

Dating Violence and the Use of Coping Strategies in Adolescents from Rural Institutions in Cuenca (2022–2024)

Violencia en el noviazgo adolescente y el empleo de estrategias de afrontamiento en instituciones rurales de Cuenca (Ecuador) 2022- 2024

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- **Receipt:** 08 - October - 2024
- **Approval:** 10 - January - 2025
- **Online publication:** 30 - June - 2025

How to cite this article: Ortiz, X., Cabrera Vélez, M., Morales Quizhpi, J., Duque, V. & Zambrano, C. (2025). Dating Violence and the Use of Coping Strategies in Adolescents from Rural Institutions in Cuenca (2022–2024). *Maskana*, 16(1), 9-23. <https://doi.org/10.18537/mskn.16.01.01>

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Abstract

Adolescent romantic relationships often involve power struggles where coping strategies play a significant role. This study aimed to determine the presence of dating violence and coping strategies among adolescents from rural institutions in the Cuenca canton. The instruments used were the Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI) and the Violence in Dating Relationships Questionnaire (CUVINO). A total of 133 students aged 12 to 18 participated, 50 of whom were in a romantic relationship. The findings revealed that 92.3% of participants had experienced violence, with 50% reporting psychological violence. Additionally, self-criticism and problem-solving will slightly positively correlated with coercion. Age was also associated with wishful thinking and problem avoidance. The study concluded that psychological violence, in its various dimensions is related to certain copying strategies.

Keywords: dating, violence, adolescents, coping strategies, rural area.

Resumen

El noviazgo en la adolescencia en ocasiones muestra un dominio de la pareja debido a una lucha de poder, situación que da lugar al uso de estrategias de afrontamiento. Este trabajo buscó determinar la presencia de violencia en el noviazgo y las estrategias de afrontamiento a las que recurren adolescentes de instituciones rurales del cantón Cuenca. Instrumentos: Inventario de Estrategias de Afrontamiento (CSI) y Cuestionario de Violencia de Novios (CUVINO). Participaron 133 estudiantes, en edades comprendidas entre los 12 y 18 años; 52 se encontraban en una relación de pareja. De acuerdo con los resultados, el 92.3 % manifestó haber vivenciado violencia; de estos, el 50 % sufrió violencia psicológica. Además, se identificó que la autocrítica y la resolución de problemas se relacionaban positivamente de manera leve con la coerción; asimismo, la edad mostró relación con el pensamiento desiderativo y la evitación de problemas. Se concluye que la violencia psicológica, en sus distintas dimensiones, se relaciona con algunas estrategias de afrontamiento.

Palabras clave: violencia, noviazgo, adolescentes, estrategias de afrontamiento, área rural

1. Introduction

Violence is defined as any intentional act intended to cause psychological, physical, or sexual harm, which may even lead to death (Póo & Vizcarra, 2008). According to the World Health Organization [WHO, 2002], violence can be perpetrated against oneself or another person, group, or community. It is a public health issue due to the individual, family, and social consequences it generates, and for people between 15 and 44 years of age, it is the leading cause of death in the world. Another alarming figure given by this organization is that worldwide, 1.4 million people die, and many more suffer serious injuries that can affect them for the rest of their lives.

Regarding intimate partner violence, WHO (2016) defines it as violent, abusive, or coercive behaviors exercised towards the partner that cause psychological, physical, or sexual harm. For Rey-Anacona (2013), dating violence can be physical and includes any type of blows such as kicks, punches, throwing objects, pushing, and attacks with weapons; psychological violence, which includes all types of humiliation, intimidation, threats or denigration, whose consequences can be more serious and lasting than physical violence; and sexual violence that includes forced sexual intercourse, sexual use, whose purpose is manipulation and criticism for performance to sexual appearance. In order to understand dating violence, there are three major theoretical frameworks: attachment theory, social learning theory, and feminist theory (Rubio-Garay et al., 2015).

According to social learning theory, when violence is naturalized in a social and cultural context, it becomes difficult to identify it (Durrant, 2021). According to Valenzuela-Varela and Vega-López (2015), “violent relationships are socially and culturally constructed and learned from the home, and institutions such as the school, the Church and the media” (p. 164), so the family context plays a leading role in the acquisition of behavioral parameters and the way to interact violently. On many occasions, these behaviors are

seen as normal and are even legitimized, which is why it is not easy to recognize them (Fernández-Antelo et al., 2020; Viejo et al., 2024).

A study carried out by the Queen Sofia Center in 2005 on homicides committed by partners or ex-partners showed that the highest rate was found in young people between 15 and 24 years of age (5 women per million) (Sarasua et al., 2007). Similarly, according to Bonomi et al. (2012), dating violence in its different manifestations begins in adolescents between 13 and 19 years of age. On the other hand, according to Sánchez-Zafra et al. (2024), those who have received violence early tend to develop a lower sense of well-being and greater victimization; therefore, there is a risk of continuing with violence in marriage. Finally, Pacheco et al. (2016), in Colombia, found that emotional violence is the most frequent in this population.

In Ecuador, according to the National Plan for the New Ecuador [PND] (2024-2025), the most important reason for the presence of adolescent pregnancy is sexual violence. One explanation that could determine why violence occurs at this stage of life is that adolescents come from violent homes. In dating relationships, the patterns of interaction they learn can be repeated and continued or transformed (Valenzuela-Varela & Vega-López, 2015). This type of violence is not the only risk factor; in fact, it is known that “interpersonal factors of a biological, behavioral, psychological and relational type and situational factors such as the physical, family, economic, historical, social and community environment” (Rubio-Garay et al., 2015. p. 49) are also involved.

Regarding the economic and community factors, it is known that there is a greater likelihood of violence in rural areas (Marquart et al., 2007; Spencer & Bryant, 2000) and in urban-marginal neighborhoods (Karriker-Jaffe et al., 2021). Furthermore, according to Marquart et al. (2007), community violence has a potentially devastating effect on dating violence for both the perpetrator

and the victim. Another determinant factor in adolescent dating is the influence of their peers with aggressive behaviors against their partners. In the words of Gómez et al. (2014), pushing or hitting may be acceptable interaction styles understood as games or jokes in their contexts.

In this sense, when talking about dating violence in adolescents, we must start from the fact that this stage of development, characterized by the transition from childhood to adulthood, involves a set of bodily changes that unfold and the development of sexual drives and desires (Lillo Espinosa, 2004).

According to Pick (2001), dating violence in adolescents refers to any act by which a partner seeks to dominate or control his or her partner and exerts power over him or her through various acts of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and even social isolation. Although psychological violence is indeed more frequent in a bidirectional manner, when this scale tends to be unidirectional, it is more prevalent in women (Paíno-Quesada et al., 2020).

Faced with this reality, coping strategies become relevant. One of the most important factors for personal functioning that allows an adequate adaptation to the stressors that may arise in life, such as relationship difficulties, is coping strategies (Lazarus, 1966). Several theoretical models explain coping strategies, which are nourished by a cognitive-behavioral approach (Chanmugam, 2015) and form a core part of stress theory (Tobin et al., 1989). Based on these criteria, coping strategies are understood as the specific actions that a person carries out before an important moment (Pelechano, 2000); that is, they are any constantly changing cognitive and behavioral effort that is developed to manage internal or external demands that overwhelm the individual's resources.

There are two types of higher-order strategies: problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies; however, several studies also speak of seven coping strategies: problem-solving, social withdrawal,

social support, cognitive restructuring, self-criticism, emotional expression, and desiderative thinking (Tobin et al., 1989). Cano et al. (2007) add a secondary division, which proposes adequate problem-directed coping (problem-solving and cognitive restructuring), emotion-directed coping (social support and emotional expression), inadequate coping (problem avoidance and desiderative thinking), and emotion-directed coping (social withdrawal and self-criticism).

However, coping strategies tend to vary throughout life, much more so in adolescence, because the transition between childhood and adulthood leads them to use different cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies that even depend on the circumstances that each person is going through (Kahn et al., 2020). In this sense, previous studies warn that situations of violence in intimate partner relationships are maintained when there is social isolation and loneliness (Addy et al., 2021; Lausi et al., 2021; Momeñe et al., 2022), which are also related to poor relationships within the family environment, to the extent that they trigger a lack of confidence to communicate the events experienced (Pastor-Bravo et al., 2023). In addition, the stage of the relationship influences the use of coping strategies; thus, in the early stages, there is a tendency to use maladaptive strategies that do not allow leaving the violent circle, while in later stages, problem-solving strategies are used more frequently, (Puente Martínez et al., 2022). On the other hand, a study by Bauman et al. (2008) found that women's emotion-focused strategies did not allow them to cope with feelings of violence.

Based on this background and considering that dating violence precedes marital and intrafamily violence (Cáceres & Cáceres, 2006), this research was proposed, whose general objective was to determine the relationship between manifestations of teen dating violence and coping strategies; to this end, we sought to describe the expressions of violence in adolescents in a dating relationship and to relate the expressions of violence and socio-demographic characteristics, such as sex and age in adolescents in a dating relationship.

2. Materials and methods

This study used a quantitative approach with a comparative relational design and a cross-sectional cut (Espinoza-Pajuelo & Ochoa-Pachas, 2020). We initially worked with the entire population of students between eighth and tenth grade of elementary school in two rural educational institutions in the southern area of Cuenca: 133 students, 70 females (52.6%) and 63 males (47.), who were between the ages of 12 and 18 years, with a mean age of 14.3 years

(SD = 2.1); most belonged to the age group of adolescents between 12 and 15 years. Of these, 52 (39.1%) were identified as being in a couple relationship, and 67.3% were in a relationship of more than 6 months. The details are shown in Table 1. The sample size responds to the previous calculation using G*Power software with a mean effect size of $p=.3$, an error of 5%, and statistical power of 95%.

Table 1: Characteristics of participants. **Fuente:** Source: Own elaboration.

Features		Yes		No		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender	Female	27	51.9	43	53.1	70	52.6
	Male	25	48.1	38	46	63	47.4
Age	12 to 15	32	61.5	75	92.6	107	80.5
	16 to 18	20	38	6	7.4	26	19.5
Time on a relation with a partner	More than 6 months	35	67.3	0	0	35	67.3
	1-2 years	15	28.8	0	0	15	28.8
	Over 2 years	2	3.8	0	0	2	3.8

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) the adolescents were between 12 and 18 years of age; (2) they were enrolled in either of the two rural institutions in the southern area of the canton of Cuenca; (3) they were in a relationship. The exclusion criteria were having ended their relationship or not being in a relationship at all.

2.1. Instruments

Socio-demographic data: This self-developed instrument sought to determine basic characteristics such as sex, age, couple relationship, and time in the relationship.

Dating Violence Questionnaire (CUVINO): This instrument has been validated in Spain,

Mexico, and Argentina. Its objective is to evaluate interpersonal relationships in couples and to identify the manifestation of violence within these relationships, which can be applied to young people and adults. It comprises 42 items, divided into eight dimensions: detachment, humiliation, sexual, coercion, physical, gender, emotional, and instrumental punishment. The items must be answered in a five-choice frequency Likert-type format (0= never and 4 = very frequently). The factor loadings of the items range from .37 to .77 (Rodríguez-Franco et al., 2010). For this study, the alpha value was .939.

Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI) is adapted by Cano et al. It is an instrument used to determine the frequency with which an individual uses a

specific coping strategy when facing a stressful situation. The strategies it includes are these: problem-solving (items 1, 9, 17, 25, 33), self-criticism (items 2, 10, 18, 26, 34), emotional expression (items 3, 11, 19, 27, 35), desiderative thinking (items 4, 12, 20, 28, 36), social support (items 5, 13, 21, 29, 37), cognitive restructuring (items 6, 14, 22, 30, 38), problem avoidance (items 7, 15, 23, 31, 39) and social withdrawal (items 8, 16, 24, 32, 40). It is presented on a Likert scale of 0-4, where 0= not at all, 1= a little, 2= quite a lot, 3= a lot, and 4= completely. For the interpretation, it is understood that the higher the score, the greater the presence of the strategy. The alpha of this adaptation, .959, showed good internal consistency, ranging from .72 to .94 for each strategy.

2.2. Procedure

Two rural educational institutions in the canton of Cuenca were contacted to participate in the research; each of them received information on the study's objectives; it was also indicated that, for their participation, the students would receive preventive workshops to address these issues in the classroom. After their acceptance, approval was requested from the participants' parents, who signed an informed consent form. The adolescents, after receiving parental consent, signed the informed consent form. The research followed the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association [APA], 1992, and the Declaration of Helsinki (WMA General Assembly, 2008), that

is, respect for confidentiality, voluntariness, and anonymity of each participant. Subsequently, the questionnaires were administered. The duration was approximately 20 minutes.

2.3. Data analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were used to analyze the research data. Initially, absolute and percentage frequencies were used to identify the presence of violence. Central tendency and dispersion measures were used to identify the intensity of these manifestations and coping strategies. To evaluate the association between the presence of violence, sex, and age group, the Chi-square statistic (X^2) was used and the effect size was visualized using Cramer's V. To relate the intensity of violence with sex and age, the Mann-Whitney U test (U) was performed and the effect size is related using the biserial correlation by ranks because the behavior of the data was non-normal according to the Kolmogorov Smirnov test ($p < 0.05$). Finally, the relationships between the coping strategies used by the students and the manifestations of violence received were explored using Spearman's correlation coefficient (r_s). Data processing was performed in the SPSS V 29 statistical package, and the significance considered was 5 % ($p < 0.05$). For the interpretation of the effect size, the Cohen (1998) recommendation for psychological studies >0.17 small, >0.43 medium, and $>.84$ high was used (Brydges, 2019).

3. Results

In order to demonstrate the fulfillment of the objectives, first, the expressions of violence in adolescents will be described. In this case, it was identified that 92.3% of the students with a dating relationship manifested some expression of violence, 50% exclusively psychological

violence, 11.5% psychological violence and physical violence simultaneously, and 1.9% psychological violence, physical violence, instrumental and sexual violence simultaneously. Table 2 describes the map of a combination of violence in students.

Table 2: Map of violence.
Source: Own elaboration.

<i>Expressions of violence</i>				<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Without expressions of violence				4	7.7
Sexual Violence				1	1.9
Psychological Violence	Exclusive			26	50.0
	Sexual Violence			4	7.7
	Instrumental			3	5.8
	Physical			6	11.5
	-	Instrumental Violence	Sexual Violence	1	1.9
	Physical Violence	-	Sexual Violence	2	3.8
		Instrumental	-	4	7.7
		Sexual Violence	1	1.9	

The rates of each type of violence can be seen in Table 3. It can be seen that 90.4% referred to psychological violence and 25% to physical violence.

3.1. Presence of violence According to sex and age

When relating violence to sex and age group, relationships were identified in physical violence in both sex and age: 40% of men with a partner

relationship reported suffering physical violence compared to 11.1% of women with a mild effect size ($X(2)=4.34$; $p=.037$; $V=.333$). 1 % of women with a slight effect size ($X^2=4.34$; $p=.037$; $V=.333$), as well as 37.5 % of students between 12 and 15 years of age versus 5 % of students between 16 and 18 years of age ($X^2=5.31$; $p=.009$; $V=.365$). The intensity with which each type of violence was manifested was not different in sex and age (Table 3).

Table 3: Violence according to sex and age.
Source: Own elaboration.

Type of violence		Gender		Age	
		Mujer	Hombre	De 12 a 15 años	De 16 a 18 años
General n=48; 92,3% M=14,56 Me=8.0 Rango= 1 -104	n (%)	25 (92.6)	23 (92.0)	30 (93.8)	18 (90.0)
	X2 (p)	0.000	(1.000)	0.00	(1.000)
	V de Cramer	.011		.068	
	Mediana	6.0	9.00	9.5	5.5
	Rango	(1 - 51)	(1 - 104)	(1 - 104)	(1 - 22)
	U (p)	214.0	(.128)	341.0	(.132)
	r	-.256		.263	

Psicológica n=47; 90,4% M=12,87 Me=6.0 Rango= 1 -102	n (%)	25	(92.6)	22	(88.0)	29	(90.6)	18	(90.0)
	X2 (p)	0.008		(0.928)		0.00		(1.000)	
	V de Cramer		.078				.010		
	Mediana	5.0		8.0		7.0		5.5	
	Rango	(1 - 45)		(1 - 102)		(1 - 102)		(1 - 22)	
	U (p)	177.0		(.036)		297.5		(.430)	
	r		-.356				.140		
Física n=13; 25.0% M=2,15 Me=1.0 Rango= 1 -8	n (%)	3	(11.1)	10	(40.9)	12	(37.5)	1	(5.0)
	X2 (p)	4.34		(0.037)		5.31		(0.009)	
	V de Cramer		.333				.153		
	Mediana	1.0		2.0		1.5		1.0	
	Rango	(1 - 1)		(1 - 8)		(1 - 8)		(1 - 1)	
	U (p)	-		-		-		-	
	r								
Sexual n=9; 17,3% M=3,78 Me=4.0 Rango= 1 -11	n (%)	5	(18.5)	4	(16.0)	7	(21.9)	2	(10.0)
	X2 (p)	0.000		(1.000)		0.53		(0.454)	
	V de Cramer		.033				.153		
	Mediana	4.0		2.5		4.0		1.5	
	Rango	(2 - 1)		(1 - 11)		(1 - 11)		(1 - 2)	
	U (p)	12.0		(.706)		12.0		(.176)	
	r		.200				.714		
Instrumental n=9; 17,3% M=3,56 Me=1.0 Rango= 1 -11	n (%)	4	(14.8)	5	(20.0)	8	(25.0)	1	(5.0)
	X2 (p)	0.016		(0.899)		2.18		(.129)	
	V de Cramer		.068				.257		
	Mediana	3.0		1.0		1.5		1.0	
	Rango	(1 - 10)		(1 - 11)		(1 - 11)		(1 - 1)	
	U (p)	14.0		(.348)		-		-	
	r		.400						

Note: X2= Chi-square test, U= Mann Whitney U test, p= statistical significance, Cramer's V=evaluates the strength of association between two categorical variables; r = effect size for Mann Whitney U (biserial rank correlation). Tests without a log of relationship are due to insufficient variability in each group.

3.2. Relationship between manifestations of violence and coping strategies

The frequency of use of coping strategies and the intensity with which the different types of violence were manifested showed no general relationship; however, age was slightly positively related to desiderative thinking ($r=.288$; $p=.038$) and problem avoidance ($r=.287^*$, $p=.039$).

Considering that there are different dimensions of psychological violence, the decision was

made to disaggregate them in order to relate them to coping strategies. Thus, it was identified that the manifestations of coercion perceived by the students were positively related in a slight intensity with problem-solving ($rs=.279$; $p=.045$) and self-criticism ($rs=.276$; $p=.048$). Likewise, emotional punishment was slightly positively related to problem-solving ($rs=.307$; $p=.027$), emotional expression ($rs=.281$; $p=.043$), and cognitive restructuring ($rs=.349$; $p=.011$). (Table 4).

Table 4: Relationship between manifestations of violence and coping strategies
Source: Own elaboration.

		Coercion	Gender	Detachment	Humiliation	Emotional Punishment
Problem resolution	rs	.279*	.092	.092	.066	.307*
	p	.045	.515	.516	.643	.027
Self-Criticism	rs	.276*	.147	.160	.163	.259
	p	.048	.299	.257	.249	.064
Emotional Expression	rs	.201	.184	.092	.175	.281*
	p	.153	.192	.514	.216	.043
Wishful thinking	rs	.192	.033	-.025	.015	.216
	p	.173	.815	.862	.914	.124
Social Support	rs	.047	.145	.190	.184	.237
	p	.738	.305	.176	.190	.091
Cognitive restructuring	rs	.151	.113	.077	.134	.349*
	p	.284	.424	.587	.343	.011
Problem Avoidance	rs	-.012	.113	-.026	.087	.217
	p	.934	.425	.856	.538	.122
Social withdrawal	rs	.205	.102	.126	.140	.199
	p	.145	.472	.374	.321	.158

Note: rs = Spearman's rho correlation coefficient, p = statistical significance.

4. Discussion

Teen dating violence is becoming increasingly frequent (Cuccí et al., 2020); in addition, the isolation that adolescents tend to generate due to the use of social networks and the difficulty in developing social skills is marked by today's society, making it a risk factor for this situation to continue (Addy et al., 2021; Lausi et al., 2021; Momeñe et al., 2022). In this sense, the objective of the research was to determine the relationship between the manifestations of violence in adolescent dating and coping strategies. For this purpose, the expressions of violence in adolescents in a dating relationship were described. The expressions of violence and socio-demographic characteristics such as sex and age in adolescents in a dating relationship were related.

It was found that the majority of adolescents manifested some expression of violence and that half of them reported having experienced psychological violence exclusively, a result explained by the social learning theory that suggests that violent relationships are constructed and learned in the different contexts in which the individual develops. This agrees with the finding of Gómez et al. (2014), that the most frequent violence in adolescents is emotional and verbal, regardless of being male or female, and contradicts the research of Pérez-Castejón et al. (2021), who found that the prevalent violence is physical. Furthermore, 40.4 % presented a combination of psychological violence with other types of violence, which resembles the data reported by

Théorêt et al. (2021), according to which, based on a sample of 3100 adolescents, 19 % perceived both physical and psychological violence.

Concerning the demographic characteristics of age and sex, it was found that the most frequent age at which physical violence is perceived was 12-15 years, which is consistent with Gómez et al. (2014), who concluded that physical violence is more prevalent in early adolescence, while the older the age, the greater the manifestation of sexual violence. Regarding gender, males perceive greater physical violence compared to females, data that resembles that found by Allen and Bradley (2018) but contradicts the results of Cyr et al. (2006), who point out that there is no marked difference and that violence is bidirectional, that is, both partners violate each other. It is also discordant with the study by Sanmartín-Andújar et al. (2023), who found that women are the ones who perceive greater violence by men. This can be understood from the cognitive-behavioral approach, which holds that behaviors are observed and reinforced by their relationship with the environment, social interactions, and individual cognitive development typical of adolescence.

Also, the intensity with which each type of violence is manifested was not different in sex and age, which may be because violence has now become normalized in relationships among adolescents who justify and tolerate it (Fernández-Antelo et al., 2020). However, the results also indicate that psychological violence has an exception since there are greater manifestations perceived by men, which contradicts the findings of Théorêt et al. (2021), who found that the manifestations of psychological violence were present to the same degree among men and women; in addition,

it does not agree with the findings of Cuadrado-Gordillo et al. (2023), that men perceive the severity of violence in a lesser way, compared to women.

Finally, the results indicate that the manifestations of coercion perceived by the students are positively related in a slight intensity to problem-solving; that is, the adolescents seek to use cognitive and behavioral strategies to avoid the situation experienced (Cano et al., 2007) although there is also a relationship with self-criticism, so it is common for them to blame themselves for finding themselves in a pressured or threatening situation (Cano et al., 2007). Likewise, emotional punishment is related to problem-solving, emotional expression, and cognitive restructuring, so those who live emotionally manipulated tend to seek to escape from these attitudes, seek to express what they feel, and try to give it another meaning to alleviate the pain (Cano et al., 2007).

These data may indicate that adolescents remain in a violent circle without finding a way out, despite their desire to do so (Puente-Martínez et al., 2022). This may be due to the fact that relationships in adolescence tend to be romanticized (Cucci et al., 2020) by the consumption of digital media (Jaureguizar et al., 2024). Therefore, negative coping strategies such as self-criticism may intensify the risk of victimization. These strategies prevent dealing with conflict effectively and may exacerbate adolescents' vulnerability by maintaining a negative view of themselves and avoiding constructive coping. Negative strategies can intensify the effects of violence by avoiding confronting and resolving conflicts, which can lead to increased exposure to violence and lower self-esteem (Hagen et al., 2020).

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, teen dating violence is a worrying phenomenon that manifests itself in different ways; adolescents report at least one form of violence, with psychological violence being the

most prevalent. These findings reinforce the social learning theory and highlight the high frequency of physical and verbal violence in this group.

Regarding gender, males report higher rates of physical violence; in addition, younger adolescents show a higher prevalence of this form of violence, which could be linked to a growing normalization of aggressive behaviors in adolescence.

On the other hand, the coping strategies employed are often ineffective, such as problem-solving, self-criticism, and cognitive restructuring, and are related to the types of violence experienced, suggesting an attempt to manage emotional pain

and pressures in a variety of ways; however, it keeps them trapped in a cycle of violence from which they find it difficult to escape and intensifies their vulnerability.

These results highlight the importance of addressing these manifestations from a multifactorial perspective where contextual influences are considered, and positive coping strategies are encouraged so as to provide tools to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence or remaining in abusive relationships.

6. Recommendations

It is also possible to compare the data found with those found in other institutions, especially private ones, in order to determine other factors that may be considered risk factors for violent situations. Likewise, according to the data obtained, it

is imperative to promote psychoeducation on more constructive coping strategies that allow adolescents to manage the dynamics of their relationships in a healthier way to avoid normalizing violence.

7. Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the University of Cuenca, especially to the Directorate for Social Outreach, for its funding and support in the implementation of this social outreach project. We also extend

our appreciation to the Women's Political Coordination, to the directors and students of the educational institutions involved, and especially to the Faculty of Psychology.

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