relationships involves dimensions such as physical, psychological and sexual abuse, requiring strategies for prevention and early intervention

What we get out the study

Being in violent relationships is often accepted, also considering that these occur between other dating couples, because certain myths and beliefs that influence behaviours and choices are believed, even though they do not correspond to reality. Therefore, it is necessary to demystify these preconceived notions in order to intervene early, aiming at guaranteeing a positive psychological well-being.