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## **Characteristics of Youth Dating Violence and Risk Factors in Mexico: An Analysis from a National Sample**

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# **Characteristics of Youth Dating Violence and Risk Factors in Mexico: An Analysis from a National Sample**

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## **Abstract**

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Dating violence is a significant issue affecting today's youth and can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic, racial, and religious backgrounds, and it occurs in heterosexual, gay, and lesbian relationships. This study examines and identifies the different types of dating violence, and their associated risk factors in Mexico considering the data from a national sample. In 2007, the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information (INEGI) conducted a nationwide survey of youth (15-24 years old), to address the problem of dating violence among these demographic group. The survey was conducted in all 32 states of Mexico, which included 4,147 males and 3,807 females. Results indicate that young females in Mexico suffered different types of dating violence from their counterpart. It also found that dating violence has a greater impact on the health status of girls. In addition, this study shows that dating violence has led many young females toward substance abuse.

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**Keywords:** youth, dating violence, risk factors, Mexico

# **Características y Factores de Riesgo en la Violencia en las Citas entre los y las Jóvenes en México: Análisis de una Muestra Nacional**

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## **Resumen**

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La violencia en las citas entre adolescentes es un tema importante que afecta a la juventud de hoy en día, pero que puede afectar a cualquier persona independientemente de su edad, sexo, etnia, nivel socioeconómico, raza e identidad religiosa y, así mismo, tiene lugar tanto en relaciones heterosexuales como en las homosexuales y lesbianas. Este estudio examina e identifica, a partir de datos extraídos de una muestra nacional, los diferentes tipos de violencia en las citas y los factores de riesgo asociados en México. El 2007, el Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Información (INEGI) llevó a cabo una encuesta a jóvenes (15-24 años), para abordar el problema de la violencia en las citas dentro de este grupo. La encuesta se llevó a cabo en los 32 estados del país, a un total de 4.417 varones y 3.807 mujeres. Los resultados indican que en México las jóvenes sufren diferentes tipos de violencia en las citas infringida por su contraparte. Así mismo halló que la violencia en las citas tiene un impacto mayor en el estado de salud de las mujeres. Además, este estudio muestra que la violencia en las citas ha llevado a muchas jóvenes al abuso de sustancias estupefacientes.

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**Palabras clave:** juventud, violencia en las citas, factores de riesgo, México

Violence in dating relationships is common among adolescents. Similar to adult domestic violence, youth dating violence is currently a growing phenomenon, in which one partner attempts to assert their power through physical, emotional, verbal, psychological, and/or sexual abuse (Espelage et al, 2014; Gómez, 2014; Zweig et al, 2013). According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) youth dating violence is defined as “physical, sexual, or psychological violence within a dating relationship” (CDC, 2006) and it is hazardous to the health and development of youth (Noonan & Charles, 2009). Youth dating violence can result in injury and even death for the victims (CDC, 2006). Further, the CDC stated; in addition to the risk for injury and death, victims of dating violence are more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior, unhealthy dieting behaviors, substance use, and suicidal attempts (2006). Adolescents who are victims of youth dating violence are more likely to develop mental health issues like depression (Banyard & Cross, 2008; Bandyopadhyay et al, 2014) and also a risk factor for intimate partner violence (IPV) in adulthood (O’Keefe et al, 1986; Vagi et al, 2013; East & Hokoda, 2015).

Dating violence can affect people from all socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, and occurs in heterosexual, gay, and lesbian relationships. It is a significant problem not only because of its alarming prevalence and physical and mental health consequences (Callahan, Tolman & Saunders, 2003; Coker, Smith, McKeown & King, 2000; Vagi et al, 2013) but also as it occurs at a stage in life in which romantic relationships are beginning and interaction patterns are learned that may carry over into adulthood (Werkerle & Wolfe, 1999; Bowen & Walker, 2015).

Despite its high prevalence rates and harmful effects, however, youth dating abuse has been slow to gain recognition as a critical public-health and policy concern. Adult intimate-partner violence and marital abuse more generally have attained such recognition, especially in the past three decades, in the form of policies, programs, and legal recourses, and in an extensive research literature base devoted to the problem (Bowen & Walker, 2015). Adolescents, by comparison, were long overlooked as a population that suffers from relationship abuse. Dating violence has been found to be influenced by many variables such as country, culture, sex and type of violence and the prevalence of dating violence has been found to range from

9 to 65 percent (Fernandez-Fuertes & Fuertes, 2010; Foshee & Reyes, 2011). Similarly, other studies indicate that; dating violence is bidirectional, in other words, both sexes can be perpetrators or victims in a violent dating relationship (O'Leary et al, 2008; Muñoz-Rivas et al, 2009).

In the case of Mexico, some studies point out that, nearly 76 percent of Mexican adolescents between 15 to 24 years old have suffered some type of violence from their partner (Alonso, 2013; Valdez-Santiago et al, 2013; González Galbán & Fernández de Juan, 2014). Rodríguez (2013)<sup>1</sup> found that; in Mexico 7 out of 10 youth under the age of 15 to 25 have suffered psychological or physical or sexual violence and as a consequence of these 3 out of 10 have committed suicide. Similarly, Valdez-Santiago et al (2013) specifies violence among youth in Mexico has resulted serious health consequences and youth, who have faced violence are more prone to alcohol or drug abuse compared to those who never faced such violence.

Currently, Mexico is going through the stage 3 according to the demographic transition model, which indicates that the youth population (15-24 years) has grown from 4,931,525 in 1950 to 20,918,384 in 2010, which is 19 percent of the total population. As a result of the changes in demographic structure, nearly one fifth of the total population is currently comprised of youth (INEGI, 2012). As we know, adolescence is a critical period of development, as important behavior patterns are set in place during this period, and these patterns can have serious and long-term consequences for lifetime health and wellbeing. In particular, when they grow up in an unhealthy environment involving violence, it can lead to health problems that will reduce both life expectancy and quality of life.

A research on students in a public university in Mexico City has shown that; nearly 75 percent of participants committed or suffered verbal-emotional violence, followed by sexual abuse (27 percent) and physical abuse (14 percent), as well as threatening behavior (16 percent). The violent behavior was associated with low self-esteem and symptoms of depression and had a more negative impact on the health of women than that of men (Lazarevich et al, 2013; Lazarevich et al, 2015). The patriarchal beliefs, or machismo in Mexican society, have been described as male dominance and controlling behavior toward women and children. In another study among Mexican adolescents, it has been seen that; authoritarian parenting is associated

with physical and psychological victimization and psychological violence perpetration in adolescent females; in contrast, higher endorsement of patriarchal beliefs is associated with lower physical perpetration and victimization in adolescent males (Espinoza et al, 2012 in Lazarevich et al, 2015).

Researches of Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer (2002), Coker et al (2000) and Lazarevich et al (2015) found that; youth dating violence has greater consequences on the physical and mental health of victims. These studies denote positive associations between dating violence and higher rates of eating disorders and suicidal thoughts, plus decreased mental and physical health and life satisfaction. Similarly, Foshee and Reyes (2011), and Exner-Cortens et al (2013) indicates that; victims of physical violence during youth dating reported higher levels of depression and substance use. Taking into consideration the above discussion, the main objective of this study is to analyze the characteristics of youth dating violence in Mexico, and in addition, focus on how violence is adversely affecting the health of victims.

### **Definition of Youth Dating Violence**

It is very difficult to have a uniform definition of youth dating violence, however, many authors agree that it is a pattern of behavior including physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse used by one person in an intimate relationship to exert power and control over another (Glass et al, 2003). Literature indicates there are basically four common forms of dating violence (Foshee & Reyes, 2011; Glass et al, 2003; East & Hokoda, 2015):

1. Physical violence
2. Emotional or psychological violence
3. Verbal violence
4. Sexual violence

Physical violence in dating includes a wide range of activities, including slapping, pushing, slamming or holding someone against a wall, biting, choking, burning, beating, and assaulting with a weapon. Such violence obviously manifests itself in different levels of severity divided into mild, moderate, and severe, based on the likelihood of resulting injuries (Foshee &

Reyes, 2011). On the other hand, emotional or psychological violence encompasses a broad array of behaviors on dating violence. Such violence may include insulting, criticizing, humiliating in front of friends, or berating a partner. The literature also commonly covers within the category of psychological violence various threatening behaviors. Examples of such threatening behaviors include threats to hurt a partner, threats to damage a partner's possessions, throwing objects at a partner but missing, and starting but stopping short of hitting a partner (Foshee & Reyes, 2011; East & Hokoda, 2015). Furthermore, this form of violence includes emotional manipulation, for example, threatening suicide, ignoring the partner, or threatening to break up. Other common forms of such abuse are behaviors whose effect is to undermine the partner's self-esteem and independence, e.g., attempting to isolate a partner from family, friends, or other potential social supports, and attempting to make a victim feel "crazy" by continually questioning the person's judgment (Espelage & De La Rue, 2012).

Verbal violence has been characterized as the use of behaviors that does not involve physical force, in which the aggressor tries to control the victim through scolding, shouting and uttering harmful words. The purpose of verbal acts is to hurt or to create threats to terrorize the victim. In addition to physical, psychological and verbal violence the fourth major type of violence is sexual violence. Sexual abuse between adolescent partners can involve rape, attempted rape, and other forms of sexual coercion, including birth control sabotage. Moreover, pressure to have sex or to have more sex than desired may also be considered sexual violence. Other actions also included within the definition of sexual abuse, are insofar as "every act leading up to sexual intercourse can be classified as sexual abuse if it is without consent, painful, unprotected or performed in a demeaning way" (Foshee & Reyes, 2011; East & Hokoda, 2015).

### **Theories on Dating Violence**

Dating violence is currently a serious public health issues all over the world (Espelage & De La Rue, 2012). It needs an in-depth theoretical analysis to understand the phenomenon in all contexts. Thus, in this section an effort

has been made to discuss some theoretical background to analyze the dynamic of this violence. The feminist perspective focuses primarily on the concept of patriarchy and emphasizes gender and power inequality in opposite sex relationships. It focuses on the societal messages that sanction a male's use of violence and aggression throughout life, and the prescribed gender roles that dictate how men and women should behave in their intimate relationships. Dobash and Dobash (2004) identified relationship violence as gender specific, with male as the offender and female as the victim, except in same sex relationships. This theory acknowledges that female violence exists, but emphasizes that the context of such acts most often involve a situation of self-defense. Moreover, such acts by women are qualitatively different because they do not elicit fear nor generally cause injury. Violence perpetration by male partners is viewed as an act of oppression.

According to the feminist theory, the violence-facilitating effects of normative socialization practices promote rigid gender roles (Miedzian, 1995; Dutton, 1995). For instance, males are socialized to be aggressive, dominant, competitive, care-taking, and low in the direct expression of emergency emotions such as fear, distress, and concern. In contrast, females are encouraged to be passive, compliant, cooperative, care-giving, and low in the direct expression of anger. Gender-based inflexible attitudes about relationship roles may translate into the belief that the female is responsible for the relationship, fostering an acceptance of male entitlement. This promotes a power-imbalanced relationship, wherein the female may be compartmentalized according to the male's needs, such as caregiver, sex provider, and so forth.

However, compare to feminist theory, the attachment theory explained that, attachment is governed by a number of important principles. First, an alarm of any kind, stemming from an internal (such as physical pain) or an external source (such as a loss of contact with a caregiver) will activate what Bowlby (1972, 1982) called "the attachment behavioral system". Bowlby believed that the "attachment behavioral system" was one of four behavioral systems that are innate and evolutionarily function to assure survival of the species. In this regard, Hazan and Shaver (1987) discussed that romantic love is an attachment process, based on perceptions of attachment figures'



responsiveness, and guided by the same relationship style tendencies evident in childhood. Healthy partnerships stem from secure attachment models, derived from consistent and responsive childrearing. Dysfunctional relationships stem from insecure working models, derived from inconsistent, aversive, intrusive, or unresponsive care giving.

In studying adult relationships, Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that secure individuals tended to describe their most important love experience as happy, friendly, and trusting, report lengthier partnerships, and tended to have a “realistic” view of partnerships, as compared to persons endorsing insecure attachment styles. Insecure individuals characterized their most important relationship as involving jealousy and emotional liability, among other characteristics like fear of intimacy (avoidant style) and obsessive preoccupation (anxious-ambivalent style) With the onset of adolescence, attachment needs gradually shift from parents to peers, with the notion that the continuity in attachment models between childhood and adolescence should be greater than between childhood and adulthood, given the lack of opportunity to revise such models with an increasing number of important relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

An insecure attachment style appears to describe a high-risk group for both victimization and offending in adolescent close relationships, particularly for adolescent males with a history of mistreatment (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). As a consequence of mistreatment, attachment models become constructed along dominance subordination and victim–victimizer dimensions (Cicchetti & Howes, 1991). Experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional trauma expose the child to stark power differentials in the context of significant, close relationships. Aggression and a sense of personal entitlement overlap with the victimizer role, and passivity and a sense of personal deprivation overlap with the victim role. Such attachment models are consistent over time, suggesting that adolescents tend to select dating partners and situations that are consistent with their understanding of what relationships are about, who they are in relationships, and what to expect from a relationship partner (Waters et al, 1993). Thus, the attachment theory considers males and females from abused backgrounds to be equally at-risk for relationship violence because they both gravitate toward: (a) partners and situations in which a victim–victimizer relationship model could be applied,

and (b) victim and victimizer behaviors would both be available to the individual, given that both sides of the victim–victimizer relationship have been learned.

On the other hand, the personality characteristics and psychopathy theory, explains that individuals who are violent towards women have some sort of personality disorder or mental illness that might get in the way of otherwise normal inhibitions about using violence. According to Pagelow (1984) violence is a rare occurrence engaged in by sick individuals who are different from other people. Dutton and Strachan (1987) explained that men who view intimacy with women as dangerous, threatening and uncontrollable, can become highly anxious and angry. These feelings of psychological discomfort may then lead to behaviors such as violence to control their partners and to reduce their own anxiety and anger. Focusing on personality characteristics of both, victims and abusers, satisfies a behavior exhibited by someone who is different from themselves. Early efforts to identify defective personality characteristics of individuals engaged in violent relationships focused primarily on the victim. Similarly, the exchange theory discusses that, the individuals engage in behavior either to earn rewards or to escape punishment (Homans, 1967). All behaviors are driven by a calculated assessment of risk versus the return on any particular action. Violence is a means by which individuals or groups can maintain or advance their interests. Violence against women therefore can be interpreted as a means for men to maintain their position in the social structure. It should occur when the costs of being violent do not outweigh the rewards.

However, the social learning theory of Bandura (1977) described that an individual learn social behaviors in a social context and it occur purely through observation or direct instruction within an individual's social environment. One type of learning that occurs within a social context is observational learning. The concept behind observational learning is that people learn by observing others' actions and the consequences to their actions (Bandura, 1977). For example, if a child has to take a time out because he or she broke a plate, then that child's sibling would learn that if he or she breaks a plate then he or she will also have to take a time out. This in turn will affect his or her behavior. According to Bandura (1977) modeling is a way of learning in which the model shows the modeler how to

behave. Modeling is reinforced in multiple ways. One way is by the model. He or she may praise the modeler for copying his or her behavior thus reinforcing the behavior. Another way modeling is reinforced is by a third person. For example, a child may be copying his or her sibling's table manners and then a parent praises the child, which again reinforces polite table manners. A third way modeling is reinforced is by the behavior itself. The person may be practicing a behavior he or she observed being modeled and the behavior is in itself rewarding which reinforces the behavior. The fourth way modeling is reinforced is called vicarious reinforcement. Vicarious reinforcement is when the model receives praise/reinforcement for his or her behavior, and the observer then displays the same behavior (Bandura, 1977).

According to above discussion, the main way social learning theory is applicable to youth dating violence is through witnessing inter-parental violence. Social learning theory proposes that through observational learning, adolescents observe that the "consequence" of violence is that it helps the parent get what he or she wants. Through modeling, adolescents then learn to view intimate-partner violence as an acceptable way of interacting with others, especially with their romantic partners. In addition, if youth have friends who are violent, they are shown that the "consequence" of violence is getting what they want and the behavior is reinforced through the approval of their friends.

### **Methodology and the Study**

In 2007<sup>2</sup>, the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information conducted a nationwide survey among youth (15 to 24 years old), collecting 7,954 samples to address the problem of dating violence among them and its impact on their health. The survey took place throughout Mexico's 32 States, and included 4,147 males and 3,807 females. For the analyses presented here, I only took into account the sample of young females (N=3,807) to describe dating violence. In the present study, I have used the United Nations definition for youth, that is: *youth can be understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's*

*independence*. That's why, as a category, youth is more fluid than other fixed age-groups<sup>3</sup>.

As stated above, the main objective of this study is to understand how many young females are victims of dating violence including verbal, physical, psychological and sexual violence, and how it affects their health. Furthermore, in this paper I have examined how dating violence overlaps with other victimization experiences such as sexual victimization and their efforts to seek help.

## Results

### Socio-Demographic Features and Youth Dating Relationships

A total of 3,807 young women were taken into consideration for the analysis of dating violence in México. The socio demographic features of these individuals indicate that 35 percent are between 15 to 17 years old, whereas nearly 39 percent are 18 to 21 years old, and one fourth of them are between 22 to 24 years old. In terms of their educational background, sample data states that only 1 percent of young females have never attended school (are illiterate) where the majority of them have a junior high school education level (38 percent) and high school degree (33 percent) (see table 1).

Table 1

*Socio-demographic characteristics of young females dating in Mexico*

<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>	<b>% (N=3,807)</b>
<b>Age</b>	
15-17	35.0
18-21	38.8
22-24	26.2
<b>Education</b>	
Illiterate	1.1
Elementary	11.7
Junior High School	38.1
High School Degree	32.9
College Degree	16.2

Source: INEGI, 2007

On the other hand, when asked whether currently they attended school, 45 percent of them reported “no”. The analysis on reasons for dropping out of school showed that; 37 percent discontinued their education because they were not interested in continuing their studies, whereas 30 percent indicated they started working, and therefore could not continue study. It is interesting to note that 2 percent of young females stated the reason they discontinued their studies was because of pregnancy, whereas 13 percent said other reasons such as health issues or bullying for discontinuing their education (see table 2).

Table 2

*Educational status and performance of young females dating in Mexico*

<b>Current educational status</b>	<b>% (N=3,807)</b>
<b>Currently attending school</b>	
Yes	55.0
No	45.0
<b>Reason for not attending school</b>	
Completed studies	9.7
Failed in class	4.6
Does not have interest to continue	36.6
Started working	30.3
Pregnant	2.1
Parents do not allow	3.8
Other reasons	12.9

Source: INEGI, 2007

On table 3, I have analyzed the characteristics of youth dating, which includes age of starting their first relationship, duration of current relationship, where the couple met and reason of continuing the relationship. From the table it appeared that nearly 73 percent of girls began dating when they were between 11 to 15 years old, while 22 percent indicated they began between 16 to 20 years old. With respect to duration of their current dating relationship, for most young females their dating relationship is very recent, as 44 percent stated their relationship is less than 1 year long; whereas nearly 28 percent responded it is 1 to 2 years long and one fourth replied over 2 years. In addition, when asked about where they first met, 35 percent

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responded they met their boyfriend in school, 14 percent said they met at a party and nearly 19 percent met in their neighborhood. Some of the young women indicated they first met their boyfriend at a friend’s house, bar, relative’s house or online. Similarly, more than 90 percent of women said they loved their boyfriend and were therefore in a relationship with him, whereas some girls stated financial need as the reason to have a boyfriend (see table 3).

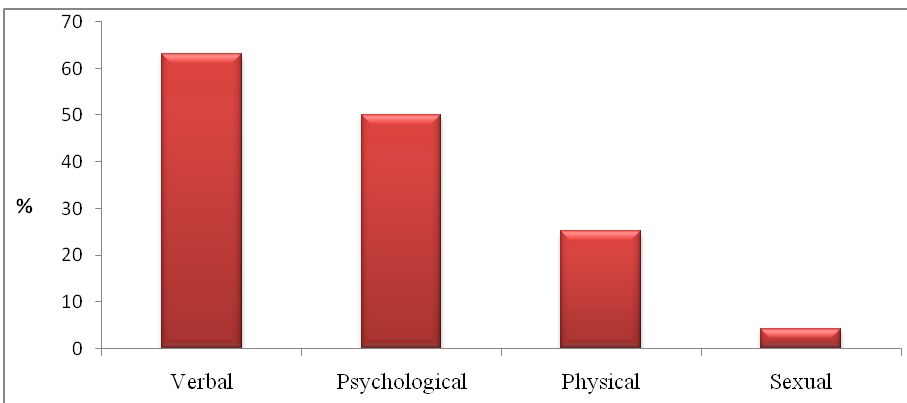
Table 3  
*Characteristics of young women dating in Mexico*

<b>Characteristics of dating</b>	<b>% (N=3,807)</b>
<b>Age they began dating</b>	
Less than 10 years old	5.4
11 to 15 years old	71.5
16 to 20 years old	22.5
21 to 24 years old	0.6
<b>Duration of dating relationship</b>	
Less than onemonth	2.9
1 month to 1 year	44.1
1 year to 2 years	27.5
More than 2 years	25.5
<b>Where they met</b>	
School	35.3
Party	14.3
Road	18.8
Place of work	10.3
Bar	2.2
Through chats and email	1.1
Friend’s house	4.7
Relative’s house	3.6
Other	9.7
<b>Reasons for having dating relationship</b>	
Because her friends have one	1.8
Fell in love	90.5
Financial need	5.5
Other reasons	2.2

Source: INEGI, 2007

### **Experience of Young Women Dating Violence and Seeking Help**

One important aspect of dating violence is to understand how young people are more vulnerable to experiencing violence in their relationships, and identifying the risk of violence increases the likelihood of early intervention and prevention. Many researchers have explained the risk factors indicating an increased likelihood for dating violence and the protective factors that buffer against dating violence. In this study, I have classified dating violence into four categories: Verbal, Psychological, Physical and Sexual. The results show that 63 percent of young women responded they have faced verbal violence from their boyfriends, such as verbal argument, humiliation, threats and shouting; whereas, 50 percent of them said they suffered psychological violence from their partner, for example emotional withholding, insults, being treated like an inferior person, being cursed, being ignored and yelled at. Likewise, results show that 25 percent of girls suffered physical violence including being punched, kicked, choked, pinched, slapped, having their hair pulled and being threatened with a weapon; and 4 percent said they have faced sexual violence from their boyfriend (see figure 2). This analysis indicates that victims of dating violence are more likely to be victimized in multiple ways.



*Figure 2.* Violence suffered by young women on dating relationships in Mexico

Source: INEGI, 2007

However, when they were asked the reason for the violence, 73 percent said it is normal in a dating relationship, some of them also responded that it is his right, and 13 percent responded their boyfriend reacted in a violent manner. Some young women (7 percent) responded that their boyfriend retaliated with violence because of “my” fault and the same number also said they didn’t know the reason for the violent reaction of their partner, as Bandura (1977) in his social learning theory explained; violent behaviour is modeled and learned often from childhood and is reinforced by broader sociocultural processes, in turn becoming accepted and normative within relationships. This normalization of violence within intimate relationships causes due to structural inequality in our patriarchal societies. Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* stated that; the identity of women has been constructed by men, by a society, which maintains ideological systems prescribing her subordination. This situation limits a woman’s freedom, and see her as an “object”, in other words, society keeps women blocked from freedom or transcendence. Often women visualize intimate partner violence as a reasonable as well as their culpability (Beauvoir, 1974). However, Fernández (2014) and Moral et al. (2011) stated that; young women and girls often accept the violence relationships because of the threat of poverty or of being assaulted, stalked, or killed by their intimate partners or friends, and as current public practices and policies fail to provide safety for women in these situations, they often accept an ongoing cycle of a violence as their best option, becoming accustomed to violence and accepting it a sa normal part of relationships.

With respect to their efforts of seeking help, those young women who experienced physical, verbal, psychological and sexual violence, it was evidenced that 55 percent of them sought neither formal nor informal help, that is, they did not talk to anyone about their problem, only 45 percent looked for an informal or formal source of help. When efforts to seek help were analyzed it showed that only 2 percent sought help from a formal source such as at school, social services or doctor, and the remaining 98 percent sought help from informal sources. Upon analyzing the sources to seek help, 59 percent replied they turn to their friends, while 29 percent spoke to their parents and about 12 percent sought help from other family members (see figure 3).



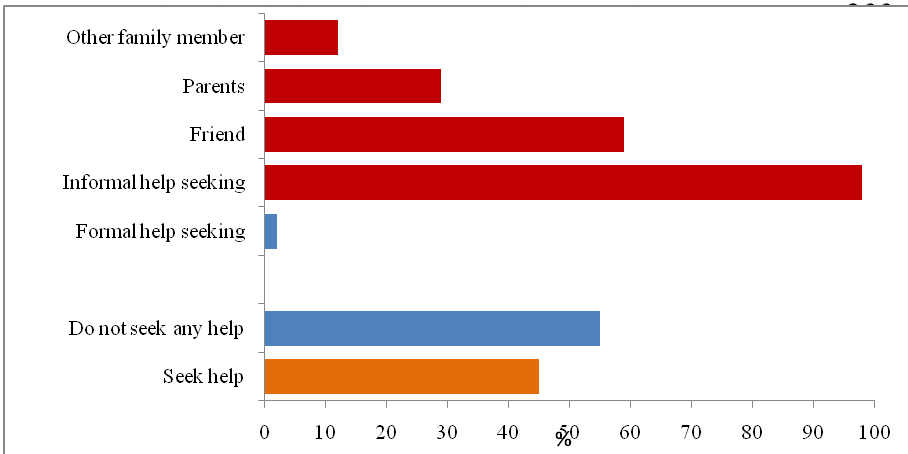


Figure 3. Formal and Informal Help Seeking Behaviors

Source: INEGI, 2007

### Forced Sex and its Impact on Young Women’s Health

Coker et al. (2000) reported that forced sex is a common occurrence among youth dating. Similarly, Foshee (1998) found that between dating partners, females experience significantly higher sexual violence by their partner, which has a greater impact on their health. In this regards, table 5 represents the analysis of forced sex suffered by the young female population in Mexico. It was observed that 7.5 percent of girls have been forced to have sex, and when examining who forced the sexual relation, data showed that 71 percent of young girls were forced by their boyfriend, whereas about 19 percent by their family member, nearly 8 percent indicated their neighbor, while some girls also replied that they have been forced to have sex by their teachers and other friends (see table 4).

The analysis on the place where sexual abuse took place, the results indicate that majority (45 percent) of young women faced such abuses at a hotel, 29 percent at a park, 21 percent at their boyfriend’s house and nearly 5 percent abused at school. Similarly, when asked about their age at which they suffered the sexual abuse, most of them (47 percent) indicated it happened when they had 11 to 17 years old, while nearly 19 percent cited it happened when they were less than 10 years old, and 34 percent stated they suffered sexual abuse at the age of 18 or above (see figure 4).

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Table 4

Young women forced to have sex by their dating partner in Mexico

<b>Forced Sex</b>	<b>% (N=3807)</b>
<b>Forced Sex</b>	
Yes	7.5
No	92.5
<b>Abuser</b>	
Boyfriend	71.0
Family member	18.8
Neighbor	7.7
Teacher	1.9
Other	0.5
<b>Place where the abuse took place</b>	
At a park	29.1
At the aggressor’s house	20.9
At school	4.6
At a public place/hotel	45.4

Source: INEGI, 2007

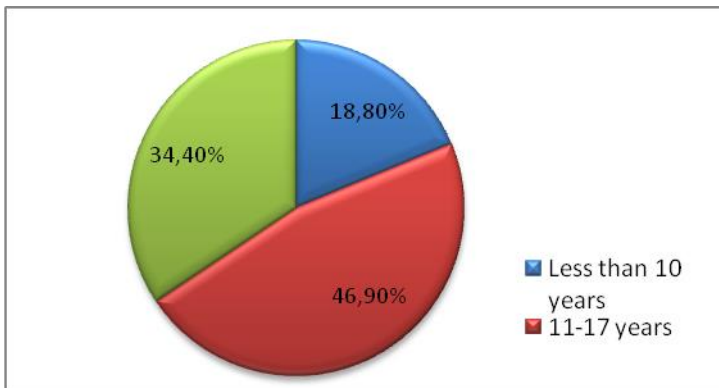


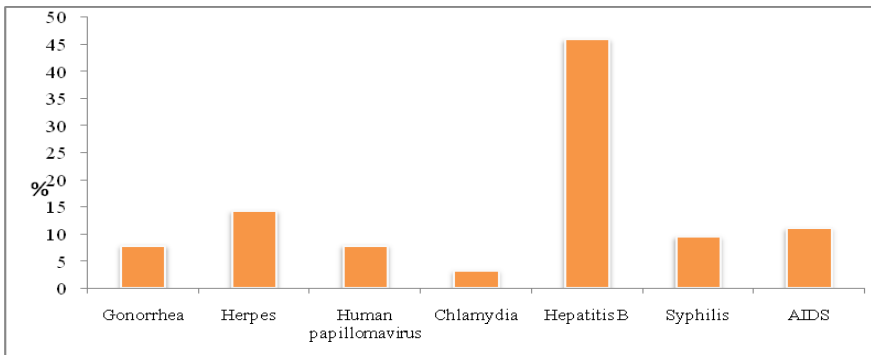
Figure 4. Age in which young women were forced to have sex in Mexico

Source: INEGI, 2007

Girls who experience forced sex are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors, which include smoking regularly, drinking alcohol and taking

drugs. Results illustrate that 63 percent of young women who suffered forced sex currently consume different kinds of substances, around 87 percent of them reported daily consumption of alcohol and 92 percent indicated that they have become regular cigarette smokers. On impact of sexual violence on young females, it has been observed that 8 percent reported that they consume drugs regularly in their daily life to cope with the trauma of sexual violence and to feel good. The majority of them consume cocaine, marihuana, heroin and paint thinner.

When analyzing the correlation between sexual violence and its impact, it is found that 43 percent of girls reported that it impacted them psychologically, such as caused depression and anxiety, whereas the majority (49 percent) of them responded that they fought physically with the aggressor and nearly 8 percent said they ended their dating relationship with their boyfriend. However, the impact of sexual violence on their current health status, it reflects that majority (46 percent) of young women suffered from hepatitis B, and 14 percent are currently suffering from herpes (see figure 5). The table shows that 11 percent of young women who suffered sexual violence more than once were reported have been infected with AIDS, similarly this analysis also indicates that they are currently suffering from other diseases such as: gonorrhea, herpes, human papilloma virus, syphilis and Chlamydia.



*Figure 5.* Impact of forced sex on the health of young women in Mexico

Source: INEGI, 2007

The results obtained in this study clearly indicate that young women being forced to have sex by their dating partner has a serious impact on their physical and sexual health, having independent effects on their psychological health. Thus, violence during dating should be considered a major type of violence that deserves the full attention of researchers, clinicians, lawyers, and policymakers.

### **Conclusion**

The pervasiveness of violence against women across the boundaries of nation, culture, race, class and religion points to its roots in patriarchy, the systemic domination of women by men. The many forms and manifestations of violence and women's differing experiences of violence point to the intersection between gender-based subordination and other forms of subordination experienced by women in specific contexts. Gender roles, that socially constructed roles of women and men, have been ordered hierarchically, with men exercising power and control over women (United Nations, 2006). In the report "Ending violence against women: From words to action" elaborated by United Nations (2006) indicates that; women who experience dating violence suffer a range of health problems, and their ability to earn a living and to participate in public life is diminished. Similarly, according to Champion et al. (cited in Herman, 2009) the incidence of dating violence (physical, sexual, or psychological) is a serious issue among young people and needs inclusion into health policies in order to raise national awareness. From this study, it is also observed that the boyfriend is violent toward his girlfriend because of a power struggle over the other individual in the relationship, and the dominant partner or the perpetrator, maintains the power and control by using tactics that intimidate and threaten the victim in order to sustain the imbalance of power (Herman, 2009; Gómez, 2014).

This paper clearly illustrates that dating violence not only includes physical abuse, but sexual and psychological abuse as well. The devastating effects of physical abuse can be seen on the outside. However, the psychological scars remain deep within the victim. Sexual and psychological abuses have extremely damaging effects on a person's sense of self and

personal identity. Thus, the results of this study indicate that dating violence suffered by young females in Mexico is a complex phenomenon and points out that there are commonalities between the violence and risk behaviors among young people. One of the major predictors of dating violence is the experience of mistreatment. Youth who experience mistreatment are not automatically on the track to experiencing dating violence, but are at a greater risk for being involved in domestic violence as adults.

On the aspect of risk behaviors, it is perceived from the study that dating violence has a negative impact on the victims' self-esteem and to overcome this problem many young women in Mexico have currently increased their alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking as well as using different drugs such as cocaine or inhalants. Researchers Rosen and Bezold (1996) and Howard and Wang (2003) have shown that individuals who were victims of dating violence reported having lower self-esteem and higher consumptions of substances, as compared to individuals who were not victims of dating violence, who reported having higher self-esteem and no consumption of substances. Females who had experienced dating violence were more likely to report feelings of sadness and hopelessness in addition to considering and attempting suicide. The results of this study found a significant relation between forced sex and its impact on health among young females in Mexico. Many young women said they are currently suffering from AIDS, gonorrhoea, herpes, human papilloma, syphilis and chlamydia.

This research has indicated that young women who are facing dating violence have a realistic and prevalent problem occurring in their relationships in Mexico. Although additional research needs to be conducted to further investigate the dynamics of dating violence, different types, and predictors, risk factors of dating violence have been initially identified. Also, certain noteworthy prevention as well as an awareness program needs to be formulated to reduce and prevent dating violence incidences. In summary, communities, parents, and educators all have a role in supporting and informing young people about the risks of dating and guiding them to make healthy and safe choices.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.salud180.com/jovenes/en-mexico-7-de-cada-10-jovenes-sufren-de-violencia>

<sup>2</sup> To this date, this is the only survey conducted by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information (INEGI) on dating violence in Mexico. Data can be downloaded from INEGI's link:

<http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/accesomicrodatos/encuestas/hogares/especiales/envin/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

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