

EXPERIENCES OF DOMINATING AND JEALOUS TACTICS, IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND ACCEPTABILITY OF VIOLENCE

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Abstract

Young adults' intimate relationships are generally respectful and based on equity. However, the literature has reported the high prevalence of psychological violence in this age bracket (Connolly & Mclsaac, 2011), being these rates higher than physical violence (Fernández-González et al., 2014; Orpinas et al., 2013; Ybarra et al., 2016). In terms of psychological violence, one of the most frequently reported types is the expression of dominance and jealousy. Following Kinsfogel and Grych (2004) and Sears et al. (2007), the acceptability of violence is not only a function of having witnessed violence at home but having being exposed to peer-perpetrated and community violence. Thus, it seems relevant to explore the acceptability of violence, learned from earlier experiences, and the role it plays in the context of a young adult intimate relationship, especially in terms of the psychological impact it might have in people experiencing those dominating and jealous tactics (Eshelman & Levendosky, 2012; Reidy et al., 2016).

The aim of the present study is therefore to analyse the relationship between the victimization of dominating and jealous tactics in young couples, as well as the acceptability of violence, and the psychological impact in terms of mental health. A cross-sectional quantitative study was designed, with a sample of 274 participant between 18 and 30 years of age (194 women and 80 men; overall mean age was 25.21 (dt = 3.9); the females mean age being 25.15 (dt = 3.84) and males mean age being 25.39 (dt = 4.26). All participants completed measures of victimization of dominant and jealous tactics by their intimate partners, acceptability of violence and mental health symptoms (anxiety, depression and interpersonal sensitivity).

The results showed that the acceptability of violence mediated the relationship between having being exposed to dominant tactics, but not for jealous tactics, in the context of an intimate relationship and overall mental health symptoms. Further mediational analyses showed that this indirect effect was present for all three indicators of mental health and victimisation of jealous tactics. However, when we analysed in detail the victimisation of dominance tactics, this indirect effect only remained for interpersonal sensitivity. Limitations of the study and implications for practice and future research will be discussed.

Keywords: *Dating violence, dominating and jealous tactics, psychological violence, mental health, acceptability of violence.*

1. Introduction

Young adults' intimate relationships are generally respectful and based on equity. However, the literature has reported the high prevalence of psychological violence in this age bracket (Connolly & Mclsaac, 2011), being these rates higher than physical violence (Fernández-González et al., 2014; Orpinas et al., 2013; Ybarra et al., 2016). This type of violence has been defined as behaviours, attitudes and communication styles based on the humiliation, control, hostility, domination and intimidation, and jealousy towards the intimate partner (O' Leary & Smith-Slep, 2003).

In terms of psychological violence, one of the most frequently reported types is the expression of dominance and jealousy. Dominant tactics consist of controlling the activities of the partner, including isolating them from family and friends (Smith & Donnelly, 2001), whereas jealous tactics have been conceptualised as the desire to control and possess one's own partner, checking what they are doing and demanding information about their whereabouts (Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2007). These authors have reported prevalence rates for these types of behaviours of between 60%-70% for the use of jealous tactics and around 30%-40% for dominant tactics. This type of violence has an important psychological toll. Dating violence, or violence, in young couples, has been linked to anxiety symptoms, depression, physical

injuries, post-traumatic stress symptoms, drug misuse and suicidal ideation (Eshelman & Levendosky, 2012; Reidy et al., 2016).

Acceptability of violence has been found to be related to what behavior is considered violence in intimate relationships. Thus, violence might be considered acceptable when it is not seen as very severe (Gracia, 2014; Worden & Carlson, 2005). Cauffman et al. (2000) found that generally speaking, dating violence is viewed as unacceptable, but it might be seen as justified under circumstances such as self-defense, playing around or revenge and this was strongly associated with dating violence. Following Kinsfogel and Grych (2004) and Sears et al. (2007), the acceptability of violence is not only a function of having witnessed violence at home but also is related to having being exposed to peer-perpetrated and community violence. Thus, it seems relevant to explore the acceptability of violence, and the role it plays in the context of a young adult intimate relationship, especially in terms of the psychological impact it might have in people experiencing those dominating and jealous tactics (Echeburúa & Corral, 2010).

The aim of this study is therefore to explore the mediating role of the acceptability of violence in the relationship between victimisation experiences of dominant and jealous tactics in the context of an intimate relationship in young adults and the psychological impact in terms of mental health.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The sample was made of 274 participants between 18 and 30 years of age, with an overall mean age was 25.21 (dt = 3.9). The inclusion criteria included being between 18 and 30 years old, and having had an intimate relationship which had lasted at least 3 months.

Over one-third of participants were female (n = 194, mean age = 25.15, dt = 3.84), males being the 29.2% of the sample (n = 80, mean age = 25.39, dt = 4.26). Of the participants, 65.9% had studied at university or had a master degree. Around a third of the participants reported being a student (33%) and another third being employed (32.5%). The remaining participants reported both being working and studying (30.5%) or being unemployed (3.9%).

Slightly over half the participants were living with their parents (52%), whereas 33% were living with their partners, 8.1% were living on their own and the remaining 7% had another living arrangement. In terms of relationship status, most participant reported being currently in an intimate relationship (74.6%), with an average duration of 3.92 years (dt = 3.14).

2.2. Design and procedure

This study used a cross-sectional design. Data collection was conducted via an online questionnaire and using a snowball sampling method.

2.3. Instruments

Ad-hoc sociodemographic questionnaire: This included a number of variables such as age and sex, educational level, current employment status, and relationship status.

Acceptability of Intimate Partner Violence against Women scale (A-IPVAW; Martín-Fernández et al., 2018): This scale assesses to what extent violence against women is accepted. It is a 20-item instrument with a 3-point Likert scale (from 1 = “not acceptable at all” to 3 = “acceptable”). This instrument has good psychometric properties, with a reported Cronbach’s alpha of .89 (Martín-Fernández et al., 2018). In this study, we found a Cronbach’s α of .58, which suggests that the finding should be taken cautiously.

Dominating and Jealous Tactics Scale (Kasian & Painter, 1992, adapted to Spanish by Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2018). This 11-item instrument measures to what extent, using a 5-point Likert scale, respondents have used and experienced themselves dominant (7 items) and jealousy (4 items) tactics in the context of an intimate relationship. Respondents answer each statement depicting a psychological violence tactic twice: once of their own perpetration, and a second time for their own victimisation. In this study, we only used the victimisation form. This instrument has been found to have a good internal consistency (Cano et al., 1998). In this study, a Cronbach’s alpha of .72 was found for the dominating tactics victimisation scale and an alpha of .80 for the scale of jealous tactic victimisation.

Spanish adaptation of the Symptom Checklist 90-R (Derogatis et al., 1977): This checklist, adapted to the Spanish context by González de Rivera et al. (1989), measures mental health symptoms, in 9 symptom subscales, using a Likert scale (from “absence of distress” to “maximum distress”) in 90 items. In this study, only the subscales of anxiety (10 items measuring indicators of emotional tension and psychosomatic manifestations), depression (13 items measuring the main symptoms, such as dysphoria, lack of motivation, and hopelessness) and interpersonal sensitivity (9 items assessing shyness and the tendency to feelings of inferiority, as well as a hypersensitivity to others’ opinions and a inhibition when

interacting with others) were utilised. An overall score was also computed, adding all three subscales. The alpha coefficients found were: anxiety .92, depression .91 and interpersonal sensitivity .86. For the overall score, the alpha was .96.

2.4. Ethical considerations

Before having access to the online set of questionnaires, participants were briefed about the aim of the study, the voluntary nature of the study and the confidentiality of the data was going to be guaranteed at all times. Participant needed to check that they were happy to participate before being able to get access to the questionnaire.

3. Results

Descriptive and correlation analyses of the study variables are presented in Table 1, indicating that the frequency distributions of the study variables are not normal. In addition, K-S tests were carried out for all study variables. All the scores were significantly non-normal: acceptability of violence, $D(243) = 0.22, p < 0.001$; Dominance Tactics victimisation, $D(243) = 0.19, p < 0.001$; Jealousy Tactics victimisation, $D(243) = 0.19, p < 0.001$; anxiety, $D(243) = 0.21, p < 0.001$; depression, $D(243) = 0.17, p < 0.001$; interpersonal sensitivity, $D(243) = 0.16, p < 0.001$; and overall symptoms, $D(243) = 0.17, p < 0.001$. Correlation analyses were conducted using Spearman’s Rho, yielding all positive significant correlations (see Table 1).

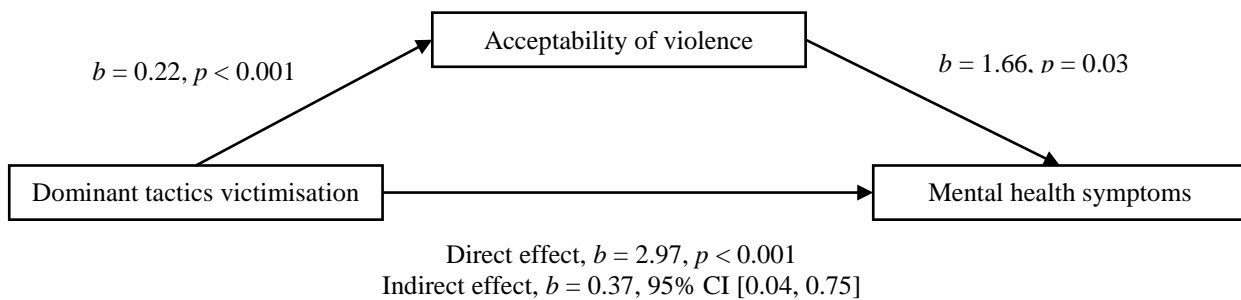
Table 1. Descriptives of acceptability of violence, victimisation and mental health symptoms.

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Acceptability of Violence	243	21.27	1.58	--						
2. Dominance Tactics vict	243	9.50	2.89	.34**	--					
3. Jealousy Tactics vict	243	6.79	3.03	.17**	.50**	--				
4. Anxiety	243	15.74	7.05	.27**	.31**	.34**	--			
5. Depression	243	24.99	9.68	.25**	.36**	.33**	.72**	--		
6. Interpersonal Sensitivity	243	14.80	5.70	.28**	.30**	.28**	.62**	.62**	--	
7. Overall symptoms	243	55.53	20.27	.27**	.36**	.33**	.86**	.92**	.82**	--

Note. ** $p < .001$

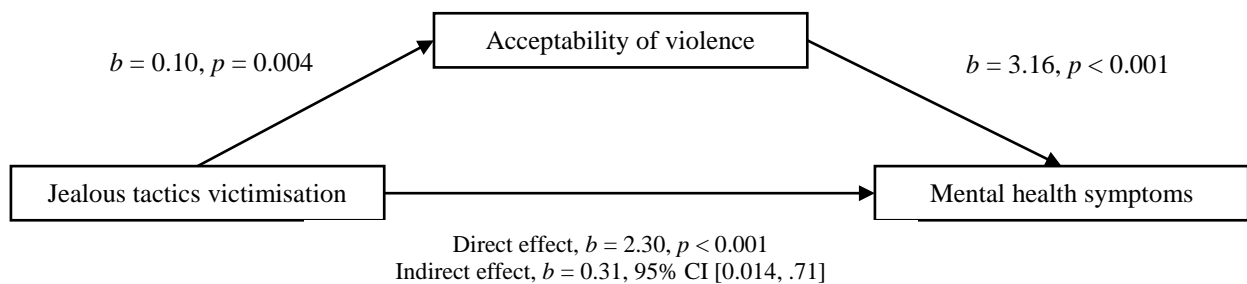
Next, the mediating role of the acceptability of violence in the relationship between the victimisation experiences and mental health symptoms was explored. Thus, a series of mediation analysis using model 4 in PROCESS (Hayes, 2022) were conducted. The results showed that the acceptability of violence mediated the relationship between having being exposed to both dominant and jealous tactics in the context of an intimate relationship and overall mental health symptoms. There was a significant indirect effect of dominant tactics victimisation on mental health symptoms through acceptability of violence.

Figure 1. Model of dominant tactics victimisation as a predictor of mental health symptoms, mediated by acceptability of violence. The confidence interval for the indirect effect is a BCa bootstrapped CI based on 5000 samples.



A similar mediational model with jealous tactics victimisation yielded a significant indirect effect (see Figure 2) of this type of victimisation on mental health symptoms through acceptability of violence. Figure 2 displays this model.

Figure 2. Model of jealous tactics victimisation as a predictor of mental health symptoms, mediated by acceptability of violence. The confidence interval for the indirect effect is a BCa bootstrapped CI based on 5000 samples.



Further mediational analyses using the specific symptoms of mental health indicators of mental health indicated that there was not a significant indirect effect of dominant tactics victimisation on anxiety through acceptability of violence, $b = 0.12$, 95% BCa CI [-0.003, 0.27]; a non-significant effect of dominant tactics victimisation on depression through acceptability of violence, $b = 0.11$, 95% BCa CI [-0.03, 0.28]; and a significant effect of dominant tactics victimisation on interpersonal sensitivity through acceptability of violence, $b = 0.16$, 95% BCa CI [0.05, 0.27].

The mediational analyses of the three specific mental health symptoms regarding the jealous tactics victimization yielded a significant indirect effect of jealous tactics victimisation on anxiety through acceptability of violence, $b = 0.09$, 95% BCa CI [0.005, 0.21]; a significant indirect effect of jealous tactics victimisation on depression through acceptability of violence, $b = 0.12$, 95% BCa CI [0.009, 0.29]; and a significant indirect effect of jealous tactics victimisation on interpersonal sensitivity through acceptability of violence, $b = 0.10$, 95% BCa CI [0.005, 0.12].

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the mediational role of the acceptability of violence in the relationship between having experienced dominant tactic and jealous tactics by an intimate partner and mental health symptoms. The direct relationship between the two latter variables has been found in this study, consistently to what has been reported in the literature (Henning & Klesges, 2003). In this regard, it has been suggested that the psychological violence might have a more severe impact on the mental health than other form of violence (Williams et al., 2012)

In addition, the acceptability of the violence against women emerged as a relevant factor explaining the association between having experienced psychological violence and experiencing some difficulties in terms of mental health. This was true for both having being the victim of dominating and controlling as well as jealous behavior. The literature suggests that having being the witness of domestic violence in childhood might be linked to the acceptance of violence (O'Keefe, 1997) because in those circumstances, violence might be being modelled as an acceptable way of dealing with conflict (Meltzer et al., 2009). The acceptability of violence might also be related to the idea of "romantic love", which will lead to minimising violent behaviors such as control or jealousy (Soldevila et al., 2012). Finally, acceptability of violence has been linked, in adult females, to the way they respond to their victimisation (Barnett, 2001; Rizo & Macy, 2011).

Our findings point out the relevance of the acceptability of violence in the context of psychological violence. Furthermore, our findings highlight the significant impact that the experiences of dominating and controlling behavior might have on how a person tackles their interpersonal relationships, as our finding suggest that in those situations, the person might have feelings of inferiority, as well as a hypersensitivity to others' opinions. In regards to jealousy behaviour, it seems to be related to a wider range of psychological impact through the acceptability of violence. It seems reasonable to develop preventative intervention strategies to intervene on the acceptability of violence.

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