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Beliefs on Marital Violence Among Portuguese Adolescents: Monitoring Their Evolution and Relationship With Dating Violence

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In the last two decades, the problem of violence in the family sphere in particular and in intimate relationships in general has been on the agenda for Portuguese governmental and nongovernmental agencies. Several initiatives and campaigns have been launched, which are aimed at reducing occurrence of this violence, particularly among teenagers. This present study aims to assess the evolution in adolescents' attitudes and behaviors concerning intimate partner violence. We collected data from a sample of adolescents ($n = 913$) to compare with corresponding data collected 7 years ago by Neves and Nogueira (2010) in a sample that had identical sociodemographic characteristics ($n = 899$). Both cohorts resided in the same areas in the northeastern region of Portugal. The instruments used were the Scale of Beliefs about Marital Violence (ECVC) and the Marital Violence Inventory (IVC; Neves & Nogueira, 2010). The results indicate that although respondents tend to reject traditional beliefs on marital violence more now than in the past, especially male and older respondents, the percentage of dating violence reports has not decreased. Among girls, there was even an increase in perpetration of emotional and mild physical violence. We discuss possible reasons for this discrepancy between the evolution of attitudes and behaviors and make suggestions for improvement in the actions implemented among teenagers to increase their effectiveness.

Keywords: marital violence; dating violence; beliefs; adolescents; Portugal

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Portugal, like other European countries (Fees Regulating Authority, 2014), has been confronted with high rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) in the last decades among both adults (e.g., Neves & Nogueira, 2010; Azambuja et al., 2013) and adolescents (e.g., Machado et al., 2010; Neves et al., 2016; Perista et al., 2012). Data from police authorities shows that in 2018, and following the trend from previous years, the crime of domestic violence (the national legal designation of IPV, cf. Article 152 of the Portuguese Penal Code) was the second most reported crime against people, with 22,423 cases (SSI - Sistema de Segurança Interna, 2019). Women represented 78.6% of all victims, with 12.2% under 16 years old and 9.4% between 16 and 24 years old. Men represented 83.5% of all aggressors.

Portuguese people's beliefs and attitudes toward women's rights and IPV reflect a patriarchal ideology that was fostered by the *Estado Novo* [New State], the dictatorial regime that ruled the country for 40 years until the 1974 Carnation Revolution (Ferreira, 2011). With the instauration of democracy, Portugal has taken on several commitments to fight gender violence, promote gender equality, and develop policies for positive action and gender mainstreaming (Monteiro & Ferreira, 2016). Along these lines, the crime of marital mistreatment was officially recognized in 1982 (Article 153 of The Portuguese Penal Code) (Duarte, 2011) and there were signs of social changes toward gender equality within families (Santos & Pereira, 2013). At the end of the 1990s, the Global Plan for Equality of Opportunities (Resolution of the Council of Ministers no. 49/97) was launched, and was the first national integrated strategy for public policy on gender equality in Portugal. The National Plan against Domestic Violence (Resolution of the Council of Ministers no. 55/99), the first national strategy aimed at reducing these issues, was also launched as a result of the first National Survey on Violence Against Women, conducted in 1995 (CIG, 2014; Lourenço et al., 1997). In 2000, domestic violence became a public crime (Law no. 7/2000), and no longer required the victim pressing charges, and as a result the entire legislative framework on this crime was reviewed in 2007 (Law no. 59/2007) and in 2013 (Law no. 19/2013) (Alves et al., 2016); the same year, dating relationships were included as a type of IPV. Also in 2013, Portugal was the first country to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Council of Europe, 2011).

Nevertheless, the efforts made to change attitudes and practices have not yet reached the goal of decreasing incidence of domestic violence. Although recent studies indicate that Portuguese people generally disapprove of the use of violence in intimate relationships, it is still a common occurrence and related incidents appear regularly in the news (e.g., Alves et al., 2016; Neves, 2014a; Caridade, 2011). Recent femicide figures led the Portuguese Government to decree March 7 as a Day of National Grief in honor of the victims of domestic violence and their families (Decree no. 8/2019, March 6), approving a set of measures based on three priorities: (a) improving the collection, processing, and cross-checking of official quantitative data; (b) improving victim protection mechanisms within 72 hours after filing a report; and (c) reinforcing training models, including other areas of intervention (e.g., follow-up, care for victims, response from the justice system).

In fact, Portuguese men continue to tolerate IPV and married individuals present a higher level of violence acceptance, which suggests that conservative gender norms subsist in the culture (e.g., Neves & Nogueira, 2010; Neves et al., 2016; Coelho, 2016; Machado et al., 2014). Although Portuguese young people's attitudes toward gender equality tend to be more resistant to conservative norms and more supportive of egalitarian values than other

Europeans' (Ramos et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2018), national studies reveal that IPV among adolescents—usually known as dating violence—is an endemic problem in the country. Although they generally refuse the idea of a traditional family model, accepting ongoing social changes in the intimate domain, even changes regarding same-sex couples, dating violence rates are high among Portuguese teenagers. Both those who suffer and those who perpetrate dating violence display conservative attitudes regarding gender social relations (Neves et al., 2016; Neves et al., 2019a). Although generational research indicates that Portuguese young people's discourses about their affective and sexual biographies reflect an evolution in double standards and social representations of gender (Neves, 2013), comparisons with daily practices reveal that effective equality remains fragile and far removed from boys and girls' real experiences (Neves, 2016). The binary division of Portuguese society is still an identitarian refuge for many young people (Neves, 2016).

Dating violence includes any abusive physical, psychological, sexual, and social acts between adolescents (Teten et al., 2009), in either heterosexual or gay/lesbian relationships (Dank et al., 2014). It is estimated that one in four Portuguese young people has experienced at least one episode of domestic violence during his or her lifetime (Neves & Nogueira et al., 2010; Caridade, 2011). A Portuguese study (Magalhães et al., 2019) revealed that, in a sample of 4,652 young people with an average age of 15, 56% admit to having been subject to violence in intimate relationships at least once. Psychological violence was the most prevalent (18%), followed by stalking (16%), online violence (12%), control (11%), sexual violence (7%), and physical violence (6%). In this study, 68.5% of the participants legitimated at least one form of violence, with male respondents being more permissive of sexual violence (22% compared with 6%). Affecting both males and females, dating violence in Portugal is mostly perpetrated by males and suffered by females (Neves et al., 2019b).

In recent years, several programs and actions have been undertaken in the country to reduce the prevalence of dating violence among young people. These different intervention strategies have been designed and implemented by both governmental entities (e.g., Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality) and nongovernmental entities (e.g., Portuguese Association for Victim Support—APAV, Women's Association Alternative and Response—UMAR). For instance, APAV carried out the IUNO (Sensibilization and information on domestic and sexual violence) project, between 2003 and 2006, with the main goal of changing teens' beliefs and attitudes toward nonviolent behavior through a set of actions aimed at strategic groups (adolescents and education professionals). Between 2008 and 2010, APAV also developed the 4D Project, directed at ninth grade pupils, an integrated intervention in school contexts, implemented by teachers throughout 24 sessions in projects, civic training, or equivalent courses (Saavedra et al., 2013). Another example is the "Changes with Art Program," editions 1 and 2, implemented respectively between 2008 and 2010 and between 2011 and 2013 by the UMAR nongovernmental organization. The program intended to prevent gender violence and promote human rights among colleges and secondary schools' pupils. UMAR also developed a program called "Artways—Educational Policies and Training against Violence and Juvenile Delinquency," which aimed to raise awareness about gender equality and gender violence; promote respect for differences; develop social values, attitudes, and behaviors; and enable youths to effectively reject gender violence and empower them for social change (Magalhães et al., 2015). The first edition was implemented in 2014–2015, and the second edition is still in progress. Since 2017, Plan i Association has also been developing a Prevention Program for Dating

Violence in College, called UNi+. Its goals are to build a culture of zero tolerance toward IPV by providing information about the phenomenon and its consequences, as well as psychological and social support for victims, by creating institutional mechanisms which prevent and combat dating violence and by raising awareness on gender equality and social diversity and deconstructing norms that promote sexism, homophobia, racism, xenophobia, and other forms of social discrimination (Neves et al., 2017).

In recent years, several awareness campaigns were launched by the Government's Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG, 2014), for example, "Violent Dating is not Love" (2008), "Those who love you do not assault you," and "Dating with Fair Play" (2015); and by APAV, for example, "There are marks that no one should wear" (2008), "Cut off violence" (2012), "Dating violence: STOP" (2017). Recently, the Government directly launched a nationwide advertising campaign—"#namorarmemeasério" (2019)—aimed at preventing dating violence among students. The Secretary of State for Citizenship and Equality has been financing students' associations and federations to develop projects aimed to combat dating violence. Finally, driven by these official initiatives, several schools and local civic associations have been organizing awareness-raising events and outreach activities on the topic of dating violence.

Despite the importance of these actions in calling young people's attention to the phenomenon of dating violence and disseminating relevant information for its prevention, as Caridade and Machado (2012) have noticed, they lack continuity and a more in-depth treatment of this problem. In particular, there is the need for more involvement of teenagers, for example, with workshops and discussion groups or skills training sessions, in order to attain an effective change in behavior (Azambuja et al., 2013). In fact, dating violence prevention in Portugal has been made carried out occasionally, without a well-defined or articulated evaluation strategy, compromising the actions' overall success (Neves, 2014b).

As previously stated, although prevention efforts have multiplied in order to promote greater awareness among young people, the most recent prevalence studies continue to show high indicators of abusive behaviors in dating relationships (Neves et al., 2016; Magalhães et al., 2019; Santos & Caridade, 2017). Such data suggest a certain inconsistency between attitudes and behaviors: while young people condemn the use of violence in their intimate relationships, they nonetheless continue to use it in situations that they define as exceptional or nonviolent (Caridade and Machado, 2012).

The present study represents an effort to understand how, in the last 7 years, Portuguese teenagers have (or have not) been changing their attitudes and behaviors with regard to IPV.

EMPIRICAL STUDY

Our study consists of a comparison between two samples of Portuguese adolescents attending basic and high schools (ages 13–23) in three northwestern districts of the country (Porto, Braga, and Aveiro) in 2010 and 2017 respectively. It should be noted that northwestern districts, in addition to being among the most populated in the country, have the highest rate of domestic violence police reports nationwide (SSI - Sistema de Segurança Interna, 2019). The main goal was to measure possible changes in teenagers' endorsement of traditional beliefs on marital violence and its relationship with self-reported perpetration and/or suffering of violence within a dating relationship. To obtain the most accurate picture possible

of this evolution in relation to other recent studies, we used the same measuring instruments and matched the sociodemographic characteristics between the two cohorts.

Taking into account the abovementioned initiatives and actions aimed at raising public awareness about the domestic violence problem and IPV in general, we might expect a decrease in the endorsement of traditional beliefs and IPV incidence in the present sample in comparison with the 2010 sample. The impact of national campaigns is diffuse, with unpredictable effects across age cohorts. Actions conducted among teenagers in the past may have not reached the present respondents, especially the younger ones, and they are not expected to have had a noticeable influence on their attitudes. On the other hand, we may hypothesize that early campaigns on domestic violence directed to an adult public might have had some indirect influence on them, namely in cases where informed parents have transmitted precautionary messages on this matter to their children. For these reasons, we cannot draw specific hypotheses for the results and simply expect greater rejection of the beliefs and corresponding lower percentages of self-reported IPV.

Method

Samples. In the 2010 study, participants were recruited nationally (according to the areas defined by the latest 2001 Census data: North, Center Lisbon, Alentejo, Algarve, Azores, and Madeira) and three groups of participants were included (12 secondary school students, 16 vocational school students, and 8 university students), from earlier and later years of education.

For the present study, we collected 1,048 questionnaires identical to those used by Neves and Nogueira (2010) answered by pupils attending basic and high schools situated in three of the country's northwestern districts. We then extracted a matching subsample from Neves and Nogueira (2010) database, in terms of geographical region and age. To achieve the highest possible sociodemographic match (in sex, age, and socioeconomic status), we randomly extracted respondents from these sociodemographic sections in each database. As a result of the matching procedure, our initial sample was reduced to 913 respondents and the 2010 subsample (from northwestern districts attending basic and high school, n = 1,031) was reduced to 899 respondents. The two samples had the sociodemographic characteristics listed in Table 1. Unfortunately, to achieve maximum parity in gender, there were significant differences in the other two characteristics, but since traditional beliefs vary more by gender than by any of the other variables (Neves & Nogueira 2010), we decided to maintain these subsamples in our comparison.

Measures. The questionnaire consisted of the Scale of Beliefs about Marital Violence (ECVC) and, for information on respondents' personal experience of IPV, the Marital Violence Inventory (IVC) (Neves & Nogueira 2010). The ECVC consists of 25 statements, each one designating a traditional belief about marital violence, such as "Husbands and wives have always beaten each other"; "it's a natural thing and there's nothing wrong with it"; or "A slap in the face hurts no one." Respondents were asked to read each statement and to record their degree of agreement with it on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 5 = *totally agree*).

The IVC consists of 20 items, each designating an abusive behavior that may occur in dating relationships. The respondents were asked to report whether or not they have perpetrated or suffered any of the listed behaviors in their intimate relationship in the previous year. The list of behaviors includes four physically abusive acts (e.g., slapping partner's face, or pulling his or her hair), nine severe forms of physical abuse (e.g., throttling,

TABLE 1. Characteristics of the 2010 and 2017 Samples

	Studies		
Sex (% girls)	2010	2017	Difference
	(n = 899)	(n = 913)	
	63.4	65.6	χ^2 <1
Age (*M, SD*)	16.95	16.44	t(1,456.0) = 5.10***
	1.52	6.64	
SES (% High)	26.7	22.3	χ^2 = 3.90*
Dating (% Yes)	46.8	59.2	χ^2 = 27.19***

Note. *SD* = standard deviation; SES = socioeconomic status.
*p < .05. ***p < .001.

punching, kicking, or head-butting), and seven emotionally abusive behaviors (e.g., insulting, humiliating, yelling, or threatening). The respondents reported their answers on two scales, for perpetrated and suffered behavior, marking either "Never," "Once," or "More than once."

The personal data form included sex, age, current dating status (Yes or No), and mothers' and father occupations. Respondents' socioeconomic status was inferred from the two latter items and coded High or Low.[1]

Procedure (present study). The procedure was identical to the 2010 study and conformed to the usual ethical rules for social research. In the 2010 study, permission from school boards was ensured beforehand. Potential participants were then invited, in a classroom setting, to participate in a study and answer two questionnaires. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before participation. No compensation was provided and all questionnaires were anonymous, with full confidentiality guaranteed. This study was approved and financed by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology.

In the present study, we contacted 15 state schools' boards asking their permission to deliver the questionnaires in classrooms according to a schedule agreed upon later with teachers. At each session, the researcher introduced herself or himself and informed the students that their participation was voluntary and that they could stop at any point in the session. After signing an informed consent, each participant filled in the questionnaire and a personal information form individually in class. For those aged under 18, an informed consent was also requested from a parent or legal guardian in advance. The study was approved by the faculty ethics committee.

Plan of Analysis (present study). We began by checking for any changes in support for traditional beliefs on marital violence, testing the differences between the two samples' mean scores in the ECVC, overall, and separately for each sociodemographic category (using *t* tests; see Table 2). We used Pearson product-moment correlations to test associations with participants' ages (see Table 2). Subsequently, to examine possible changes in the frequency of abusive behaviors in dating, we conducted identical analyses concerning the percentages of reports, overall, by type (physical, severe, and emotional) and by agent (perpetrated and suffered) (using Chi-square tests; see Table 3). The third step was

to observe whether the associations between the support of traditional beliefs and self-reported abusive behavior, either perpetrated or suffered, changed within the 7-year lapse (using *t* tests; see Table 4).

Results

Beliefs on Marital Violence. Responses to the ECVC items were averaged into a single score (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$[2]). The first row of Table 2 shows that there was a significant decrease in acceptance of traditional beliefs in the present study. Regrettably, this decrease does not correspond to an effective change in of the endorsement (the statistical effect size is very small, $\eta^2 = .03$[3]). In other words, there seems to be a declining trend in acceptance of these beliefs, but far from a substantial reduction that could lead to an effective change in behavior. The overall mean is still very close to the scale's point of moderate disagreement with traditional beliefs.

The results with regard to sociodemographic categories obtained in the two samples are similar: there are the usual differences between boys and girls, with the former endorsing beliefs more than the latter, and the effect of age shows that beliefs are less supported as adolescents grow older. It should be noted that the difference between boys and girls is smaller in the present study, and that the correlation with age is larger. The first result indicates that there may now be a greater inclination for boys to reject traditional beliefs than in the past. The second result indicates that adolescents' socialization and development have a more positive effect on changing traditional beliefs on this matter now than 8 years ago: the older they are now, the more they reject violent behaviors in intimate relationships.

Prevalence of Dating Violence. To analyze the IVC scores, we proceeded as Neves and Nogueira (2010), that is, for statistical analyses, participants were considered abusive if they reported having perpetrated an act classified as physically (e.g., "Throwing objects"), severely (e.g., throttling), or emotionally abusive (e.g., "Insulting or

TABLE 2. Differences in ECVC Scores Across Sociodemographic Categories

		2010		2017	
		Mean (*SD*)	*t* test	Mean (*SD*)	*t* test
Total		2.17 (0.56)	-	1.97 (0.59)	7.62***
Sex	Females	2.00 (0.50)	13.07***	1.84 (0.53)	9.01***
	Males	2.46 (0.53)		2.21 (0.62)	
SES	High	2.14 (0.56)	1.94	1.96 (0.59)	1.16
	Low	2.23 (0.58)			1.90 (0.53)
Dating	Yes	2.17 (0.56)	<1	1.94 (0.58)	1.63
	No	2.18 (0.56)			2.00 (0.59)
Age		r (899) = –.19***		r (913) = –.26***	

Note. ECVC = Scale of Beliefs about Marital Violence; *SD* = standard deviation; SES = socioeconomic status.
***$p < .001$.

humiliating") at least once during the preceding year. We thus computed a new dichotomous variable (overall abuse), in which reports of "Once" or "More than once" in at least one violent behavior of any kind, whether perpetrated or suffered, was coded as 1 = Yes. Never, in all abusive behaviors, was coded as 0 = No. We then used the same coding system separately for each of the three categories, physical, severe and emotional, and also separately for perpetrated and suffered abuse, producing a total of 12 new dichotomous variables. The relative frequencies of these variables (percentages of participants in the whole sample who marked at least once in at least one violent behavior) are presented in Table 3. In the top row, we can see that overall there was no significant reduction of the prevalence of violent behaviors. Moreover, there were even more reports of emotional violence (second row). Reports of mild and severe physical violence did not increase significantly in these years, but they did not decrease either. Disaggregation by agent did not bring significant qualifications to these results—the increase in emotional violence refers to both perpetrated and suffered violence.

We then compared the demographic characteristics of perpetrators and victims of dating violence in the two samples. The results displayed in Table 4 suggest that there were some small changes. For instance, in 2017, there is a higher proportion of girls than boys reporting perpetration than in 2010. However, further analyses (not displayed in the tables) showed that this higher proportion of girls reporting perpetration refers essentially to emotional violence, which is a type that increased significantly, as shown by Table 3. Indeed, whereas the girls to boys ratio of perpetrators in 2010 was even in all types of violence, all χ^2 <1, it increased in 2017, in physical violence, $\chi^2 = 5.22$, $p = .02$, and particularly in emotional violence, $\chi^2 = 7.83$, $p = .002$. The percentage of girls reporting perpetration of emotional

TABLE 3. Percentages of Self-Reported Abusive Behavior (at Least One Occurrence) by Study

			2010	2017	χ^2 (1)
All abuse		Total	18.5	21.7	2.92
By type		Emotional	12.9	17.6	7.83**
		Physical	5.7	5.9	<1
		Severe Phys.	10.2	12.4	2.07
By agent	Perpetrated	Total	15.5	17.5	1.40
		Emotional	10.5	13.7	4.46*
		Physical	8.0	10.2	2.59
		Severe Phys.	3.8	3.7	<1
	Suffered	Total	13.0	17.0	5.58*
		Emotional	10.0	14.0	6.88**
		Physical	6.8	7.7	<1
		Severe Phys.	3.3	4.2	<1

$p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$.

violence increased from 12.1% to 18.7% in 2017, whereas among boys it increased from 14.3% to 15.6%. Girls' mild physical violence increased from 9.1% to 13.4% in 2017, whereas boys' decreased from 12.2% to 10.5%.

Attitude-Behavior Relationships. Finally, we compared the relationships between self-reported IPV and the results of the ECVC (see Table 4). In their study, Neves and Nogueira (2010) found significant associations between endorsement of traditional beliefs and being a victim or perpetrator of abusive acts of violence. Specifically, respondents who reported having committed or suffered a violent act in dating at least once scored higher on the ECVC than respondents who reported no such behaviors. In the northeastern region subsample extracted from their database for the present analysis, perpetrators also endorsed beliefs more than nonperpetrators, denoting a small but significant association between beliefs and perpetration ($p < .001$) or victimhood ($p < .05$). In contrast, in the 2017 sample, the difference between the two types of respondents is no longer significant (see Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The present study is but a preliminary look at the evolution of Portuguese young people's attitudes regarding violence in dating relationships over the last 7 years. Nonetheless, the results may provide some hints on the impact of campaigns aimed at reducing prevalence of IPV that were launched throughout this period. Firstly, there is a decreasing trend in the endorsement of traditional beliefs about marital violence, which is more noticeable among boys and older adolescents. Considering that preventive actions and campaigns concerning IPV and dating violence are generally directed at boys and men, with girls and women mostly characterized as victims, it would be expectable that changes in traditional beliefs would be more prominent in the preestablished target group. This represents, perhaps, a positive shift in the evolution of male adolescents' attitudes, probably denoting a change in how Portuguese society at large sees marital violence nowadays.

Regarding the negative correlation found between beliefs and respondents' age, it is important to note that younger teens mainly support the beliefs and attitudes that were transmitted to them by their parents and other adults, namely teachers, around them during the early stages of their development (Makin-Byrd & Bierman, 2016; Markowitz, 2001). Only later, as their references in interests, attitudes, and values shift to more diversified contexts, they may question their previous beliefs and adopt different attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Smith et al., 2015). Thus, the rejection of traditional beliefs among teenagers, especially younger teenagers, heavily depends on parents' and other adults' rejection of these beliefs. The fact that adolescents now increasingly reject traditional beliefs as they grow older can be explained by several factors, but the impact of official campaigns and actions aiming at prevention and calling on the media to give more attention to this problem might be seen as a strong possibility. Still, as discussed previously, prevention programs applied in schools have focused on secondary and college students, educating them about gender equality, which may explain their more accurate sensitivity to the subject.

As they grow older, teens become more open to societal issues and to pondering their previous attitudes when new alternative views emerge, spread by the media, or with the emergence of campaigns and actions. We could therefore speculate that governmental and nongovernmental policies on this matter may be having some impact on changing older adolescents' beliefs.

TABLE 4. Sociodemographic and Beliefs (ECVC) Correlation of Violent Practices in Dating (at Least One Occurrence)

	2010			2017		
			Perpetration			
	Yes	No	Diff	Yes	No	Diff
Age	17.13	16.92	$t(897) = 1.50$	17.18	16.28	$t(214) = 3.92$***
M (*SD*)	(1.58)	(1.50)		(2.90)	(2.56)	
Sex %						
Boys	16.7	83.3	$\chi^2 < 1$	13.1	86.9	$\chi^2 = 6.61$*
Girls	14.7	85.3		19.9	80.1	
SES %						
Low	15.6	84.4	$\chi^2 = 1.05$	15.9	84.1	$\chi^2 = 1.81$
High	12.4	87.6		20.2	79.8	
ECVC	2.34	2.14	$t(897) = 3.90$***	1.99	1.96	$t(235) < 1$
M (*SD*)	(0.55)	(0.55)		(0.57)	(0.59)	
			Victimhood			
Age	17.03	16.94	$t(897) < 1$	17.25	16.27	$t(207) = 3.91$***
M (*SD*)	(1.49)	(1.52)		(2.88)	(2.57)	
Sex %						
Boys	14.3	85.7	$\chi^2 < 1$	16.9	83.1	$\chi^2 < 1$
Girls	12.3	87.7		17.0	83.0	
SES %						
Low	11.8	88.2	$\chi^2 < 1$	14.7	85.3	$\chi^2 = 4.38$*
High	14.6	85.4		21.4	78.6	
ECVC	2.30	2.15	$t(897) = 2.52$*	2.03	1.95	$t(235) = 1.44$
M (*SD*)	(0.59)	(0.55)		(0.59)	(0.58)	

Note. ECVC = Scale of Beliefs about Marital Violence; *SD* = standard deviation; SES = socioeconomic status.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Secondly, self-reported IPV did not change significantly, thus confirming the results of other studies (e.g., Neves et al., 2016; Santos & Caridade, 2017). This result may be explained by the similarities between groups in terms of sociodemographic characteristics. As other studies have shown (e.g., Magalhães et al., 2019) adolescents have a greater tendency to minimize and relativize violence in their dating relationships, often perceiving

certain behaviors as being jealousy or an act of love and not being recognized as victims (Caridade, 2018). Such failure to recognize the condition of victim interferes with appropriate reactions such as seeking help (Ameral et al., 2017), and reporting of violence.

There was even an increase in self-reported emotional violence among female respondents. Furthermore, whereas the two sexes were even in the past in terms of perpetrating violence on their partners, there is now a tendency for girls to exceed boys, with mild physical attacks but especially at emotional level. These findings are consistent with the results of a meta-analysis of female perpetration of IPV within heterosexual relationships made by Williams et al. (2008). The authors concluded that not only was emotional abuse the most prevalent form of IPV, but that rates of emotional abuse perpetrated by college-age females were also particularly high, ranging between 40% and 89%. This evidence may be explained by the growing self-awareness of women's rights, which may be confused in some cases with a right to use female violence in response to male violence (Neves, 2014a). Some qualitative research (e.g., Neves, 2014a; Watson et al., 2001) has revealed that girls carry out more psychological and physical violence than boys because they react more to violence that they experienced previously. Psychological violence, even if it does not directly cause physical injuries to the victim, may harm the victim psychologically as much as physical violence, causing disturbances such as posttraumatic stress and depression (Começanha et al., 2017; Decker et al., 2014).

Taken together, the results suggest that there is now a higher discrepancy between attitudes—a widespread disapproval of violence—and actual dating practices among young people. There is now a weaker relationship between what adolescents say they believe and how they behave with their intimate partners, as revealed by our analyses of attitude/behavior relationships (see Table 4).

In fact, the review of previous research on the relationship between attitudes on dating violence and actual dating behavior shows that it is a complex one. On the one hand, some results suggest that teenagers' own attitudes toward dating violence have low to moderate effects on their engagement in this behavior (Capaldi et al., 2012, but see, e.g., Diaz-Aguado & Martinez, 2015). However, other research has found that widespread attitudes and beliefs about marital violence ultimately exert considerable influence on the emergence of dating violence. For instance, peers' approval of dating violence has been found to be a strong predictor of this behavior (Capaldi et al., 2012; Herrenkohl & Jung, 2016). In terms of adult IPV, it was found that neighborhood attitudes supportive of nonintervention in couples' conflicts are associated with higher levels of IPV (Browning, 2002).

We can mention three types of hypothetical causes for the discrepancy found: the first is associated with the ongoing process of change in gender social relationships, the second is related to the quality of the implemented actions, and the third is connected with supervening factors that may ultimately be fostering teenagers' aggressive behavior, despite their changes in attitude. Thus, the persistently high prevalence of dating violence may suggest that although traditional beliefs regarding IPV seem to have been changing in the last 6 years, becoming less conservative, structural change has not been achieved in Portuguese society. The patriarchal values spread by the dictatorship regimen continue to have a significant influence on Portuguese culture, as can be seen when analyzing the high rates of domestic violence crime (SSI - Sistema de Segurança Interna, 2019). Furthermore, the appropriation of gender equality principles and practices by girls seems to entail a misconception of what it means to have equal rights, favoring their condition of potential aggressors in dating relationships.

Additionally, prevention strategies are not sufficiently comprehensive and focused on this problem. Another hypothesis may be related to the fact that preventive efforts are not sufficiently sensitive to relational specificities, which are changeable and dynamic over time (Caridade, 2018). As noticed by Caridade and Machado (2012), the implemented actions aimed at reducing IPV among teens, besides their limited number, have primarily been informative, focusing mostly on awareness of the problem among a younger public; they were not sufficiently deepened and integrated to the point of changing behaviors. Nonetheless, as Coker (2004) notes, in the domain of violence against women, "educational programs aimed at changing social norms" are among the best preventive mechanisms alongside "early identification of abuse by health and other professionals, programs and strategies to empower women, safety and supportive resources for victims of abuse, and improved laws and access to the criminal justice system" (p. 1327; see also, Hyman et al., 2000). We may therefore hope that future improvements in prevention actions will ultimately produce effective changes in teenagers' behaviors.

With regard to supervening factors that may negatively influence teenagers' behavior, which therefore counteract the effects of public policies and actions, we can mention the ever-greater exposure to mass media, online networks, and video games. The violence depicted in these channels may encourage aggressive responses, making them a natural and acceptable way of coping with divergences and disputes. TV channels, in their attempts to attract audiences, and being aware of the alluring effect of violence, project an increasingly aggressive picture of social relations in films and series (e.g., Friedlander et al., 2013; Kronenberger et al., 2005; Manganello, 2008). Consistent with this idea, the phenomenon of bullying and cyberbullying is increasingly widespread among young people (Fanti et al., 2012; Lee & Kim, 2004). TV news, newspapers, and magazines obviously prefer enticing news of famous couples disputing in courts, exposing acts of domestic violence. Posts spread through social networks may have the same gist—teenagers are increasingly using online social networks to publicly harm and harass boyfriends or girlfriends breaking up (Baker, & Carreño, 2016). Such incidents may function as behavioral models for members of the network. An important complement to the violent stimuli exposed in the media and networks is the violence that teenagers are encouraged to enact in virtual contexts such as video games (Kronenberger et al., 2005). Considering the repeatedly confirmed effects of exposure to media and Internet violence on IPV, as Friedlander et al. (2013) recommend, school curricula should include media awareness training.

In addition, other external factors may be invoked to explain the continuing high IPV levels in the cohorts analyzed. For instance, Banyard et al. (2006), indicate divorce and low parental monitoring within families, low school attachment, and low social support or neighborhood monitoring at community level as possible factors for abusive behavior in dating relationships. Apart from the likely influence of these external factors on teenagers' dating behavior, there is also the problem that adolescents are not sufficiently prepared to cope with these increasingly stronger influences. Indeed, dating violence has also been seen as a result of the difficulty that adolescents have in solving their relationship conflicts and in which the manifestation of jealousy and absence of anger control skills are identified as forces that encourage violence (e.g., Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). As Banyard et al. (2006) mention, substance use, low attachment to school, and low social responsibility are strong correlates of perpetration of violent behavior in dating among teenagers, suggesting the existence of individual difficulties in dealing with stress and frustrations. Johnson (2006; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000) also proposes the need to consider the possibility of multiple forms of intimate violence, alerting to the existence of situational couple violence that

results from couple's difficulty in solving the conflicts. It should be noted that the most recent efforts to explain dating violence (Aizpitarte et al., 2017) consider it to be multidimensional, and seek to explore the role of different risk factors in terms of being a victim or perpetrator of intimate violence, as well as the type of interaction and relationship they establish between them.

Despite our efforts to ensure an accurate assessment of teenagers' evolution, the present study has several shortcomings. For instance, the sample was limited to the northeastern region of the country, which, despite being the second most populated, is not representative of the whole population. Future studies should consider extending to other regions to make it possible to assess how young people have been evolving there and identify factors for possible differences between regions. The timing of the present study was also possibly premature. As suggested above, the outcomes of the implemented actions, and the attitudinal changes they may be producing, would probably be better assessed within a larger time span, as awareness of the unacceptability of violence in intimate relationships may have a delayed effect on behaviors. Future studies could also focus on analyzing the direct experiences of young people involved in dating violence, both as victims and as perpetrators. Conducting in-depth individual interviews with young people with these experiences would allow us to make significant progress in understanding the discrepancies between attitudes and behaviors, as seen in the present study.

FINAL NOTE

Educating for nonviolent, tolerant, and cooperative citizenship is a major goal for all civilized states. This is particularly difficult to achieve when violence is justified by ancestral beliefs and myths, as in the case of domestic violence: among couples or in parent–children relationships. Being a victim of dating violence has significant effects, beyond immediate physical injuries, in the areas of substance use, sexual and reproductive health, or mental health (especially posttraumatic stress; Começanha et al., 2017; Decker et al., 2014). Even long-term physical effects, such as cardiovascular diseases, were detected in formerly victims of dating violence (Clark et al., 2016).

It is crucial to change traditional conceptions about the acceptability of violence in intimate relationships and their presumed consensus in the population, since they may determine the way in which youths react to disagreements, frustrations, or unexpected decisions of their partners. As Coker (2004) states, "violence is a learned response to a stressor [. . .] supported by attitudes of acceptance of the behavior." Consequently, "we need to question our societal tolerance for violence as a control tactic," since "alternative strategies exist to peacefully resolve conflicts [. . .], yet our collective skill in negotiation, mediation, and conflict resolution is underdeveloped" (p. 1327).

NOTES

1. Neves and Nogueira (2010) inferred respondents' socioeconomic status from the father's and mother's occupations into five classes: Low, Middle-Low, Middle, Middle-High, and High. Their results showed that ECVC differed significantly only between Low/Middle-Low and Middle/Middle-High/High. We therefore decided to use only two categories and aggregated the classes accordingly.

2. Some would find it wrong to average such a high number of items even if they are highly correlated. We therefore averaged only the 10 core items on the scale (identified through factor analysis and accounting for 31.60% of the whole scale variance). The same analysis conducted on this 10-item score yielded results identical to those obtained from the whole scale.

3. Since there was a significant difference between the average age of the two samples, a variable significantly correlated with ECVC scores, we used the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) in order to statistically eliminate this possible bias. Respondents' sex and socioeconomic status either did not differ across samples or was uncorrelated with ECVC scores and were therefore not considered. This more rigorous analysis again yielded a small significant difference between the two samples, F (1, 1809) = 80.40, $p < .001$ (corresponding to a $t = 8.97$), thus confirming the initial unweighted test. Following a reviewer's advice, we further tried to cancel out the confusing effect of age through iterative random elimination of about 5% of the cases in the older half of the 2010 sample and a similar percentage in the younger half of the 2017 sample in order to obtain two new samples with similar ages, $M = 16.86$, standard deviation (SD) = 1.51, and $M = 16.75$, $SD = 2.88$, respectively, $t(1707) < 1$. The difference obtained in the ECVC scores of these two new samples did not change significantly, $t(1707) = 11.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$.

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