

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, INTERPERSONAL TRUST AND HOPE: A STUDY AMONG PORTUGUESE ADULTS

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*Recepción Artículo: 13 mayo 2021
Admisión Evaluación: 13 mayo 2021
Informe Evaluador 1: 18 mayo 2021
Informe Evaluador 2: 26 mayo 2021
Aprobación Publicación: 02 junio 2021*

ABSTRACT

Introduction: According to results presented in several reports from the World Health Organization, violence in intimate relationships is a phenomenon whose incidence covers the most diverse populations on a universal scale. Allowing for recent information included on a report from a Portuguese association that gives support to victims (APAV, 2014), this is a very serious problem with severe consequences, including death. Being a complex problem, so interconnected with several variables that have an impact on developmental trajectories, there is an increased need for research and intervention. **Objectives:** Considering previous research on interpersonal trust, hope and intimate partner violence, this exploratory study aims to examine the relationship between intimate partner violence, interpersonal trust in the intimate partner and hope for the future. Also, prevalence of violence in intimate relationships will be addressed. **Methods:** In this cross-sectional study, the sample includes 302 subjects (202 women and 100 men), aged 18 to 63 years ($M = 29$, $SD = 10.78$). Data collection was performed through a protocol that includes a Sociodemographic Questionnaire, the Portuguese adaptation of the Rotenberg's Specific Trust Scale-Adults, the Scale of Beliefs about Marital Violence, the Inventory of Marital Violence and the Scale of the Future. **Results:** A worrying prevalence of violence in intimate relationships was found, whether in present or in past relationships. Results also show the existence of weak, but statistically significant negative associations between interpersonal trust and violence, considering both victimization and perpetration. Although modest, some significant positive relationships between certain aspects of hope and interpersonal trust were found. In addition, results show some significant differences in legitimating beliefs of intimate

partner violence by age, sex and socioeconomic status. **Discussion:** Interpretation of these findings, study limitations and suggestions for future investigations are presented and discussed.

Keywords: intimate partner violence; interpersonal trust; hope

RESUMEN

Violencia de pareja, confianza interpersonal y esperanza: un estudio entre adultos portugueses. Introducción: Según los resultados presentados en varios informes de la Organización Mundial de la Salud, la violencia en las relaciones íntimas es un fenómeno cuya incidencia abarca las más diversas poblaciones a escala universal. Teniendo en cuenta la información reciente incluida en un informe de una asociación portuguesa que da apoyo a las víctimas (APAV, 2014), se trata de un problema muy grave con consecuencias severas, incluyendo la muerte. Al tratarse de un problema complejo, tan interconectado con diversas variables que inciden en las trayectorias de desarrollo, hay una mayor necesidad de investigación e intervención. **Objetivos:** Teniendo en cuenta las investigaciones previas sobre la confianza interpersonal, la esperanza y la violencia en la pareja, este estudio exploratorio pretende examinar la relación entre la violencia en la pareja, la confianza interpersonal en la pareja y la esperanza en el futuro. También se abordará la prevalencia de la violencia en las relaciones íntimas. **Métodos:** En este estudio transversal, la muestra incluye 302 sujetos (202 mujeres y 100 hombres), con edades comprendidas entre los 18 y los 63 años ($M = 29$, $SD = 10,78$). La recogida de datos se realizó mediante un protocolo que incluye un Cuestionario Sociodemográfico, la adaptación portuguesa de la Escala de Confianza Específica de Rotenberg-Adultos, la Escala de Creencias sobre la Violencia Marital, el Inventario de Violencia Marital y la Escala de Futuro. **Resultados:** Se encontró una preocupante prevalencia de violencia en las relaciones íntimas, tanto en las relaciones actuales como en las pasadas. Los resultados también muestran la existencia de asociaciones negativas débiles, pero estadísticamente significativas, entre la confianza interpersonal y la violencia, considerando tanto la victimización como la perpetración. Aunque modestas, se encontraron algunas relaciones positivas significativas entre ciertos aspectos de la esperanza y la confianza interpersonal. Además, los resultados muestran algunas diferencias significativas en las creencias legitimadoras de la violencia de pareja según la edad, el sexo y el nivel socioeconómico. **Discusión:** Se presenta y discute la interpretación de estos resultados, las limitaciones del estudio y las sugerencias para futuras investigaciones.

Palabras clave: violencia de pareja; confianza interpersonal; esperanza

INTRODUCTION

According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002 cit. in Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2002), violence in intimate relationships is a phenomenon whose incidence covers the most diverse populations on a universal scale. In line with recent information included in a report by the Portuguese Association for Victim Support (APAV) "the context of intimate relationships continues to stand out with regard to the victim's relationship with the perpetrator of the crime" (APAV, 2017, p. 18). In fact, "the relationships of spouse, partner, ex-spouse, ex-partner, ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend and boyfriend/girlfriend together account for 59% of the existing relationships between victim and perpetrator of crime" (*idem, ibidem*). Evidencing gender differences, the number of female victims is considerably higher than that of men who have or have had a romantic relationship with the perpetrator of the crime, regardless of the type of crime (APAV, 2017). While it is as well necessary to investigate violence against men (e.g., Lien, & Lorentzen, 2019), the perspective that accentuates this gender asymmetry is also underlined by the World Health Organization, which states that "Although women can be violent in relationships with men, often in self-defence, and violence sometimes occurs in same-sex partnerships, the most common perpetrators of violence against women are male intimate partners or ex-partners. By contrast, men are far more likely to experience violent acts by strangers or acquaintances than by someone close to them" (WHO, 2012).

In recent years, there has been an increase in investigations on the theme of violence between intimate partners, due to its negative impact on health and the developmental trajectory of those subjects (Ludermir,

Valongueiro, & Araújo, 2014; Machado, Martins, & Caridade, 2014). Researchers make it clear that if a relationship is dominated by conflict and such violence occurs frequently, this may cause one or both parties to suffer mental and physical injury (Lien, & Lorentzen, 2019). Being a complex phenomenon, which continues to reveal a worrying prevalence, there is a need to intensify research that can elucidate prevention and intervention in this area. Given the transversal and multidimensional nature of violence in relationships, there are several approaches and relevant variables in this area of research. In this correlational study, particular attention will be paid to the possible inverse association between violence and variables related to Positive Psychology, such as hope and interpersonal trust.

The Concepts of Violence, Interpersonal Trust and Hope

Over the years, the concept of violence has been changing. It is described by the WHO as the intentional use of physical force or power, in the form of an act or threat, against oneself, against another person, or against a group or community, which causes or is likely to cause injury, death, psychological damage, developmental disruption or deprivation (cf. 2002 cit. in Krug, Dalhberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002, p. 5). More recently, Manita, Ribeiro and Peixoto (2009, p.10) describe violence as any "purposeful use of force, coercion or intimidation against a third party, and any form of intentional action that may offend integrity, needs and rights of the individual". As for domestic violence, it covers several types, with violence between intimate partners (IPV) being one of the most referenced forms, which is exercised in a context of intimacy and not just in *stricto sensu* conjugality (Krug et al., 2002; Manita, Ribeiro, & Peixoto, 2009). According to the WHO, intimate partner violence, which includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and controlling behaviours by an intimate partner, is one of the most common forms of violence against women and it occurs in all settings and among all socioeconomic, religious and cultural groups (WHO, 2012). A Portuguese study from the first decade of this century reported that about 28% of the men and women surveyed said they had been or were involved in a relationship with abusive behaviors, with this scenario being more likely in relationships with longer duration and in which there is cohabitation (Caridade, & Machado, 2006). Given that the repercussions of violence can be felt both in the short and long term (Paiva, & Figueiredo, 2003; Piotrowski, Taylor, & Cormier, 2014; Redondo, Pimentel, Correia, & Vicente, 2012), studies are still required who seek to explore and understand a possible negative relationship with the positive development of individuals, which is decisive for their quality of life. Among the relevant constructs for this analysis are interpersonal trust and hope.

Being considered necessary for the survival of society and for a successful psychological functioning, interpersonal trust is certainly a desirable quality in any close relationship. Susceptible to be hurtfully affected in a violent intimate relational process, as to its bases of *reliability*, *emotional trust* and *honesty* (Rotenberg, 2010), it appears implicated in the various facets of social functioning, affecting the individual's mental and physical health (Rotenberg et al., 2010). For its part, hope is an equally complex construct, with Snyder (2002) standing out as one of the authors who studied it the most. According to the Hope Theory (Snyder, 2002), this concept corresponds to a general perception about how personal goals can be achieved, through motivation/determination or initiative (agency) oriented to them and, also, from elaboration of means or paths (pathways) to reach them (Snyder et al., 1991). In Snyder's Hope Theory, goals, paths and freedom of choice are central. Today, this concept is based on a series of assumptions linked to human nature, the process of change and hope in itself.

OBJECTIVES AND HIPOTHESES

In addition to verifying the prevalence of violence in a non-clinical sample and analyzing the effect of sociodemographic variables, it is intended to ascertain whether there are links between violence, interpersonal trust and hope. Therefore, the following research hypotheses are presented: (H1) There is a negative relationship between violence in intimate relationships and hope; (H2) There is a negative relationship between violence in intimate relationships and interpersonal trust; (H3) There is a positive relationship between interpersonal trust and hope; (H4) There is a positive relationship between all aspects of violence (victimisation and perpetration; past

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and present); (H5) There are differences in legitimating beliefs of intimate partner violence according to gender, age and socioeconomic status (SES).

PARTICIPANTS

The sample used in this correlational study consists of 302 subjects (33.1% male and 66.9% female) (Table 1). The mean age is 29 years old (SD = 10.78), with a minimum of 18 years and a maximum of 63 (Table 2).

Regarding the socioeconomic level of the 268 subjects who provided sufficient data for this to be calculated, the largest number was in the "Medium" category, with 86 subjects (28.5%), followed by the category "Medium-low" (N=74; 24.5%), 61 subjects belong to the category "Medium-high" (20.2%); 26 subjects belong to the category "Low" (8.6%) and, finally, 21 subjects belong to the category "High" (7.0%).

Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages by Sex in the total sample

Sex	N	Percentage
Female	202	66.90%
Male	100	33.10%
Total	302	100%

Table 2. General characteristics regarding to age of the total sample

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mode	Mean	SD
Age	296	18	63	22	29.02	10.78

INSTRUMENTS

For data collection, the following instruments were used: (a) a sociodemographic questionnaire; (b) the Portuguese adaptation of the *Rotenberg's Specific Trust Scale-Adults* (Specific Interpersonal Trust Scale-Adult, EEC1-A; Vale-Dias, & Franco-Borges, 2014), with 10 items divided by Reliability and Emotional Trust, a 9-point Likert-type response scale and a *Cronbach's alpha* of 0.90 for the Total Scale; (c) the Scale of Beliefs about Marital Violence (ECVC; Machado, Matos, & Gonçalves, 2006), with the factors Legitimization and Trivialization of Minor Violence, Legitimization of Violence by the Conduct of Women, Legitimization of Violence by its Attribution to External Causes, and, finally, Legitimization of Violence for the Preservation of Family Privacy, and the Total Scale ($\alpha=0.93$), with 25 items and response on a 5-point Likert scale, measures the degree of legitimacy or tolerance towards violence in love relationships; (d) the Inventory of Marital Violence (IVC; Machado, Matos, & Gonçalves, 2006), to determine the prevalence and frequency of physical and emotional violent acts that the subject points out, or not, as perpetrated and/or received in loving relationships, current (21 items) and past (21 items); (e) finally, the Hope-trace Scale for adults (Scale of the Future-EF; Portuguese adaptation: Pais-Ribeiro, Pedro, & Marques, 2006), which includes the factors Pathways ($\alpha=0.79$) and Agency ($\alpha=0.76$), in addition to the Total Scale ($\alpha=0.86$), of 12 items and answers on a scale (Likert-type) of eight points.

RESULTS

Abusive Behaviors (IVC) and Gender

In this study, 23.8% ($n=72$) of the participants involved in a romantic relationship reported having been victims of at least one abusive act during the last year and 24.5% ($n=74$) admitted to having adopted this type of procedure towards their partner. The analysis of indicators of violence in past relationships shows that 26.5% ($n=80$) of the subjects were victims of at least one abusive act and that 22.3% ($n=67$) perpetrated some kind of this behavior. With regard to the general Victimization profile found in the current relationships, it was verified, through the *Chi-Square test*, that there are no statistically significant differences according to gender [$\chi^2(1)=$

21,031; n.s.] and the same is the case in Past Victimization [$\chi^2(1) = 31,337$; n.s.]. Regarding perpetration in general, in Current and Past intimate relationships, there were also no statistically significant differences, according to gender [respectively, $\chi^2(1) = 12,963$; n.s.; $\chi^2(1) = 15,040$; n.s.].

Relationship between Violence and Hope and Associations between Aspects of Violence

To assess the existence of relations of association between Violence (IVC) and Hope (EF) *Pearson's* Correlation Coefficient was calculated, considering each of the factors of the instruments and also Total Hope (Table 3). In general, no strong correlations were found to establish a link between the various aspects of Violence and the variables of Hope (Pathways; Agency; Total score), because they are all very close to zero and without statistically significant value ($p > 0,05$).

A strong positive correlation was obtained for the variables Current Perpetration and Current Victimization ($r = 0,89$; $p = 0,006$), and both variables share 79.2% of the observed variance. Current Perpetration was strongly and positively correlated with Past Perpetration ($r = 0,63$; $p = 0,005$), sharing 39% of the total observed variance. The positive correlation established between Current Perpetration and Past Victimization showed mean magnitude ($r = 0,37$; $p = 0,002$; $R^2 = 0,13$). The positive correlation between Current Victimization and Past Perpetration has a strong value ($r = 0,65$; $p = 0,006$), sharing 42% of the observed variance. The Current Victimization also correlates with the Past Victimization, revealing a mean and positive value ($r = 0,39$; $p = 0,027$), for a shared variance of 15.21%. Finally, the positive correlation between Past Perpetration and Past Victimization proved to be quite strong ($r = 0,71$; $p = 0,003$), in this case, explaining 50.41% of the total shared variance.

Table 3. Matrix of Correlations between Hope (EF) and Current / Past Intimate Violence (IVC) (N=302).

	Pathways	Agency	Hope Total scale	Current Perpetration	Current Victimization	Past Perpetration	Past Victimization
Pathways (EF ^a)	-	0,694*	0,921**	-0,007	0,014	-0,002	-0,030
Agency (EF ^a)		-	0,918**	-0,088	-0,073	0,025	0,012
Hope Total scale (EF ^a)			-	-0,050	-0,030	-0,014	-0,009
Current Perpetration ^b				-	0,891**	0,638**	0,371**
Current Victimization ^b					-	0,651**	0,391*
Past Perpetration ^b						-	0,713**
Past Victimization ^b							-

Notes. * $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$; ^aScale of the Future (EF); ^b Inventory of Marital Violence (IVC)

Relationships between Interpersonal Trust and Hope

The Total score of Interpersonal Trust and the Emotional Trust factor generally establish non-significant and very close to zero correlations with the factors and Total scale of Hope (Table 4). Yet, the Reliability factor establishes positive and statistically significant relationships, although modest, with the Agency factor ($r = 0,127$; $p = 0,02$) and the Total Hope ($r = 0,119$; $p = 0,04$).

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Table 4. Matrix of Correlations between Hope (EF) and Interpersonal Trust (EECI-A) (N=302).

	Interperson al Trust	Emotion al Trust	Trust_ Reliability	Pathways	Agency	Hope Total scale
Interpersonal Trust ^a	-	-	-0,934**	0,066	0,093	0,085
Emotional Trust ^a		0,775**	-	-0,001	0,005	-0,001
Trust_Reliability ^a			-0,474**	0,093	0,127*	0,119*
Pathways ^b				-	0,694**	0,918**
Agency ^b					-	0,765**
Hope Total scale ^b						-

Notes. *p<0,05; **p<0,01; ^a Specific Interpersonal Trust Scale-Adult (EECI-A); Scale of the Future (EF)

Relationship between Violence and Interpersonal Trust

Interpersonal Trust (EECI-A) correlates negatively with all past and current dimensions of Violence (IVC), but only two relationships deserve to be mentioned. The values of the coefficients reveal a weak but statistically significant relationship with respect to the Current Perpetration ($r = -0,136$; $p = 0,02$) and the Current Victimization ($r = -0,17$; $p = 0,005$).

Legitimizing Beliefs of Intimate Partner Violence by Sex, Age and SES

Regarding Beliefs about Violence (ECVC), it was possible to verify, by *Students t*-test, that the male sex reveals a greater trivialization of violence, and the differences were significant for the Total ECVC [$t(139,823) = 4,92$; $p = 0,00$] and factors (Table 5).

After calculating a variance analysis (ANOVA) and multiple *a posteriori* comparisons, considering 4 age groups, the means obtained in the Total ECVC recorded statistically significant differences [$F(3, 292) = 9,63$; $p = 0,03$], particularly among the older subjects group [≥ 50 years ($M = 51,55$; $DP = 18,63$)] compared to the rest [18-29 years ($M = 38,26$; $DP = 11,32$); 30-39 years ($M = 39,13$; $DP = 11,94$); 40-49 years ($M = 42,27$; $DP = 12,63$)]. There were also differences in the various factors according to the age group (Table 6).

Table 5. Comparison of means (*t*-test for independent samples) for Males and Females on the Beliefs about Marital Violence (ECVC) (N=302).

	Sex	M	SD	p	t
Factor 1*	M	26.79	11.10	.00	$t_{(126,526)} = 4.81$
	F	21.11	5.81		
Factor 2*	M	17.70	7.57	.00	$t_{(142,548)} = 4.20$
	F	14.23	4.97		
Factor 3*	M	17.06	5.04	.00	$t_{(300)} = 4.15$
	F	14.44	5.24		
Factor 4*	M	12.45	6.00	.00	$t_{(133,340)} = 3.82$
	F	9.47	3.50		
ECVC total*	M	45.53	15.68	.00	$t_{(139,823)} = 4.92$
	F	37.08	9.97		

*(ECVC factors: Factor1: "legitimization and trivialization of minor violence"; Factor2: "legitimization of violence by the conduct of the woman"; Factor3: "legitimization of violence by its attribution to external causes"; Factor4: "Legitimacy of violence by preserving family privacy"); *ECVC - Scale of Beliefs about Marital Violence.

Table 6. Mean comparison (ANOVA): ECVC* by age (N=302)

	Age	M	SD	p	F _(3, 292)
Factor 1*	18-29	21.96	7.14	.00	8.34
	30-39	22.69	7.75		
	40-49	24.44	8.52		
	≥50	30.15	13.56		
Factor 2*	18-29	14.47	4.89	.00	11.78
	30-39	15.56	5.88		
	40-49	16.46	5.65		
	≥50	21.55	11.08		
Factor 3*	18-29	14.74	4.62	.00	6.84
	30-39	15.00	4.80		
	40-49	16.22	5.69		
	≥50	19.44	8.48		
Factor 4*	18-29	10.32	3.87	.00	7.94
	30-39	10.29	3.61		
	40-49	11.56	4.89		
	≥50	14.70	8.26		
ECVC	18-29	38.26	11.32	.03	9.63
	30-39	39.13	11.94		
Total*	40-49	42.27	12.63		
	≥50	51.55	18.63		

*(ECVC factors: Factor1: "legitimization and trivialization of minor violence"; Factor2: "legitimization of violence by the conduct of the woman"; Factor3: "legitimization of violence by its attribution to external causes"; Factor4: "Legitimacy of violence by preserving family privacy "); *ECVC - Scale of Beliefs about Marital Violence.

An ANOVA was also calculated to analyse the differences in ECVC according to the socioeconomic level (5 groups: high; medium-high; medium; medium-low; low), using multiple *a posteriori* comparisons. There was a statistically significant difference for Total ECVC [$F(4, 263) = 3,625; p = 0,01$] between the medium-high ($M = 37,00; DP = 9,55$) and medium-low ($M = 44,21; DP = 14,49$) groups. Differences by age group were present in all the ECVC factors (Table 7).

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Table 7. Mean comparison (ANOVA): ECVC by Socioeconomic Status (SES) (N=302).*

	SES	M	SD	p	F _(4, 263)
Factor 1*	High	20.73	5.08	.02	2.978
	Medium/High	21.22	6.00		
	Medium	22.66	8.27		
	Medium/Low	25.53	10.20		
	Low	23.35	7.26		
Factor 2*	High	13.86	3.53	.01	3.849
	Medium/High	13.78	4.11		
	Medium	15.13	5.41		
	Medium/Low	17.37	7.51		
	Low	15.69	5.60		
Factor 3*	High	14.10	3.86	.01	3.201
	Medium/High	14.33	3.90		
	Medium	15.17	5.19		
	Medium/Low	16.99	5.48		
	Low	15.08	5.24		
Factor 4*	High	9.78	2.97	.00	4.482
	Medium/High	9.40	2.70		
	Medium	10.87	4.53		
	Medium/Low	12.61	6.29		
	Low	10.69	3.71		
ECVC Total*	High	36.30	7.88	.01	3.625
	Medium/High	37.00	9.55		
	Medium	39.39	13.04		
	Medium/Low	44.21	14.49		
	Low	40.01	11.21		

*(ECVC factors: Factor1: "legitimization and trivialization of minor violence"; Factor2: "legitimization of violence by the conduct of the woman"; Factor3: "legitimization of violence by its attribution to external causes"; Factor4: "Legitimacy of violence by preserving family privacy"); *ECVC - Scale of Beliefs about Marital Violence.

DISCUSSIO

Among other objectives, in this investigation, we sought to know the prevalence of violence in an occasional non-clinical sample. Data were found in agreement with the study of Caridade e Machado (2009, cit. by Machado, 2010), given that the percentages related to various aspects of violence (victimization and perpetration; past and

current) are between 22.3% and 26.5% - worrying values, considering the non-clinical type of the sample in this research. The general Victimization and Perpetration profiles are identical in both sexes, suggesting, however, that possible differences in the specific type of violence practiced should be analysed in the future.

The correlations established between violence and aspects of hope are mostly negative, but without significant results. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H1 - There is a negative relationship between violence in intimate relationships and hope) was not corroborated. Regarding what was expected, Snyder and col. (2000) claim that it is common, in more adverse life situations, to lose hope and motivation to achieve certain goals. In the future, taking into account the results, it will be interesting to deepen the extent to which the adversity associated with violence can be mitigated by possible protective factors of hope, such as other sources of support and positive coping strategies.

Regarding the modest but statistically significant negative association established between interpersonal trust and violence (current perpetration and current victimization - IVC), it was possible to partially confirm the second hypothesis (H2 - There is a negative relationship between violence in intimate relationships and interpersonal trust). When we talk about violence, in fact, we can mention several consequences, one of which is distrust of members of the opposite sex (Paiva & Figueiredo, 2003), or partners, whatever the sex. In fact, when there is violence, the relationships established are mainly disrespect and distrust (Bloomfield, 2003), with a breach of trust and safety of the victim in relation to the aggressor, with prejudice to the victim's well-being, as well as to the entire marital system (Almeida, 2012). Although modest, our results suggest the importance of deepening the study of this inverse relationship, particularly with clinical samples.

Interpersonal trust, through the Reliability factor, showed modest positive relationships with hope, corroborating the third hypothesis (H3 - There is a positive relationship between interpersonal trust and hope), in the case of the Agency factor and Total Hope. From an optimistic perspective, trust is directly related to hope, which allows in part to explain the results obtained: the most confident subjects will also be those who are more sensitive and open to new future opportunities, in the most diverse contexts of life (Govier, 1998). In the case of victims of violence, and as Huyse (2003) indicates, the experience of negative relational experiences (lack of understanding and empathy) gives rise to feelings of isolation and lack of hope. It is understandable that, in a relationship in which there is violence, optimism is compromised: the relationships established are mostly of disrespect and mistrust (Bloomfield, 2003).

Supporting the fourth hypothesis [(H4 - There is a positive relationship between all aspects of violence (victimisation and perpetration; past and present)], the data also revealed the existence of significant positive correlations, mostly strong, between all aspects of Violence. Not only does past violence relate to the current one, but the roles of victim and perpetrator seem to cross paths, a fact that requires proper intervention.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the effect of the Socioeconomic level, Age and Gender on Beliefs of Legitimation of Violence in intimate relationships, corroborating the fifth hypothesis (H5 - There are differences in legitimating beliefs of intimate partner violence according to gender, age and socioeconomic status). Although the literature points to the transversal nature of this type of violence, these data suggest that older individuals, male and belonging to the medium/low socioeconomic level, emerge as priority targets for prevention and intervention regarding the change of beliefs that legitimize violence.

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