



## Gender beliefs and dating violence practices among university students in Portugal

Sofia Neves, Ariana Correia & Janete Borges


**To cite this article:** Sofia Neves, Ariana Correia & Janete Borges (18 Oct 2023): Gender beliefs and dating violence practices among university students in Portugal, *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, DOI: [10.1080/10911359.2023.2267615](https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2023.2267615)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2023.2267615>



Published online: 18 Oct 2023.



[Submit your article to this journal](#) 



Article views: 77



[View related articles](#) 



[View Crossmark data](#) 



# Gender beliefs and dating violence practices among university students in Portugal

Sofia Neves <sup>a</sup>, Ariana Correia <sup>a</sup>, and Janete Borges <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Interdisciplinary Center for Gender Studies (CIEG/ISCSP-University of Lisbon), University Maia, Castelo da Maia, Portugal; <sup>b</sup>School of Health, Polytechnic of Porto (ESS-PPorto), University of Maia, Castelo da Maia, Portugal

## ABSTRACT

The aim of the present article is to present and discuss the results of a Portuguese national study with 4696 university students, 3846 (81.9%) self-identified as females, 843 (17.8%) self-identified as males, and 16 (0.3%) non-binary people ( $M = 22.4$  years old;  $SD = 5.132$ ). With the objective of characterizing the relationship between gender beliefs and dating violence practices, an online questionnaire was administered. Results show that 2524 (53.7%) students had suffered an episode of dating violence and 1599 (34%) had perpetrated one at least once during their life. Female students were more victimized than male students, while male students perpetrated more dating violence than female participants. An association between gender beliefs legitimizing violence and gender was found, with male students endorsing more gender beliefs legitimizing violence than female students. Additionally, those who suffered from and perpetrated dating violence presented higher levels of gender beliefs legitimizing violence than those who did not suffer from or perpetrate it.

## KEYWORDS

Dating violence; gender; beliefs; university students; Portugal

## Introduction

Dating violence is one of the most challenging problems affecting adolescents and young adults at present. Due to its high prevalence, negative consequences, and extensive impacts, several studies have been conducted, and various programs have been developed to address, prevent, and combat it since the 1980s (Lee & Wong, 2022).

Findings from numerous studies (e.g., Gehring & Vaske, 2017; Vives-Cases et al., 2021; Wincentak et al., 2017) consistently demonstrate that students of different ages and in distinct social, cultural, and economic backgrounds are often exposed to multiple typologies of dating violence in their intimate relationships. Thus, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or nationality, young people are often exposed to these types of violence.

Dating violence is a set of attitudes and behaviors between young partners or former partners, in same- or different-sex couples, presenting a wide range of typologies of violence, including psychological, physical, social, economic, and sexual, with reciprocity assuming a distinctive characteristic when compared to adult intimate relationships (Miller et al., 2013; Reidy et al., 2016). From secondary school to college, many students report being both perpetrators and victims (Ybarra et al., 2016), although some types of violence,

the motivations underlining these violent acts, and the severity of the results seem to be different according to gender (Straus, 2015). Some evidence suggests that young women are more likely to experience sexual violence in dating relationships compared to young men, including unwanted sexual contact, coercion, forced sexual activity, and cyber abuse (Miller et al., 2018). Furthermore, women are more likely to become severely injured than men (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Although the idea that women use physical violence toward men as a self-defense strategy is controversial (Leisring & Grigorian, 2016), some studies show that when women are physically violent to men, they are often motivated by self-defense and fear, whereas men are motivated by purposes of control (Swan et al., 2008).

A systematic review of studies on dating violence in Europe since 2010, conducted by Tomaszewska and Schuster (2021), concluded a varying prevalence rate for different forms of dating violence. Thus, for females and males, respectively, psychological violence ranged from 5.9% to 95.5% and from 5.6% to 94.5%; physical violence from 2.2% to 32.9% and from 0.8% to 29.8%; sexual violence from 4.8% to 41.0% and from 2.4% to 39.0%, and cyber violence from 0.6% to 48.0% and from 1.0% to 46.0%.

Although prevalence rates can vary depending on the definitions and concepts used, the population studied, and the methodology employed, the fact is that dating violence is a widespread experience in young people's lives, shaping their emotions and increasing the likelihood of engaging in disruptive and abusive behaviors in further relationships (Lapierre et al., 2019). Dating violence might also be a predictor of intimate partner violence in adulthood (Cui et al., 2013), which justifies early prevention.

Additionally, the effects of dating violence are devastating for victims and are considered a public health problem (Peterson et al., 2018). A significant number of victims suffer from mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, and physical conditions such as chronic pain, and get involved in risky conduct, such as substance abuse or delinquent conduct (Dosil et al., 2020; Kaukinen, 2014). Despite this, youngsters who are exposed to dating violence resist seeking help (Nelson et al., 2023).

Amid the various risk factors identified in the literature, holding gender beliefs legitimizing violence toward women has been one of the most consensual among researchers (McCauley et al., 2013; Reed et al., 2021; Sears et al., 2007; Shen et al., 2012; Tharp et al., 2013). Gender beliefs can be described as thoughts, attitudes, and social expectations regarding what should be normative for each gender, usually from a binary perspective. It includes roles, behaviors, and characteristics conceived as normative for men and women. In this sense, social norms play a prescriptive function concerning gender scripts, normalizing ideas, and actions.

The literature has demonstrated that conservative gender beliefs, frequently rooted in traditional and rigid notions of what it means to be a man or a woman, are associated with violent conduct in the context of intimate relationships (e.g., Reyes et al., 2016). The link between masculinity, aggression, and violence has been widely cited, with hegemonic masculinity contributing to the perpetration of various forms of violence (Pérez-Martínez et al., 2023).

As indicated by several authors (e.g., Duval et al., 2020; Pastor et al., 2020; Van Ouytsel et al., 2020), endorsing gender stereotypes is positively correlated with abusive youth behaviors in romantic relationships. Reed and colleagues (Reed et al., 2021) found that a stronger adherence to stereotypical beliefs was associated with the engagement of girls in digital monitoring and control behaviors and boys in

directly aggressive and hostile digital behaviors. Among men, decreased perceptions that their behaviors are violent are associated with higher levels of dating violence victimization and perpetration, while in women there is no association (Dardis et al., 2017).

The university environment encourages intense social activities, with rape myths and conservative gender norms being generally accepted as a manifestation of hegemonic masculinity, university and students are, for that reason, particularly vulnerable to sexual and dating violence (Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017).

In recent decades, several studies have been conducted in Portugal to determine the prevalence of dating violence and to understand its dynamics. Most research is focused on students from secondary schools (e.g., Caridade et al., 2020; Neves & Torres, 2018; Neves et al., 2021), showing a high percentage of young Portuguese people having been exposed to at least one episode of dating violence during their lives. In a national sample of 3943 students aged between 11 and 25 years old ( $X = 15$ ), 65.2% ( $n = 2571$ ) of participants revealed some type of victimization in their dating relationships (Magalhães et al., 2023). Nearly 45% ( $n = 1777$ ) were victims of psychological violence, 44.6% ( $n = 1760$ ) were controlled, 23.3% ( $n = 919$ ) were stalked, 21.2% ( $n = 836$ ) were cyber abused, and 14.9% ( $n = 589$ ) and 12.2%, respectively ( $n = 480$ ) were subjected to sexual and physical violence.

Although particular attention has been given to dating violence perpetrated in Portuguese universities lately, there are no studies concerning its prevalence and there is scarce evidence on beliefs potentially associated with violent practices.

Since 2013, dating violence has been considered a crime of domestic violence in Portugal, under Article 152 of the Penal Code. In 2000, domestic violence became a public crime, which means that any person can report it to the authorities, whatever the victim's wishes.

In 2022, domestic violence was the most reported crime, reaching an increase of 15% compared to 2021 (Sistema de Segurança Interna—SSI, 2023). In total 30,488 complaints were presented to police authorities. Nearly 80% of the aggressors were men, and 72.4% of the victims were women. Victims aged between 16 and 24 years old represent 9.9% of the reported cases.

The research described in the present paper is the first national study on dating violence among Portuguese university students. Its innovative nature could be relevant to redefining policies to more effectively prevent and combat one of the most pervasive forms of violence affecting young people.

## Method

The goal of the present study is to characterize the relationship between gender beliefs and dating violence practices among university students in Portugal. It was carried out as part of a larger project aimed at preventing and combating dating violence in Portuguese universities.

To achieve the main goal, four research questions were addressed:

**Research question 1 (RQ1):** What is the proportion of dating violence among university students in Portugal?

**Research question 2 (RQ2):** How are victims, and perpetrators of dating violence in universities in Portugal characterized, in terms of gender and age?

**Research question 3 (RQ3):** If existent, are there gender differences in university students' gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence?

**Research question 4 (RQ4):** If existent, is there any association between victimization and perpetration of dating violence and university students' gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence?

### **Research hypothesis**

Our first hypothesis was that female students are more victimized than male students (H1); the second hypothesis was that male students perpetrate more dating violence than female students (H2); the third was that female students suffer more sexual violence than male students (H3); the fourth that older students perpetrate more dating violence than younger (H4); the fifth that male students hold higher levels of gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence than female students (H5); the sixth that participants who suffer from dating violence manifest higher levels of gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence than those who do not (H6); and the last hypothesis was that participants who perpetrate violence manifest higher levels of gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence than those who do not perpetrate it (H7).

### **Data collection**

Data were collected through an online questionnaire composed of informed consent, followed by sociodemographic questions (e.g., age, nationality, education area), the Inventory of Gender Beliefs, and the Inventory of Violent Juvenile Relationships.

The Inventory of Gender Beliefs aims to assess participants' beliefs on gender social relations and contains 24 items on a five-point Likert scale (e.g., "Women who don't want to become mothers aren't real women"; "Women are victims of sexual violence because they provoke men"; or "Women and men must share domestic work"). The sum of the responses to the 24 items of the inventory was used to measure gender beliefs: higher values reflect more conservative beliefs. Cronbach's alpha value was 0.778. The Inventory of Violent Juvenile Relationships seeks to characterize psychological, physical, sexual, economic, and social violence and stalking. It is composed of 21 items, with four answer options: *Never happened to me*; *I already suffered*; *I already perpetrated*; and *I already suffered and perpetrated* (e.g., "Force me to have unwanted sex behaviors"; "Keep all my money or limit/control my expenses"; "Threaten me verbally or through behaviors causing fear"). Victimization was measured by accounting for the number of responses *I already suffered*, and perpetration was measured by accounting for the number of responses *I already perpetrated*. Both the level of victimization and perpetration were accounted as the proportion of responses *I already suffered*, and *I already perpetrated*, respectively. Persons who responded to at least at one item with *I already*

*suffered*, or *I already perpetrated* were accounted as victim and/or perpetrator, respectively. The different typologies of violence were defined according to the definitions presented in the literature.

### **Sample and procedures**

Regarding the characterization of the participants, more specifically 4696 college students, 81.9% ( $n = 3846$ ) self-identified as female, 17.8% ( $n = 834$ ) self-identified as male, and 0.3% ( $n = 16$ ) as non-binary gender. Concerning sexual orientation, 86.5% ( $n = 3878$ ) of the respondents were heterosexual, 7.8% ( $n = 350$ ) bisexual, 4.3% ( $n = 193$ ) homosexual and 1.4% ( $n = 62$ ) stated “other” as their sexual orientation. Most of the participants were Portuguese (96.7%), single (92.3%), came from the north of the country (69.3%) and studied in public universities (61.2%), in half of the cases at graduate level. Regarding education area, law, social sciences and services stand out with 44.9% of the responses, followed by health 12.9% and others such as education sciences (6.8%), humanities, secretarial and translation and economic, management and accounting, both with 6.7% of the responses (see Table 1).

The description of the study and the survey link were sent by e-mail to all Portuguese universities, who were asked to disseminate it on the universities’ social media channels and announce it in classes. The inclusion criteria were 1) to be attending a university in Portugal; 2) to comprehend the Portuguese language; and 3) not having answered the questionnaire previously.

The study followed the Code of Ethics and Deontology of the Portuguese Psychologists Association, the ethical principles of the American Psychology Association, and the European Union General Regulation on Data Protection.

### **Data analysis**

Data were treated and analyzed using *Statistical Package for Social Sciences*, version 28 for Windows. Descriptive analyses were used to characterize victims and perpetrators of dating violence in universities in Portugal. Means and standard deviations were used to describe gender beliefs and the level of dating violence suffered and perpetrated. *T*-tests for independent samples were used to identify statistically significant differences between the levels of violence perpetrated and suffered according to gender (H1, H2 and H3) and to compare the mean age between those who had already perpetrated dating violence and those who had not (H4). *T*-tests were also used to compare the means of gender beliefs according to gender (H5) and according to whether they had suffered from dating violence (H6) and according whether they had perpetrated it (H7). A significance level of .05 for individual tests was considered with a Bonferroni adjusted correction for repeated tests. The size effect of differences in means was measured with Cohen’s *d* statistic.

### **Results**

In respect to RQ1, and considering the global sample, 53.7% ( $n = 2524$ ) of the participants admitted having suffered at least one episode of dating violence, and 34% ( $n = 1599$ ) admitted having perpetrated an episode of dating violence at least once.

**Table 1.** Sample characteristics.

Sample Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	3846	81.9
Male	834	17.8
Non-binary	16	0.3
<i>Sexual orientation</i>		
Heterosexual	3878	86.5
Bisexual	350	7.8
Homosexual	193	4.3
Other	62	1.4
<i>Nationality</i>		
Portuguese	4546	96.7
Other	150	3.2
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	4341	92.3
Non-marital partnership	148	3.1
Married	96	2.0
Divorced	25	0.5
Other	87	1.9
<i>Education Region</i>		
North	3258	69.3
Centre	1152	24.5
South	263	5.6
Madeira	13	0.3
Azores	11	0.2
<i>Institution type</i>		
Public	2878	61.2
Private	1817	38.7
<i>Education level attended</i>		
Graduate	2657	56.5
Master	1036	22.0
PhD	72	1.5
<i>Education area</i>		
Law, Social Sciences and Services	2112	44.9
Health	607	12.9
Science	368	7.8
Education Sciences	321	6.8
Humanity, Secretarial and Translation	317	6.7
Economic, Management and Accounting	316	6.7
Physical Education, Sports and Performing Arts	232	4.9
Technology	224	4.8
Architecture, Plastic Arts and Design	158	3.4
Agriculture and Natural Resources	36	0.8
<i>Academic situation</i>		
Student	3425	72.9
Working student	1271	27.0

Regarding RQ2, 53.5% ( $n = 2056$ ) and 54.9% ( $n = 458$ ) of the female and male participants, respectively, were subjected to dating violence. Psychological violence was the most prevalent, with 51.5% ( $n = 1981$ ) of female students and 53.2% ( $n = 444$ ) of male students suffering from it, followed by social violence, which affected 30.2% ( $n = 1160$ ) of women and 26.6% ( $n = 222$ ) of men. Almost 15% ( $n = 571$ ) of women and 9.2% ( $n = 77$ ) of men were sexually victimized and 14.1% ( $n = 544$ ) of female participants, and 12.5% ( $n = 104$ ) of male participants were exposed to physical violence. Nearly 13% ( $n = 506$ ) and 9% ( $n = 75$ ) of women and men, respectively, were stalked, and 3.5% ( $n = 134$ ) of females and 4.6% ( $n = 38$ ) of males were victims of economic violence.

Concerning perpetration, 32.8% ( $n = 1260$ ) and 39.7% ( $n = 331$ ) of women and men, respectively, admitted having been abusive in intimate relationships. 36.6% ( $n = 305$ ) of

men and 31% ( $n = 1194$ ) of women reported acts of psychological violence, 10.8% ( $n = 90$ ) of men and 5.3% ( $n = 205$ ) of women social violence, 3.8% ( $n = 32$ ) of men and 3.3% ( $n = 128$ ) of women physical violence, 3.4% ( $n = 28$ ) of men and 0.7% ( $n = 27$ ) of women sexual violence, 3.1% ( $n = 26$ ) of men and 1.7% ( $n = 66$ ) of women stalking and 0.6% ( $n = 5$ ) of men and 0.4% ( $n = 15$ ) of women economic violence (see Table 2).

Male students reveal higher levels ( $M = 0.04$ ,  $DP = 0.08$ ) of dating violence perpetration than female students ( $M = 0.03$ ,  $DP = 0.06$ ),  $t(1083.59) = -3.99$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = -0.17$ , while female students reveal higher levels ( $M = 0.11$ ,  $DP = 0.17$ ) of dating violence victimization than male students ( $M = 0.09$ ,  $DP = 0.13$ ),  $t(1541.81) = 5.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.17$ .

To analyze the difference in mean age between those who do and do not perpetrate dating violence, a  $t$  test for independent samples was used. A statistically significant difference was found between those who perpetrate ( $M = 23.01$ ,  $DP = 5.73$ ) and those who do not ( $M = 22.11$ ,  $DP = 4.76$ ). Thus, people who perpetrate dating violence are older than those who do not,  $t(2741.76) = -5.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.18$ .

The difference in mean age between those who do and do not suffer from dating violence was also evaluated. A statistically significant difference was found between those who suffer from it ( $M = 22.81$ ,  $DP = 5.12$ ) and those who do not ( $M = 21.96$ ,  $DP = 5.11$ ), with those who suffer being older than those who do not,  $t(4578.14) = -5.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.17$ .

All the typologies of dating violence present statistically significant differences regarding gender, except physical and economic violence. Taking violence suffered into consideration, female students present statistically significant higher levels of psychological violence than male students,  $t(13070.35) = 2.93$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $d = 0.10$ ; social violence,  $t(1334.57) = 3.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.13$ ; sexual violence,  $t(1287.82) = 3.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.12$ ; and stalking,  $t(1385.63) = 3.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.13$ . Conversely, male students present statistically significant higher levels of psychological violence,  $t(1170.57) = -2.96$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $d = -0.12$ ; social violence,  $t(1044.78) = -4.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.19$ ; and sexual violence,  $t(935.49) = -3.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.21$ , where perpetration is concerned (see Table 3).

Concerning RQ3, a statistically significant difference was found between female participants ( $M = 28.00$ ,  $DP = 3.67$ ) and male participants ( $M = 32.40$ ,  $DP = 6.25$ ) concerning gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence. Male students are those who hold higher levels

**Table 2.** Number and percentages of people who suffered and perpetrated at least one act of dating violence.

	Female (N=3846)		Male (N = 834)		Total (N = 4696)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Suffered</i>	2056	53.5	458	54.9	2524	53.7
Psychological	1981	51.5	444	53.2	2432	51.8
Physical	544	14.1	104	12.5	650	13.8
Social	1160	30.2	222	26.6	1386	29.5
Sexual	571	15.0	77	9.2	651	13.9
Economic	134	3.5	38	4.6	174	3.7
Stalking	506	13.0	75	9.0	583	12.4
<i>Perpetrated</i>	1260	32.8	331	39.7	1599	34.0
Psychological	1194	31.0	305	36.6	1505	32.0
Physical	128	3.3	32	3.8	163	3.5
Social	205	5.3	90	10.8	299	6.4
Sexual	27	0.7	28	1.7	57	1.2
Economic	15	0.4	5	0.6	21	0.4
Stalking	66	1.7	26	3.1	94	2.0

**Table 3.** Dating violence by gender.

Typologies of dating violence	Female (N=3846)		Male (N=834)		t	df	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
<i>Suffered</i>								
Psychological	.262	.327	.230	.281	2.931	1370	.002	0.102
Physical	.065	.196	.056	.186	1.235	1268	.109	0.046
Social	.137	.254	.106	.225	3.526	1334	<.001	0.125
Sexual	.069	.191	.047	.177	-3.757	935	<.001	0.116
Economic	.035	.183	.046	.209	-1.373	1128	.085	-0.057
Stalking	.132	.338	.090	.286	3.681	1385	<.001	0.126
<i>Perpetrated</i>								
Psychological	.099	.177	.120	.190	-2.957	1170	.002	-0.118
Physical	.009	.056	.012	.074	-1.209	1053	.114	-0.055
Social	.015	.072	.029	.096	-4.098	1044	<.001	-0.188
Sexual	.003	.035	.011	.066	3.195	1287	<.001	-0.210
Economic	.004	.062	.006	.077	-0.841	4678	.201	-0.032
Stalking	.017	.130	.031	.174	-2.198	1043	.014	-0.101

Note. Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .008 per test.

**Table 4.** Gender beliefs by gender.

	Female (n=3846)		Male (n=834)		t	df	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Gender Beliefs	28.00	3.67	32.40	6.25	-19.44	947	<.001	-1.03

**Table 5.** Gender beliefs for those who perpetrated and/or suffered dating violence.

	Yes		No		t	df	p	Cohen's d
	M	DP	M	DP				
Perpetrated DV	29.59	5.05	28.37	4.23	-8.23	2741	<.001	-0.27
Suffered DV	28.98	4.65	28.55	4.44	-3.20	4655	.001	-0.09

of gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence when compared to female students, [ $t(947.35) = -19.44, p < .001, d = -1.03$  (see Table 4).

A *T* test for independent samples was performed to answer RQ4, revealing a statistically significant difference between those who perpetrate dating violence ( $M = 29.59, DP = 5.05$ ) and those who do not ( $M = 28.37, DP = 4.23$ ) regarding gender beliefs legitimizing it. Those who perpetrate dating violence show higher levels of gender beliefs legitimizing it than those who do not,  $t(2741.74) = -8.23, p < .001, d = -0.27$ .

Moreover, a statistically significant difference between those who suffer from dating violence ( $M = 28.98, DP = 4.65$ ) and those who do not ( $M = 28.55, DP = 4.44$ ) was found, with those who suffer from it showing higher levels of gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence than those who do not,  $t(4655) = -3.20, p = .001, d = -0.09$  (see Table 5).

## Discussion

The results of the present study point out significant levels of dating violence among university students in Portugal, with more than half of the participants (53.7%) admitting having suffered from it, and nearly 1/3 (34%) admitted having perpetrated one episode of

dating violence at least once in their lifetime. As widely documented, psychological violence is the most prevalent among university students and one of the most harmful. Comparing figures on dating violence in Europe (Tomaszewska & Schuster, 2021), the results of our study are aligned with the trend concerning different types of violence, both suffered and perpetrated.

When analyzing victimization in terms of gender differences, it can be concluded that female students are more victimized than male students, confirming H1. Although evidence on scientific research is debatable about the prevalence of dating violence according to gender, many studies (e.g., Miller et al., 2018) have suggested that females are particularly vulnerable to violence in romantic relationships in youth, especially sexual violence. In our sample, female students are those who suffered from more sexual violence, along with psychological and social violence, when compared to male students, validating H3.

While other studies (e.g., Bonomi et al., 2012) contradict this finding, showing that women can be as violent as men or more so, especially when it comes to physical violence, our results indicate that male students perpetrate more dating violence than female students, confirming H2. This evidence is prominent regarding psychological, social, and sexual violence, but not physical violence, as no gender differences were found. What several authors (e.g., Karlsson et al., 2016) have argued is that male-to-female dating violence might be associated with a higher acceptance of violence by males, which is corroborated in our research. In fact, male students hold higher levels of gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence than female students, supporting H5. As previous discussed, adhering to traditional gender norms can be a risk factor for engaging in aggressive and disruptive behaviors (Reidy et al., 2015). Using power and control to assure dominance is still a social prescription to men, who must prove their *real* masculinity.

Furthermore, higher levels of violence acceptance in dating relationships have been associated with higher levels of victimization and perpetration, which is congruent with our outcomes, supporting both H6 and H7. Not only do participants who have suffered from dating violence manifest higher levels of gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence than those who have not, but also participants who have perpetrated violence manifest higher levels of gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence than those who have not perpetrated it. The fact that victims and aggressors legitimize more dating violence than non-victims and non-aggressors is a core issue in rethinking prevention strategies. These findings address the necessity of deconstructing gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence in the early phases of development.

It could also be concluded that older students perpetrate more dating violence than younger, meaning H4 is accepted. Even though an association between age and gender beliefs legitimizing dating violence was not found, it is reasonable to argue that younger students, who were likely exposed to a narrative of gender equality earlier in their lives, might have developed more egalitarian perspectives regarding gender roles and intimate relationships and therefore are less involved in violent and abusive conducts.

### **Limitations and future research**

Although several findings are shown to be statistically significant, a more equal distribution regarding gender would have provided more accurate outcomes. Nevertheless, the fact that the participation of women in this study was four times higher than the participation of men

may itself be related to gender roles, and therefore a contribution that is in line with the present findings.

The wide range of definitions, concepts, and methodology diffuses comparative readings, with dating violence not being given the proper attention or importance, reflected in prevention strategies that are often inadequately and ineffectively developed. For a better understanding of the issue, aiming to identify the mechanisms sustaining dating violence, further studies should be implemented with university students. Also, qualitative methodologies have the potential to offer valuable insights into students' perspectives and recommendations regarding the essential components of effective prevention measures.

## Conclusions

Dating violence and its typical pattern of polyvictimization has serious psychological and physical consequences for the victims, especially women, including increased rates of depression, anxiety, substance use, suicide ideation, eating disorders, sexual transmitted infections, early pregnancy and severe injuries (Taquette & Monteiro, 2019). With power and control undermining these relationships, whether in a unidirectional or bidirectional pattern and building toward a potential escalation of conflict, homicide and/or suicide is a possible outcome of dating violence, but an unresearched and invisible one (Jaffe et al., 2018).

The aim of the current research was to characterize the relationship between gender beliefs and dating violence practices among university students in Portugal. According to the results, more than half of the sample has been subjected to violence in the context of intimate relationships and one in three participants had perpetrated abusive acts against partners, which reveals that dating violence is an alarming problem demanding immediate action. Besides the magnitude of the phenomena, its relationship with gender beliefs that legitimize dating violence, both in victims and aggressors, configures a substantial concern, as it reflects a structural framework of power asymmetries.

Considering the findings of the study, it can be affirmed that gender differences in the victimization and perpetration of dating violence, with the exception of physical violence, exists among university students in Portugal. Thus, female students are more exposed than male students to psychological, social, and sexual violence.

Conservative gender beliefs as strong contributors to legitimizing and minimizing violence within intimate relationships, consequently, promote a nonperception of victimization and, therefore, help is not sought, keeping victims underprotected and phenomena underreported (Ameral et al., 2020). On that account, the findings in this study contribute to strengthening the association between (conservative) gender beliefs and the perpetration and victimization of dating violence among college students. Thus, the importance of a robust intervention with college students is underpinned, with a special focus on sexual violence, as university contexts, especially where nightlife is concerned, can be a laboratory for gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and sexual violence, frequently reproducing societal patterns (Pires et al., 2022).

The high prevalence of social sciences students as participants in this study brings about another concern, that being the danger of bad practices in a professional context. These can be linked to personal (conservative) beliefs, that promote a bias regarding gender-based violence or gendered vulnerabilities (Neves & Correia, 2021).

The present study also sheds light on the urgency to develop new strategies regarding dating violence prevention in precollege years, considering long lasting programs, designed within a trans-curricular and multisystemic approach for effective results, reinforcing that dating violence prevention is simultaneously the prevention of intimate partner violence in adulthood (Caridade, 2020).

As Portugal has ratified the Istanbul Convention and has the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination—Portugal+ Igual (2023–2026) under implementation, its commitment to gender equality by reducing gender-based violence is evident. One of the three plans approved, the plan of action for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, establishes investigating, monitoring, and assessing policies as one of its main goals. Dating violence prevention, at different school levels, is stated as a strategical area of action, so data on the university context can contribute to new directions in research and intervention.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This study was part of a project funded by the Portuguese government, through Programa Operacional Inclusão Social e Emprego (grant number 03-4437-FSE-000227).

## ORCID

Sofia Neves  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6180-4932>

Ariana Correia  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8432-6790>

Janete Borges  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8332-0039>

## References

- Ameral, V., Palm Reed, K. M., & Hines, D. A. (2020). An analysis of help-seeking patterns among college student victims of sexual assault, dating violence, and Stalking. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 35*(23–24), 5311–5335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517721169>
- Bonomi, A. E., Anderson, M., Nemeth, J., Bartle-Haring, S., Buettner, C., & Schipper, D. (2012). Dating violence victimization across the teen years: Abuse frequency, number of abusive partners, and age at first occurrence. *BMC Public Health, 12*(1), 637. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-12-637>
- Caridade, S. (2020). Violência no namoro: Práticas, especificidades e desafios. In R. Barroso & D. Neto (Eds.), *A Prática Profissional da Psicologia na Justiça* (pp. 282–290). Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses.
- Caridade, S., E Sousa, H. F. P., & Dinis, M. A. P. (2020). Cyber and offline dating abuse in a Portuguese sample: Prevalence and context of abuse. *Behavioral Sciences, 10*(10), 152. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs10100152>
- Cui, M., Ueno, K., Gordon, M., & Fincham, F. D. (2013). The continuation of intimate partner violence from adolescence to young adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 75*(2), 300–313. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12016>

- Dardis, C. M., Edwards, K. M., Kelley, E. L., & Gidycz, C. A. (2017). Perceptions of dating violence and associated correlates: A study of college young adults. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 32*(21), 3245–3271. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515597439>
- Dosil, M., Jaureguizar, J., Bernaras, E., & Sbicigo, J. B. (2020). Teen dating violence, sexism, and resilience: A multivariate analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(8), 2652. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17082652>
- Duval, A., Lanning, B. A., & Patterson, M. S. (2020). A systematic review of dating violence risk factors among undergraduate college students. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 21*(3), 567–585. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838018782207>
- Gehring, K. S., & Vaske, J. C. (2017). Out in the open: The consequences of intimate partner violence for victims in same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 32*(23), 3669–3692. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515600877>
- Jaffe, P., Fairbairn, J., & Sapardanis, K. (2018). Youth dating violence and homicide. In D. A. Wolfe & J. R. Temple (Eds.), *Adolescent dating violence: Theory, research, and prevention* (pp. 191–214). Elsevier Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-811797-2.00008-6>
- Jozkowski, K. N., & Wiersma-Mosley, J. D. (2017). The Greek system: How gender inequality and class privilege perpetuate rape culture. *Family Relations, 66*(1), 89–103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12229>
- Karlsson, M. E., Temple, J. R., Weston, R., & Le, V. D. (2016). Witnessing interparental violence and acceptance of dating violence as predictors for teen dating violence victimization. *Violence Against Women, 22*(5), 625–646. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215605920>
- Kaukinen, C. (2014). Dating violence among college students: The risk and protective factors. *Trauma, Violence and Abuse, 15*(4), 283–296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838014521321>
- Lapierre, A., Paradis, A., Todorov, E., Blais, M., & Hebert, M. (2019). Trajectories of psychological dating violence perpetration in adolescence. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 97*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104167>
- Lee, C., & Wong, J. S. (2022). Examining the effects of teen dating violence prevention programs: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 18*(1), 1–40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-020-09442-x>
- Leisring, P. A., & Grigorian, H. L. (2016). Self-defense, retaliation, and gender: Clarifying motivations for physical partner violence. *Journal of Family Violence, 31*(8), 949–953. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-016-9874-3>
- Magalhães, M. J., et al. (2023). *Estudo Nacional sobre a Violência no Namoro. Novo estudo 2023*. UMAR. [https://www.cig.gov.pt/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/InfografiaVN\\_UMAR\\_2023\\_Final\\_Corrigida.pdf](https://www.cig.gov.pt/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/InfografiaVN_UMAR_2023_Final_Corrigida.pdf)
- McCauley, H. L., Tancredi, D. J., Silverman, J. G., Decker, M. R., Austin, S. B., McCormick, M. C., Virata, M. C., & Miller, E. (2013). Gender-equitable attitudes, bystander behavior, and recent abuse perpetration against heterosexual dating partners of male high school athletes. *American Journal of Public Health, 103*(10), 1882–1887. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301443>
- Miller, E., Jones, K. A., & McCauley, H. L. (2018). Updates on adolescent dating and sexual violence prevention and intervention. *Current Opinion in Pediatrics, 30*(4), 466–471. <https://doi.org/10.1097/MOP.0000000000000637>
- Miller, S., Williams, J., Cutbush, S., Gibbs, D., Clinton-Sherrod, M., & Jones, S. (2013). Dating violence, bullying, and sexual harassment: Longitudinal profiles and transitions over time. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 42*(4), 607–618. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-013-9914-8>
- Nelson, A., Allen, J., Cho, H., Yun, S., Choi, Y., & Choi, G. (2023). Intimate partner violence and openness to online counseling among college students. *Journal of Family Violence, 38*(4), 611–621. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-022-00396-4>
- Neves, S., Cameira, M., & Caridade, S. (2021). Beliefs on marital violence among Portuguese adolescents: Monitoring their evolution and relationship with dating violence. *Violence and Victims, 36*(3), 363–380. <https://doi.org/10.1891/VV-D-18-00050>
- Neves, S., & Correia, A. (2021). Intimate partner femicide in Portugal: The perception of intervention professionals with intimate partner violence. *Observatório (OBS\*)*, *16*(2), 117–137. <https://doi.org/10.15847/obsOBS16220221916>

- Neves, S., & Torres, J. (2018). Heterosexual dating violence and social gender relations: Voices of young Portuguese girls. In S. Gomes & V. Duarte (Eds.), *Female Crime and Delinquency in Portugal: In and out of the Criminal Justice System* (pp. 125–141). Palgrave. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73534-4\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73534-4_7)
- Pastor, Y., Pascual, E., Muñoz, J. J., & Bravo, S. M. (2020). Wording effect in the measurement of attitudes towards dating violence. *Psychosocial Intervention*, 29(1), 19–28. <https://doi.org/10.5093/pi2019a15>
- Pérez-Martínez, V., Marcos-Marcos, J., Cerdán-Torregrosa, A., Briones-Vozmediano, E., Sanz-Barbero, B., Davó-Blanes, M., Daoud, N., Edwards, C., Salazar, M., La Parra-Casado, D., & Vives-Cases, C. (2023). Positive masculinities and gender-based violence educational interventions among young people: A systematic review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 24(2), 468–486. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211030242>
- Peterson, K., Sharps, P., Banyard, V., Powers, R. A., Kaukinen, C., Gross, D., Decker, M. R., Baatz, C., & Campbell, J. (2018). An evaluation of two dating violence prevention programs on a college campus. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 33(23), 3630–3655. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516636069>
- Pires, V., Carvalho, M. C., & Carvalho, H. (2022). Certificação Sexism Free Night: da visibilização do assédio sexual à criação de um roteiro de lazer noturno mais seguro e igualitário no Porto. *ex aequo - Revista da Associação Portuguesa de Estudos sobre as Mulheres*, 45(45), 1177–1194. <https://doi.org/10.22355/exaequo.2022.45.12>
- Reed, L. A., Ward, L. M., Tolman, R. M., Lippman, J. R., & Seabrook, R. C. (2021). The association between stereotypical gender and dating beliefs and digital dating abuse perpetration in adolescent dating relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(9–10), NP5561–NP5585. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518801933>
- Reidy, D. E., Ball, B., Houry, D., Holland, K. M., Valle, L. A., Kearns, M. C., Marshall, K. J., & Rosenbluth, B. (2016). In search of teen dating violence typologies. *The Journal of Adolescent Health*, 58(2), 202–207. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2015.09.028>
- Reidy, D. E., Smith-Darden, J. P., Cortina, K. S., Kernsmith, R. M., & Kernsmith, P. D. (2015). Masculine discrepancy stress, teen dating violence, and sexual violence perpetration among adolescent boys. *The Journal of Adolescent Health*, 56(6), 619–624. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2015.02.009>
- Reyes, H. L., Foshee, V. A., Niolon, P. H., Reidy, D. E., & Hall, J. E. (2016). Gender role attitudes and male adolescent dating violence perpetration: Normative beliefs as moderators. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 45(2), 350–360. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0278-0>
- Sears, H. A., Sandra Byers, E., & Lisa Price, E. (2007). The co-occurrence of adolescent boys' and girls' use of psychologically, physically, and sexually abusive behaviours in their dating relationships. *Journal of Adolescence*, 30(3), 487–504. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2006.05.002>
- Shen, A. C.-T., Chiu, M. Y.-L., & Gao, J. (2012). Predictors of dating violence among Chinese adolescents: The role of gender-role beliefs and justification of violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(6), 1066–1089. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260511424497>
- Sistema de Segurança Interna - SSI. (2023). *Relatório Anual de Segurança Interna - Ano de 2022*. Ministério da Administração Interna. <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/download-ficheiros/ficheiro.aspx?v=%3d%3dBQAAAB%2bLCAAAAAAABAAzNDazMAQAhxRa3gUAAAA%3d>
- Straus, M. A. (2015). Dyadic concordance and discordance in family violence: A powerful and practical approach to research and practice. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 24, 83–94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2015.04.011>
- Swan, S. C., Gambone, L. J., Caldwell, J. E., Sullivan, T. P., & Snow, D. L. (2008). A review of research on women's use of violence with male intimate partners. *Violence and Victims*, 23(3), 301–314. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.23.3.301>
- Taquette, S. R., & Monteiro, D. L. M. (2019). Causes and consequences of adolescent dating violence: A systematic review. *Journal of Injury and Violence Research*, 11(2), 137–147. <https://doi.org/10.5249/jivr.v11i2.1061>

- Tharp, A. T., DeGue, S., Valle, L. A., Brookmeyer, K. A., Massetti, G. M., & Matjasko, J. L. (2013). A systematic qualitative review of risk and protective factors for sexual violence perpetration. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 14*(2), 133–167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838012470031>
- Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (2000). Prevalence and consequences of male-to-female and female-to-male intimate partner violence as measured by the national violence against women survey. *Violence Against Women, 6*(2), 142–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778010022181769>
- Tomaszewska, P., & Schuster, I. (2021). Prevalence of teen dating violence in Europe: A systematic review of studies since 2010. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 2021*(178), 11–37. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20437>
- Van Ouytsel, J., Ponnet, K., & Walrave, M. (2020). Cyber dating abuse: Investigating digital monitoring behaviors among adolescents from a social learning perspective. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 35*(23–24), 5157–5178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517719538>
- Vives-Cases, C., Sanz-Barbero, B., Ayala, A., Pérez-Martínez, V., Sánchez-SanSegundo, M., Jaskulska, S., Neves, S., Forjaz, J., Pyżalski, J., Bowes, N., Costa, D., Waszyńska, K., Jankowiak, B., Mocanu, V., & Davo-Blanes, M. C. (2021). Dating violence victimization among adolescents in Europe: Baseline results from the Lights4Violence project. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(4), 1414. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph1804141>
- Wincentak, K., Connolly, J., & Card, N. (2017). Teen dating violence: A meta-analytic review of prevalence rates. *Psychology of Violence, 7*(2), 224–241. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0040194>
- Ybarra, M. L., Espelage, D. L., Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J., Korchmaros, J. D., & Boyd, D. (2016). Lifetime prevalence rates and overlap of physical, psychological, and sexual dating abuse perpetration and victimization in a national sample of youth. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 45*(5), 1083–1099. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-016-0748-9>