

# Prevalence and characteristics of dating violence among school-aged adolescents in Portugal

*Prevalência e características da violência no namoro entre adolescentes escolares de Portugal*

*Prevalencia y características de la violencia en el noviazgo entre adolescentes en edad escolar en Portugal*

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** To identify the prevalence of dating violence among adolescents and discuss the association between the violent behaviors and the variables: age, gender and length of dating relationship. **Methods:** Epidemiological cross-sectional study. Sample: 1,268 male and female students, aged 16-24 years, enrolled in Portuguese secondary schools. Data were collected through questionnaires including sociodemographic data and data on dating violence victimization and perpetration behaviors.

**Results:** 5.9% of the adolescents were involved in dating violence situations. Both genders used physical violence. Males were the greatest perpetrators and victims of psychological violence. **Conclusion:** A similar pattern of violence was found between genders in some behaviors, such as: hair pulling, choking, throwing objects, slapping, kicking, head-banging, and pushing. Therefore, further studies are needed to understand which factors influence the differences and similarities of dating violence.

**Keywords:** adolescence; adolescent behavior; violence.

## RESUMO

**Objetivos:** Identificar a prevalência de violência no namoro entre adolescentes e discutir a associação entre os comportamentos de violência e as variáveis: idade, sexo e tempo de namoro. **Métodos:** Estudo transversal epidemiológico. A amostra foi constituída por 1.268 estudantes de ambos os sexos, idades entre 16 e 24 anos, de escolas secundárias de quatro distritos da Região Central de Portugal. Na coleta de dados, foi utilizado um questionário contendo dados sociodemográficos e de comportamentos de vitimização e perpetração de violência no namoro. **Resultados:** 5,9% do total dos adolescentes referiram envolvimento em situação de violência no namoro. Ambos os sexos relataram uso de violência física. Na violência psicológica, o sexo masculino é o maior perpetrador e vítima. **Conclusão:** Os resultados apresentaram, em alguns comportamentos, similaridade do padrão de violência entre os sexos, tais como: puxar os cabelos com força; dar uma bofetada; apertar o pescoço; atirar objetos em outra pessoa; dar pontapés e cabeçadas e dar empurrões violentos, indicando, portanto, que mais pesquisas são necessárias para entender que fatores influenciam as diferenças e similaridades desse evento.

**Palavras-chave:** adolescência; comportamento do adolescente; violência.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivos:** Identificar la prevalencia de la violencia en el noviazgo entre adolescentes y discutir la relación entre las conductas de violencia y variables independientes: edad, sexo y tiempo de citas. **Métodos:** Estudio Transversal Epidemiológico. La muestra estuvo conformada por 1.268 estudiantes, de ambos sexos, de 16 y 24 años de edad, de escuelas secundarias de cuatro distritos de la Región Centro de Portugal. En la recolección de datos, se utilizó un cuestionario que contiene los datos sociodemográficos y el comportamiento de la victimización y perpetración de violencia en el noviazgo. **Resultados:** 5,9% de todos los adolescentes reportaron participación en situaciones de violencia en el noviazgo. Ambos sexos reportaron el uso de la violencia física. En la violencia psicológica, los chicos son los mayores perpetradores y las víctimas. **Conclusion:** Los resultados muestran, en algunos comportamientos, similitudes del estándar de violencia entre los sexos, como el pelo tirando con fuerza; bofetada; apriete el cuello; lanzar objetos a otra pessoa; patadas y cabezazos cabeza y dar sacudidas violentas, lo que indica, por lo tanto, que se necesita más investigación para entender que factores influyen en las diferencias y similitudes de este evento.

**Palabras clave:** Adolescente; Conducta del Adolescente; Violencia.

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Submitted on 06/05/2015.

Accepted on 11/19/2015.

DOI: 10.5935/1414-8145.20160024

## INTRODUCTION

The knowledge about violence acquired in recent years has brought to light one of the most important challenges to public health of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which has motivated the study of various types and forms of this phenomenon. Despite its great social relevance, dating violence among adolescents started to be explored only recently in the scientific literature, thus data on the prevalence of dating violence and its associated factors in adolescents and young women are scarce<sup>1</sup>. The main objectives of the recent international studies that attach great importance to the topic are: to improve the affective-sexual experiences between young people and prevent conjugal violence<sup>2</sup>.

In Portugal, the awareness about the severity and magnitude of the problem of dating violence increased from the beginning of the 1990s<sup>3</sup>, which can be seen in the publication of several studies<sup>3-6</sup> that have contributed to the characterization and discussion of the phenomenon from the perspective of its prevention. In the last two decades, many countries and international institutions that encourage research have given priority to the study of adolescent health, due to the observation that the formation of the lifestyle of adolescents is crucial not only for them but also for the future generations<sup>7</sup>.

There are currently other consensuses regarding the perception that adolescence is a developmental stage which allows for the investment in preventive efforts<sup>8</sup>. Adolescence is a transitional period characterized by the impulses of the physical, mental, emotional, sexual and social development in which the individual strives to achieve the goals related to the cultural expectations of the society in which he/she lives<sup>9</sup>. It should be underlined that all studies converge on the importance of research on violence in this phase of the life-cycle in which the first affective-sexual relationships are established and the risk of experiences of victimization or perpetration of violence emerges<sup>9</sup>. Experiencing violence in a dating relationship in adolescence can be seen as a continuum that begins with the abuse suffered by the adolescents still in childhood within their families of origin, and is perpetuated in the families that they will build in adulthood<sup>9</sup>. Adolescents who are victims of dating violence in middle school are at greater risk for victimization during higher education<sup>10</sup>.

According to the World Health Organization, dating violence refers to any "behavior in an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm, including acts of physical aggression, forced intercourse, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors"<sup>11:107</sup>. This type of violence starts in adolescence and continues throughout adult life, and often starts in dating relationships and extends to marriage or cohabitation. This form of violence is mainly perpetrated by men against women, but it can also be perpetrated by women against men and in same-sex intimate relationships. Dating violence is a pandemic which affects primarily women and permeates all ethnic groups, cultures, socioeconomic or educational levels, and has historical and cultural roots<sup>12</sup>.

The inclusion of adolescents in health professionals' actions with a view to planning the prevention and intervention in dating violence is an additional step to modify the current scenario<sup>2</sup>. Adolescence and early adulthood are important periods which lay down the foundations for healthy and stable relationships that contribute to women's health and general well-being. Ensuring that adolescents and young women may enjoy violence-free relationships is an important investment in their future<sup>13</sup>.

In light of the above, the purpose of this study was to analyze dating violence among adolescents of public schools in four districts of Portugal. Studies of this nature are essential to characterize the severity of the problem and raise awareness on its potential consequences throughout the lifecycle of the individual. The central hypothesis is that the length of dating relationships and the age of the adolescents influence the violent behavior in the relationship between young people. The objectives of this study were to identify the prevalence of dating violence between adolescents and discuss the association between the violent behaviors and the following variables: age, gender and length of dating relationship. It should be underlined that investigating the different manifestations of dating violence, which is becoming more common among the young population, is a way of subsidizing intervention work with a view to improving the affective-sexual experiences of adolescents and preventing violence between intimate partners.

## METHODS

This is a cross-sectional study of epidemiological nature which is part of a broader study on dating violence. The population was composed of 4,158 female and male students aged between 14 and 19 years who attended secondary schools from the central region of mainland Portugal, more specifically 54 schools of the districts of Aveiro, Coimbra, Leiria and Viseu, in 2010 and 2011. The non-probability purposive sample was composed of 1,268 adolescents. The inclusion criteria were: having a boyfriend/girlfriend at the time of the study; age between 14 and 19 years; and attending the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Only 30.6% of the study population met these criteria.

The data collection tool was a self-administered questionnaire composed of two groups of questions: the first group was on sociodemographic data (age, gender and education) and on the dating relationship (length of dating relationship and condition of having been a victim or not of dating violence); the second group included 18 questions on the behaviors of victimization and perpetration of violence in intimate relationships. The answers to the second questionnaire were dichotomous (yes, no) and assessed three forms of violence: Psychological (Blackmail behaviors; Negative comments about personal image; Threatening postures and gestures; Stalking behaviors at school; Invasion of privacy; Judging, correcting and criticizing; Yelling or threatening to instill fear; Insulting, or making defamatory or humiliating statements to "hurt"); Physical (Pulling hair; Slapping; Choking;

Throwing objects; Kicking or head banging; Shoving; Preventing contact with other people), and Sexual (Forcing sexual actions against consent; Pressure for unwanted sexual activity; Attempt of physical contact with sexual connotation).

Before the study was conducted, the questionnaires were assessed by six experts in the area of dating violence, and subjected to a preliminary test with students who were not part of the sample. The results of the test did not indicate the need to change the questionnaires. After the researchers explained the study objectives and obtained the informed consent of the students and their parents and/or legal guardians, the students answered both questionnaires in the classroom. The average response time was 10 minutes.

To assess the association between the variables "behaviors of victimization and perpetration of violence" and the students' gender, we used the chi-square test (two nominal variables). To assess the association between the variables "behaviors of victimization and perpetration of violence" by gender and the variables age and length of dating relationship, we used the Student's *t*-test and Pearson's correlation. Although the variables were not normally distributed, as can be seen using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the use of parametric tests was supported by the central limit theorem<sup>14</sup>. According to this theorem, when the size of both samples is greater than 30, the distribution is close to normal distribution.

Data were statistically analyzed using Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 18.0 for Windows. To systematize and highlight the information provided by the data, we used descriptive statistical techniques: absolute (N) and relative (%) frequencies, measures of central tendency (arithmetic means -  $\bar{x}$ ), and measures of dispersion and variability (standard deviation, minimum and maximum).

This study complied with the ethical and legal requirements to safeguard the anonymity of the subjects involved. Data collection was performed only after the protocol was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Nursing School of Coimbra, registered under number 247-12/2014. It should be underlined that this study was foreseen in the community outreach project *N(amor) o (Im)perfeito* and that it was developed with the authorization of the Ministry of Education of Portugal and the directing boards of each school participating in the study, which were part of the health education and sex education program. The researchers safeguarded the right of adolescents and their parents or legal guardians to sign the Free and Informed Consent Form.

## RESULTS

Of the total of 1,268 adolescents who participated in the study, 63.6% were female, 36.4% were male, and 5.9% had been involved in situations of dating violence. The mean age was 16.56 years (SD = 1.16), considering the age range from 14 to 19 years, and the mean length of the dating relationship was 11.33 months (SD = 11.30) (Table 1).

The assessment of the violent behaviors of adolescents as perpetrators and/or victims (Table 2) revealed the prevalence of perpetration by males against females, which occurred in 13 of the 18 behaviors assessed, such as: "Negative comments about personal image" (11.7% x 7.9%); "Threatening postures and gestures" (5.0% x 3.8%); "Stalking at school" (5.4% x 1.2%); "Judging, correcting and criticizing" (36.5% x 33.6%); "Hair pulling" (5.0% x 1.4%); "Chocking" (3.2% x 0.3%); "Throwing objects at another person" (4.1% x 1.5%); "Kicking or head-banging" (2.5% x 1.0%); "Pushing" (3.4% x 1.8%); "Insulting, or making defamatory or insulting statements to *hurt*" (4.5% x 3.3%); "Pressure unwanted sexual activity" (4.1% x 0.4%); and "Attempt of physical contact with sexual connotation" (6.8% x 1.9%).

In relation to the condition of having been a victim, there was a prevalence of females in ten of the 18 behaviors assessed, such as: "Blackmail behaviors" (18.3% x 17.2%); "Negative comments about personal image" (12.9% x 12.3%); "Threatening postures and gestures" (8.8% x 8.1%); "Stalking at school" (4.3% x 3.8%); "Invasion of privacy" (19.6% x 16.9%); "Pushing" (5.3% x 4.9%); "Preventing contact with other people" (17.7% x 13.1%); "Yelling or threatening to instill fear" (9.5% x 4.5%) and "Insulting, or making defamatory or insulting statements to *hurt*" (9.8% x 3.5%). It is worth pointing out that the differences were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) only in eight behaviors of victimization and in six behaviors of perpetration (Table 2).

Subsequently, we assessed the association between the violent behaviors and the condition of being a victim or perpetrator according to gender, age and length of dating relationship of the sampled adolescents (Tables 3 and 4). The analysis of the victimization behaviors according to gender revealed that only five out of the 18 behaviors differed significantly according to age, in female adolescents (Table 3): "Blackmail behaviors" ( $p < 0.001$ ), "Negative comments about personal image" ( $p < 0.005$ ), "Judging, correcting and criticizing" ( $p < 0.001$ ), "Preventing contact with other people" ( $p < 0.02$ ), "Yelling or threatening to instill fear" ( $p < 0.007$ ). In male adolescents, only two behaviors differed significantly: "Invasion of privacy" ( $p < 0.017$ ) and "Judging, correcting and criticizing" ( $p < 0.008$ ). The above-mentioned behaviors were more frequent in older adolescents.

In relation to the perpetration behaviors according to the gender of the adolescents, we found that six behaviors differed significantly in females according to age: "Blackmail behaviors" ( $p < 0.001$ ), "Negative comments about personal image" ( $p < 0.001$ ), "Judging, correcting and criticizing" ( $p < 0.001$ ), "Preventing contact with other people" ( $p < 0.02$ ), "Throwing objects at another person" ( $p < 0.042$ ) and "Yelling or threatening to instill fear" ( $p < 0.003$ ). In male students, the difference was only significant in one behavior: "Judging, correcting and criticizing" ( $p < 0.001$ ). The prevalence of all of the behaviors mentioned above was higher in older adolescents.

The analysis of the 18 victimization behaviors by gender according to the length of dating relationship (Table 4) revealed significant differences in four of them among females and in nine of them among males. Female adolescents who had been dating

**Table 1.** Distribution of students according to gender, age, length of dating relationship and condition of having been a victim or not of dating violence

		Nº	%	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Gender	F	806	63.6				
	M	462	36.4				
Length of dating relationship/months				1	100	11.33	11.30
Age				14	19	16.53	1.16
Situation of violence	Yes	75	5.9				
	No	1,193	94.1				

**Table 2.** Dating violence victimization or perpetration behaviors reported by the adolescents according to gender

Variables		Perpetration victimization									
		No				p	Yes				p
		Nº	%	Nº	%		Nº	%	Nº	%	
Blackmail behaviors	F	678	86.7	104	12.9	0.60	649	81.7	145	18.3	0.47
	M	388	87.8	54	12.2		371	82.8	77	17.2	
Negative comments about personal image	F	722	92.1	62	7.9	0.04	694	87.1	103	12.9	0.58
	M	392	88.3	52	11.7		392	87.7	55	12.3	
Threatening postures and gestures	F	753	96.2	30	3.8	0.58	727	91.2	70	8.8	0.73
	M	420	95.0	22	5.0		411	91.9	36	8.1	
Stalking at school	F	773	98.8	9	1.2	0.00	762	95.7	34	4.3	0.99
	M	420	24.0	94.6	5.4		427	96.2	17	3.8	
Invasion of privacy	F	672	86.0	109	14.0	0.56	640	80.4	156	19.6	0.32
	M	385	86.9	58	13.1		370	83.1	75	16.9	
Judging, correcting and criticizing	F	521	66.4	264	33.6	0.36	513	64.4	284	35.6	0.25
	M	280	63.5	161	36.5		271	60.8	175	39.2	
Hair pulling	F	770	98.6	11	1.4	0.00	782	98.1	15	1.9	0.00
	M	419	95.0	22	5.0		425	94.9	23	5.1	
Slapping	F	705	90.2	77	9.8	0.04	755	94.8	41	5.2	0.00
	M	415	93.5	29	6.5		393	88.1	53	11.9	
Chocking	F	779	99.7	2	0.3	0.00	780	97.9	17	2.1	0.27
	M	428	96.8	14	3.2		433	96.7	15	3.3	
Throwing objects at another person	F	769	98.5	12	1.5	0.01	775	97.5	20	2.5	0.00
	M	424	95.9	18	4.1		415	93.3	30	6.7	
Kicking or head-banging	F	774	99.0	8	1.0	0.13	786	98.6	11	1.4	0.08
	M	432	97.5	11	2.5		430	96.8	14	3.2	
Pushing	F	768	98.2	14	1.8	0.12	755	94.0	42	5.3	0.73
	M	426	96.6	15	3.4		423	95.1	22	4.9	
Preventing contact with other people	F	720	90.5	80	10.2	0.50	654	82.3	141	17.7	0.01
	M	400	40.0	9.1	9.5		386	86.9	58	13.1	
Yelling or threatening to instill fear	F	750	95.9	15	3.4	0.55	720	90.5	76	9.5	0.02
	M	425	96.6	27	6.1		425	95.5	20	4.5	

Continued Table 2.

Variables	Perpetration victimization										
		No		Yes		p	No		Yes		p
		Nº	%	Nº	%		Nº	%	Nº	%	
Insulting, or making defamatory or humiliating statements to "hurt"	F	755	96.7	26	3.3	0.34	719	90.2	78	9.8	0.02
	M	420	95.5	20	4.5		769	96.5	28	3.5	
Forcing sexual actions against consent	F	777	99.4	5	0.6	0.10	430	96.8	14	3.2	0.66
	M	434	98.2	8	1.8		769	96.6	27	3.4	
Pressure for unwanted sexual activity	F	779	99.6	3	0.4	0.00	432	96.9	14	3.1	0.65
	M	423	95.9	18	4.1		751	94.7	42	5.3	
Attempt of physical contact with sexual connotation	F	764	98.1	15	1.9	0.00	413	93.4	29	6.6	0.47
	M	410	93.2	30	6.8		649	81.7	145	18.3	

Due to the large amount of data in the table, only the *p*-value, rather than the chi-square, was shown, which is essential to assess if the differences are statistically significant.

for a longer time mentioned the following victimization behaviors: "Blackmail behaviors"; "Negative comments about personal image"; "Threatening posture and gestures" and "Judging, correcting and criticizing". On the other hand, male adolescents who had been dating for a longer time reported the following victimization behaviors: "Negative comments about personal image"; "Stalking at school"; "Invasion of privacy"; "Slapping"; "Throwing objects at another person"; "Kicking or head-banging"; "Pushing"; "Insulting, or making defamatory or humiliating statements to *hurt*" and "Pressure for unwanted sexual activity".

In relation to the perpetration behaviors according to the gender of adolescents, nine out of the 18 behaviors differed significantly according to the length of dating relationship among females; among males, the difference was significant in 17 behaviors. It should be underlined that the adolescents who had been dating for a longer time displayed the identified behaviors.

In the final phase of this study, we performed regression and correlation analyzes to the data on the percentage of adolescents who were victims or perpetrators of dating violence, according to the length of dating relationship and age by gender of the adolescents (Table 5). Among females, we observed that the percentage of victimization and perpetration behaviors increased with the increase in age and length of dating relationship. Among males, the increase in length of dating relationship was accompanied by an increase in the percentage of perpetration behaviors.

## DISCUSSION

This study on the scenario of dating violence among adolescents found a prevalence of 5.9% for the occurrence of this type of violence in the studied population. The prevalence rates reported in the literature<sup>15-17</sup> are significant and diverse worldwide, as a result of the adoption of different notions of violence, reflected in the instruments used, and also of different definitions of sample and methodological strategies of analysis.

Both male and female adolescents reported the use of physical violence, including "Hair pulling", "Slapping", "Chocking", "Throwing objects at another person", "Kicking and head-banging", and "Pushing". Many studies<sup>18,19</sup> indicate the symmetry of violence between partners, i.e. equality in terms of the exercise of dating violence, which can be exercised by both males and females. A study conducted with 15,214 American students from 158 high schools revealed that 8.9% of them experienced dating violence, being 8.9% of males and 8.7% of females<sup>16</sup>. These results emphasize that the occurrence of this phenomenon is similar between genders. Violence in the affective-loving relationships of adolescents shows patterns of mutual physical and psychological aggression between partners, revealing that, to break this relational dynamics, it is necessary to intervene in the couple, rather than only in one of the members<sup>17</sup>.

This study found that male adolescents were the greatest perpetrators of psychological violence, expressed mainly by controlling behaviors, such as "Preventing contact with other people", "Stalking at school" and "Yelling or threatening to instill fear". In the dimension of psychological violence, there is a significant difference between genders in terms of relational violence, with the perpetration and victimization rates being higher among males<sup>17</sup>.

In relation to sexual violence, this study found the prevalence of the male gender as victim (18.3% x 6.6%) in the following behaviors: "Pressure for unwanted sexual activity", "Forcing to have sexual actions against consent" and "Attempt of physical contact with sexual connotation". For these same behaviors, female students prevailed in the condition of perpetrators (6.8% x 1.9%). In a similar study, a high percentage of individuals of both genders reported having been touched sexually without consent (23.1% of females x 20.8% of males)<sup>19</sup>. The rates of perpetrated sexual abuse, particularly regarding the issue of forcing the partner to have sexual intercourse, were lower among girls (1.9% of females x 12.2% of males). Adolescence is a phase of discovery, during which most individuals start dating and exploring their sexuality;

**Table 3.** Differences between the victimization and perpetration behaviors according to the age and gender of the adolescents.

Behaviors by gender	Victimization/age						Perpetration/age						
	Does not have that behavior			Has that behavior			Does not have that behavior			Has that behavior			
	Mean	SD	p	Mean	SD	t	Mean	SD	p	Mean	SD	t	p
Blackmail behaviors	F	16.5	1.2	16.9	1.3	-3.47	0.00	16.5	1.2	16.9	1.1	-2.94	.00
	M	16.7	1.4	16.7	1.3	0.04	0.96	16.7	1.3	16.8	1.5	-0.74	.45
Negative comments about personal image	F	16.5	1.2	16.9	1.3	-2.82	0.00	16.5	1.2	17.0	1.2	-3.31	.00
	M	16.7	1.4	16.6	1.3	0.27	0.78	16.7	1.4	16.8	1.4	-0.56	.57
Threatening postures and gestures	F	16.6	1.3	16.8	1.4	-1.63	0.10	16.6	1.3	16.8	1.5	-0.72	0.46
	M	16.7	1.4	16.9	1.6	-0.89	0.37	16.7	1.4	16.9	1.2	-0.40	0.68
Stalking at school	F	16.6	1.3	16.4	0.9	0.69	0.48	16.6	1.3	16.7	1.1	-0.16	0.87
	M	16.7	1.4	17.0	1.7	-0.84	0.39	16.8	1.4	16.5	1.2	0.83	0.40
Invasion of privacy	F	16.6	1.3	16.5	1.2	0.59	0.55	16.6	1.3	16.7	1.2	-1.28	0.19
	M	16.6	1.3	17.0	1.4	-2.40	0.01	16.7	1.4	16.8	1.2	-0.50	0.61
Judging, correcting and criticizing	F	16.4	1.2	16.8	1.3	-3.47	0.00	6.4	1.2	16.8	1.3	-3.35	0.00
	M	16.6	1.3	16.9	1.4	-2.67	0.00	16.5	1.3	17.0	1.4	-3.49	0.00
Hair pulling	F	16.6	1.3	16.9	1.4	-0.76	0.44	16.6	1.3	16.0	1.4	1.46	0.14
	M	16.7	1.4	16.8	1.4	-0.14	0.88	16.7	1.4	16.5	1.3	0.84	0.39
Slapping	F	16.6	1.3	16.9	1.5	-1.32	0.18	16.6	1.3	16.9	1.5	-1.84	0.06
	M	16.7	1.4	17.0	1.4	-1.59	0.11	16.7	1.4	16.9	1.5	-0.63	0.52
Chocking	F	16.6	1.3	16.7	1.1	-0.17	0.86	16.6	1.3	17.0	1.4	-0.45	0.65
	M	16.8	1.4	16.4	1.0	0.92	0.35	16.8	1.4	16.3	1.1	1.10	0.26
Throwing objects at another person	F	16.6	1.3	16.8	1.3	-0.85	0.39	16.5	1.2	17.3	1.4	-2.03	0.04
	M	16.7	1.4	17.0	1.6	-0.87	0.38	16.7	1.4	16.9	1.6	-0.63	0.52
Kicking or head-banging	F	16.6	1.3	17.2	1.4	-1.54	0.12	16.6	1.3	17.2	1.6	-1.48	0.13
	M	16.8	1.4	16.5	1.1	0.73	0.46	16.8	1.4	16.2	1.2	1.31	0.18
Pushing	F	16.6	1.3	16.9	1.4	-1.51	0.13	16.6	1.3	16.6	1.2	0.06	0.95
	M	16.8	1.4	16.6	1.3	0.55	0.57	16.8	1.4	16.4	1.2	0.93	0.35
Preventing contact with other people	F	16.5	1.2	16.9	1.3	-3.09	0.00	16.6	1.3	16.8	1.2	-1.45	0.14
	M	16.7	1.4	16.7	1.4	0.14	0.88	16.7	1.4	16.9	1.4	-0.92	0.35
Yelling or threatening to instill fear	F	16.6	1.2	16.9	1.4	-2.71	0.00	16.5	1.2	17.2	1.4	-3.00	0.00
	M	16.7	1.4	16.4	1.3	1.09	0.27	16.7	1.4	16.8	1.4	-2.4	0.80
Insulting, or making defamatory or humiliating statements to "hurt"	F	16.6	1.3	16.8	1.3	-1.35	0.17	16.6	1.3	16.6	1.2	-0.15	0.87
	M	16.8	1.4	16.5	1.4	0.97	0.33	16.7	1.4	16.7	1.4	0.06	0.94
Forcing sexual actions against consent	F	16.6	1.3	16.7	1.6	-0.55	0.58	16.6	1.3	17.0	1.6	-0.71	0.47
	M	16.8	1.4	16.2	1.3	1.32	0.18	16.7	1.4	16.8	1.3	-0.03	0.97
Pressure for unwanted sexual activity	F	16.6	1.3	16.8	1.8	-1.02	0.30	16.6	1.3	16.7	0.6	-0.09	0.92
	M	16.8	1.4	16.5	1.3	0.72	0.47	16.7	1.4	16.6	1.1	0.43	0.66
Attempt of physical contact with sexual connotation	F	16.6	1.3	16.4	1.4	0.80	0.42	16.6	1.3	16.7	1.4	-0.23	0.81
	M	16.8	1.4	16.6	1.8	0.36	0.71	16.7	1.4	16.8	1.6	-0.12	0.89

**Table 4.** Victimization and perpetration behaviors related to the length of the adolescents' dating relationship, according to gender

Behaviors by gender	Victimization/Length of dating relationship					Perpetration/Length of dating relationship							
	Does not have that behavior		Has that behavior		p	Does not have that behavior		Has that behavior		p			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Blackmail behaviors	F	12.0	11.9	14.5	13.9	-2.21	0.02	12.1	12.2	15.5	12.8	-2.64	0.00
	M	10.0	11.1	10.4	9.4	-0.29	0.76	9.7	10.7	13.5	11.3	-2.41	0.01
Negative comments about personal image	F	12.1	11.9	14.9	14.6	-2.23	0.02	12.2	12.1	16.2	14.0	-2.48	0.01
	M	9.6	9.6	14.1	17.1	-2.87	0.00	9.7	9.6	13.6	17.5	-2.48	0.01
Threatening postures and gestures	F	12.2	12.0	15.6	14.9	-2.23	0.02	12.1	11.8	22.4	20.0	-4.63	0.00
	M	9.8	10.5	13.0	14.4	-1.65	0.09	9.7	9.9	19.2	22.5	-3.84	0.00
Stalking at school	F	12.5	12.3	16.6	16.9	-0.99	0.32	12.5	12.3	16.6	16.9	-0.99	0.32
	M	9.8	9.5	16.2	24.3	-2.83	0.00	9.8	9.5	16.2	24.3	-2.83	0.00
Invasion of privacy	F	12.7	12.5	11.6	11.6	0.95	0.34	12.1	12.0	15.4	13.9	-2.58	0.01
	M	9.1	9.6	13.8	11.0	-3.83	0.00	9.5	9.9	14.5	15.6	-3.27	0.00
Judging, correcting and criticizing	F	11.5	11.2	14.0	13.8	-2.72	0.00	11.2	11.1	15.0	14.1	-4.17	0.00
	M	9.4	10.4	11.2	11.4	-1.79	0.07	9.2	10.1	11.7	12.0	-2.33	0.02
Hair pulling	F	12.4	12.3	13.3	8.7	-0.26	0.79	12.4	12.3	20.3	13.6	-1.90	0.05
	M	10.0	10.5	12.4	16.2	-1.04	0.29	9.7	9.5	19.0	25.4	-3.83	0.00
Slapping	F	12.4	12.3	13.5	11.8	-0.53	0.59	12.2	12.1	15.2	13.9	-2.08	0.03
	M	9.6	9.3	14.2	18.3	-2.92	0.00	9.7	9.5	16.3	22.2	-3.17	0.00
Chocking	F	12.4	12.3	14.5	10.2	-0.67	0.49	12.5	12.3	28.5	10.6	-1.82	0.06
	M	9.9	10.0	14.7	27.2	-1.56	0.11	9.8	9.6	23.2	30.0	-4.45	0.00
Throwing objects at another person	F	12.3	12.2	15.1	12.1	-0.97	0.32	12.3	11.9	27.6	23.1	-4.48	0.00
	M	9.7	9.5	16.2	21.8	-3.17	0.00	9.9	10.1	16.1	22.7	-2.37	0.01
Kicking or head-banging	F	12.4	12.3	16.2	14.1	-0.95	0.34	12.5	12.3	11.7	10.6	0.18	0.85
	M	9.8	10.0	17.6	26.4	-2.58	0.01	9.8	9.6	23.5	32.6	-4.17	0.00
Pushing	F	12.4	12.4	12.9	11.0	-0.22	0.81	12.5	12.4	12.2	8.9	0.10	0.92
	M	9.7	9.5	18.2	25.0	-3.53	0.00	9.9	10.2	15.5	24.1	-1.93	0.05
Preventing contact with other people	F	12.2	11.8	13.5	13.9	-1.13	0.25	12.0	11.9	16.7	14.7	-3.22	0.00
	M	10.0	10.3	10.5	14.1	-3.14	0.75	9.6	9.7	15.6	18.6	-3.40	0.00
Yelling or threatening to instill fear	F	12.3	12.1	14.2	13.9	-1.30	0.19	12.2	11.8	20.4	19.0	-3.86	0.00
	M	10.0	10.5	12.0	16.4	-0.80	0.42	9.8	9.6	20.4	28.7	-3.74	0.00
Insulting, or making defamatory or humiliating statements to "hurt"	F	12.6	12.4	11.4	10.8	0.75	0.45	12.5	12.4	13.1	11.8	-0.25	0.79
	M	9.7	9.6	14.5	22.8	-2.17	0.03	9.7	9.5	19.2	24.8	-0.06	0.00
Forcing sexual actions against consent	F	12.6	12.4	9.6	9.9	1.28	0.20	12.5	12.3	18.8	11.1	-1.13	0.25
	M	9.9	10.4	10.3	10.7	-0.11	0.91	9.9	10.1	21.8	32.7	-3.08	0.00
Pressure for unwanted sexual activity	F	12.6	12.4	8.4	9.2	1.86	.06	12.5	12.3	18.3	15.3	-0.81	.41
	M	9.6	9.5	24.6	30.1	-5.00	.00	9.7	9.6	19.8	26.5	-3.87	.00
Attempt of physical contact with sexual connotation	F	12.7	12.4	9.2	10.4	1.81	.06	12.5	12.3	15.2	13.4	-0.84	.39
	M	10.1	10.8	9.7	12.5	0.18	.85	9.8	9.9	13.8	19.9	-1.93	.05

**Table 5.** Correlation coefficient to the variables victimization and perpetration behaviors according to the length of dating relationship, age and gender of the adolescents

	Female				Male			
	Age		Length of dating relationship		Age		Length of dating relationship	
	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p
Number of victimization behaviors (0-18)	.104**	.004*	.040	.267	.035	.471	.051	.288
Number of perpetration behaviors (0-18)	.125**	.001*	.188**	.000*	.027	.582	.282**	.000*

\* Significant correlation at  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* Pearson correlation coefficients (r).

however, the first romantic experiences of many adolescents involve sexual coercion<sup>20</sup>.

A recent study on youth risk behavior revealed that 7.4% of the adolescents had been forced to have sexual intercourse<sup>21</sup>. A survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that about 10% of high school students reported the sexual victimization of a boyfriend/girlfriend, during the 12 months before the survey<sup>22</sup>.

The analysis of the association between violence and the age of the adolescent and the length of dating relationship showed that the older the adolescents and the longer the length of dating relationship, the higher the number of violent victimization and perpetration behaviors among females, whereas among males only the percentage of perpetration behaviors increased according to the length of dating relationship. The results obtained corroborate those obtained in a study on the co-occurrence of physical and psychological violence among adolescents in dating relationships, which detected a significant association between the duration of the affective relationship and the incidence of psychological violence, as well as an increase of 5.81% in the probability of it happening in dating relationships lasting more than one year<sup>15</sup>.

It is known that dating violence has negative consequences for the physical and emotional health of adolescents, and is a risk factor for violence in adult relationships<sup>23,24</sup>. Taking into account this dynamics, in which there is often a mixture of love and violence in adolescence, means preventing future intimate partner violence in adulthood, when the learnt relationship patterns are established and can bring about serious consequences for the couple and their children<sup>17</sup>. Further studies are needed to determine if the results of this study are similar in adolescents of other age groups. Another limitation of this study is the lack of the analysis of the frequency and severity of dating violence incidents, as well as the damage caused by them.

## CONCLUSION

The prevalence of dating violence was lower than in other studies found in the literature. The length of dating relationship correlates with the perpetration and victimization among females, and with the condition of being a perpetrator among males.

Although there is a similarity between the behaviors adopted by both male and female adolescents, the development of the victimization pattern of dating violence may be different for both genders. Therefore, it is essential to conduct additional studies to identify which factors influence the differences and similarities of this event, so as to adapt the interventions aiming at the prevention of the victimization of dating violence among adolescents.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is part of the activities planned for the Sandwich Doctorate scholarship and had the support of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - CAPES, a Foundation of the Ministry of Education in Brazil.

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