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## Implications of Experiences in the Family of Origin and Infidelity in Violence Loving Relationships

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### Abstract

The experiences of partners in their families of origin, the circumstances of everyday life and aspects of infidelity in the marital relationship have been studied to explain the genesis of intimate partner violence. This study investigated the experiences of the family of origin, which sociodemographic data and what factors associated with infidelity have a greater predictive power of intimate partner violence, besides the possible interactions between these variables. A quantitative, correlational and explanatory study was developed with 600 participants (384 men, 216 women), correlations were established and linear regression models were proposed. The results identified that circumstances of daily life (such as gender, having children or not, partner's age) and experiences in the family of origin (physical neglect, sexual abuse and parental alliance) contribute to the explanation of the different expressions of violence in the couple. Infidelity, although correlated with violence, did not prove to be a predictor. Physical neglect and sexual abuse were identified as predictors of physical violence while the dysfunctional parental alliance was a predictor of psychological violence. The women showed higher rates of psychological violence while men presented greater perpetration of sexual coercion. The marital clinic is a highlighting in this context, since it proposes to welcome and treat the conjugal relationship in its structuring and relational aspects, improving the establishment of more balanced, stable and functional relational models.

**Keywords:** Marital violence, infidelity, family of origin, regression analysis.

### Implicações das Experiências na Família de Origem e de Infidelidade na Violência dos Relacionamentos Amorosos

### Resumo

Experiências dos parceiros nas famílias de origem, circunstâncias da vida cotidiana e aspectos da infidelidade na relação conjugal têm sido estudados para explicar a gênese da violência no casal. Este estudo investigou as experiências da família de origem, quais variáveis sociodemográficas e que fatores associados à infidelidade possuem maior poder preditivo da violência nos relacionamentos íntimos,

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além das suas possíveis interações. Um estudo quantitativo, correlacional-explicativo foi desenvolvido com 216 homens e 384 mulheres ( $n=600$ ). Correlações foram estabelecidas e modelos de regressão linear foram propostos. Resultados identificaram que circunstâncias da vida cotidiana (sexo, ter filhos ou não, idade dos parceiros) e experiências na família de origem (negligência física, abuso sexual e aliança parental) contribuem para a explicação das expressões de violência no casal. A infidelidade se correlacionou com a violência, mas não se mostrou preditora. Negligência física e abuso sexual identificaram-se como preditores da violência física e a aliança parental disfuncional mostrou-se preditora da violência psicológica. Mulheres revelaram maiores taxas de violência psicológica enquanto homens apresentaram maior perpetração da coerção sexual. Destaca-se a importância da clínica conjugal que se propõe a acolher e tratar a relação conjugal em sua estrutura relacional, favorecendo o estabelecimento de modelos mais equilibrados, estáveis e funcionais.

**Palavras-chave:** Violência conjugal, infidelidade, família de origem, análise de regressão

## Implicaciones de las Experiencias en la Familia de Origen y la Infidelidad en la Violencia de las Relaciones Románticas

### Resumen

Las experiencias de los cónyuges en sus familias de origen, y las circunstancias de la vida cotidiana, infidelidad en la relación conyugal se ha estudiado con el fin de explicar la *génesis de* la violencia en la pareja. Este estudio investigó las experiencias de la familia de origen, que las variables sociodemográficas y factores asociados a la infidelidad tienen mayor poder predictivo de la violencia en las relaciones íntimas, además de las posibles interacciones entre estas variables. Un estudio explicativo cuantitativo, correlacional se llevó a cabo con 384 216 hombres y 216 384 mujeres ( $n = 600$ ). Las correlaciones se establecen y se propusieron modelos de regresión lineal. Resultados encontrados que las circunstancias de la vida cotidiana (sexo, tienen hijos o no, la edad de los socios) y experiencias en la familia de origen (abandono físico, el abuso sexual y la alianza de los padres) contribuir a una explicación de las expresiones de la violencia no se doble. El infidelidad se correlacionada con la violencia, pero no fue predictiva. abandono *físico* y el abuso sexual fueron identificados como predictores de la violencia *física y una* alianza parental disfuncional demostrado ser un predictor de la violencia psicológica. Las mujeres mostraron tasas *más altas de* violencia psicológica, mientras que los hombres eran *más* comisión de coacción sexual. Se destaca la importancia de la clínica civil que ofrece un acogedor y es una relación marital en una estructura relacional, favoreciendo la creación de modelos más equilibradas, estables y funcionales.

**Palabras clave:** La violencia de pareja, infidelidad, familia de origen.

Intimate partner violence has long been a subject of interest in the literature and has been studied from different perspectives and contexts (Colossi & Falcke, 2013; Oliveira, Gessner, Brancaglioni, Fonseca, & Egry, 2016; World Health Organization [WHO], 2016). Its most frequent manifestations are conceptually divided into *physical*, *sexual* and *psychological* violence, and occur either alone, or in combination with one another (Hirigoyen, 2006). In Brazil, the law which deals specifically with violence against women also makes reference to *property* and

*moral* violence (Law no. 11.340, 2006 [*Maria da Penha*]).

Global data suggests that over 38% of female homicides are committed by their intimate partners (WHO, 2016). In Spain, a study of 1076 female victims of violence revealed that 27.6% of participants had suffered some form of aggression, which 42.7% of them attributed to their partners (Martín-Baena, Montero-Piñar, Escribà-Agüir, & Vives-Cases, 2015). In Brazil, this phenomenon is also highly prevalent: according to recent estimates, one in

every three women has been the victim of some sort of violence in their lifetime, and 40% to 70% of homicides against women are committed by intimate partners (Rosa, Boing, Büchele, Oliveira, & Coelho 2008).

Epidemiological studies have estimated that 30% to 50% of women experience some form of intimate partner violence (Lamoglia & Minayo, 2009; Rodrigues, Gomes-Sponholz, Stefanelo, Nakano, & Monteiro, 2014; Vieira, Perdoná, & Santos, 2011). A study of different types of violence in the Brazilian state of Pernambuco reported a prevalence of 52.7% for emotional violence, 46.1% for physical violence and 13.6% for sexual violence in a sample of 245 women aged 15 to 49 (Barros et al., 2016). An even higher figure was reported by Dourado and Noronha (2015) in a study conducted in Bahia, where 63.2% of women experienced intimate partner violence, revealing the endemic nature of this phenomenon. However, these studies were conducted from a gender perspective, where males are often the perpetrators deserving of punishment, and women are victims who need care and protection. Violence against men is also known to occur. As recently as the last decade, Hirigoyen (2006) found that 3% to 5% of heterosexual males were victimized by their partners. Yet this phenomenon may be underreported, since men are less likely to inform the authorities of any violence they may have suffered at the hands of their partners, possibly out of shame, lack of social acceptance and/or fear of ridicule (Shuler, 2010). These findings were corroborated by Panuzio and DiLillo (2010), who found that 24% to 44% of women reported to engaging in some form of violence against their husbands in the early stages of marriage, with most couples reporting that the violence was bidirectional. A more recent study conducted in France involving 707 victims of intimate violence revealed that 13% of men had been victimized by their partners (Le Blanc-Louvry, Thureau, Gricourt, & Proust, 2015). A study by Chang et al. (2011) in the United States of America reported lifetime prevalence rates of 63% for intimate partner violence against women and 32% for intimate partner violence

against men, which highlights the fact that this type of violence is often bidirectional.

The complexity of intimate partner violence reflects its multifaceted nature and multifactorial etiology. Attempts to explain the origins of this phenomenon have led to the identification of several possible causes. Flynn and Graham (2010) proposed a conceptual model comprised of three levels of factors which may contribute to marital violence: (1) Background and personal characteristics of perpetrators and victims; (2) Current life circumstances; (3) Immediate precursors or precipitators. The analysis of 16 empirical studies on the topic led authors to conclude that in most cases, the violence was attributed to level three factors, which refer specifically to immediate causes. These may include jealousy, infidelity and psychoactive substance abuse. Infidelity is an immediate precipitator of intimate partner violence (Flynn & Graham, 2010), and a growing phenomenon in both genders, as reflected by the clinical experience of couples therapists (Prado, 2012).

These findings speak to the importance of an in-depth study of these topics in order to identify the associations between them. These include both current and previous life experiences which may be associated with intimate partner violence.

### **Experiences in the Family of Origin and Intimate Partner Violence**

Studies have identified an association between individuals' experiences in their families of origin and the occurrence of intimate partner violence, which underscores the role of the family in establishing behavior patterns which are learned and maintained across generations (Marasca, Colossi, & Falcke, 2013; Paradis et al., 2009; Pedro, 2013). Prior experiences of family violence, either as a victim or as a witness, are predictive of violent marital relationships in adulthood (Colossi, Marasca, & Falcke, 2015; Milner et al., 2010), possibly because this leads individuals to naturalize violence and see the relational patterns they have learned as children as a model to be followed (Godbout, Lussier, & Sabourin, 2006; Marasca et al., 2013).

According to the concept of intergenerationality, the influence of childhood experiences on subsequent development may be attributed to the reliance on caretakers and relationships as models to be reproduced in life (Black, Sussman, & Unger, 2010; Gover, Park, Tomsich, & Jennings, 2011; Kerley, Xu, Sirisunyaluck, & Alley, 2010; Pedro, 2013). Children and adolescents exposed to violent environments may therefore learn that violence is a part of relationships, so that they naturalize it and use it as a model for intimate relationships in adulthood, perpetuating the cycle of violence. In the present study, intergenerationality will be defined as the set of family experiences which are transmitted from one generation to the next (Wagner, 2014). It is not merely an intrapsychic phenomenon (Almeida, 2008), and can influence the perpetuation of family interaction patterns over time, even when those involved are not explicitly aware of engaging in this behavior (Falcke, & Wagner, 2005).

Studies of the relationship between the family of origin and intimate partner violence have found the latter to be associated with experiences such as physical and/or sexual abuse (Fergusson, 2011; Yoshihima & Horrocks, 2010); neglect (Fang & Corso, 2007); parental substance abuse (Alexander 2011; Whiting, Simmons, Havens, Smith, & Oka, 2009); caretaker psychological distress (Godbout et al., 2006; Whiting et al., 2009) and parental decision-making styles (Alexander 2011). The aforementioned studies sought to investigate which aspects of the family of origin may be associated with conjugal violence in adulthood. All authors identified positive associations between abuse in the family of origin and conjugal violence in adulthood, though the relatively low predictive value of one factor over the other underscores the need for more in-depth studies of this phenomenon, in order to identify additional variables which may contribute to the repetition of learned violent behaviors or, conversely, allow for the cycle to be broken. In a systematic review about intimate partner violence and experiences in the family of origin, Marasca et al. (2013) noted the scarcity of international research on the topic; a

similar pattern emerges in the national literature, which accounted for only 3.17% of worldwide publications on the topic between 2006 and 2011, underscoring the need for further research in this area of study.

### **Current Life Circumstances and Intimate Violence**

Studies of the association between couples' current circumstances and the occurrence of marital violence have found the latter to be related to sociodemographic variables including gender, presence and number of children, as well as partner age (Colossi, Razera, Haack, & Falcke, 2015; Kronbauer & Meneghel, 2005). Yet the study of gender differences in the context of partner violence has not produced consistent results. Though many studies find that the majority of perpetrators of intimate partner violence are male (Kim, Laurent, Capaldi, & Feingold, 2008; Martínez & Marín, 2009; Trindade, Almeida, & Rozendo, 2008; Vatnar & Bjorkly, 2009), others identify significant gender differences in the type of violence committed, where males are more likely to resort to physical and sexual violence, while women tend to engage in verbal and psychological aggression (Carvalho, Destro, Faust, Coelho, & Boing, 2010; Colossi, Razera, et al., 2015; D'Oliveira et al., 2009). Therefore, although both men and women can be victims or perpetrators, gender still plays a major role in the study of intimate partner violence (D'Oliveira et al., 2009).

On the other hand, some studies have identified no significant differences in perpetration rates between men and women (Colossi, Razera, et al., 2015; Follingstad & Edmundson, 2010; Lamoglia & Minayo, 2009). Though these investigations vary in their focus, they agree that couples may reciprocally engage in different forms of aggression (Colossi & Falcke, 2013; Lamoglia & Minayo, 2009), especially when psychological violence is involved (Colossi & Falcke, 2013; Follingstad & Edmundson, 2010).

Having children is one of the life circumstances which has been found to be associated with the occurrence of intimate partner violence.

Studies have found that the number of children is positively associated with the likelihood of sexual coercion in the relationship (Colossi, Razera, et al., 2015; Kronbauer & Meneghel, 2005). Similarly, studies find that formal marriage, as opposed to other types of relationship, is a protective factor against intimate violence (D'Oliveira et al., 2009; Vieira et al., 2011). These investigations find that, in the context of marriage, the violence is often resolved by separation or divorce. As such, since intimate violence in married couples usually leads to separation, the prevalence of this phenomenon in formal unions is relatively low. This may be why marriage is associated with a lower prevalence of intimate partner violence. On the other hand, couples in shorter or more casual relationships are at greater risk of establishing new violent partnerships, leading to an increased frequency of violent behaviors in relationships other than formal marriage.

Studies of partner age find this variable to be inversely associated with physical and psychological intimate violence (Colossi, Razera, et al., 2015; D'Oliveira et al., 2009). It is possible that emotional maturity facilitates engagement in reflection or deliberation during conflict situations (Colossi, Razera, et al., 2015). A similar observation was made by D'Oliveira et al. (2009) who found that tolerant and thoughtful responses to conflict were more common in older couples. On the other hand, a study by Kronbauer and Meneghel (2005) found that age was positively associated with intimate partner violence.

The couple's life circumstances are also known to play a role in the occurrence of intimate partner violence. These factors must continue to be investigated in order to comprehend how they contribute to the onset of partner violence in different situations.

### **Infidelity and Intimate Partner Violence**

In contemporary couples therapy, infidelity may be understood as a symptom of pathology in the relationship, but also as a feature of the

conjugal dynamics of a given couple (Prado, 2012). Regardless of how it takes place, it can have major repercussions, resulting in both suffering and possible psychopathology (Baucom, Snyder, & Dixon, 2008; Prado, 2012; Whisman & Baucom, 2012).

Studies have found that episodes of infidelity may compromise the relationship, leading to excessive control, pathological jealousy, accusations and humiliation even in the absence of real danger, resulting in psychological violence which reinforces dysfunctional patterns in the relationship (Conroy, 2014; Ortiz, Leiva, & Jacinto, 2009; Wilson, Mattingly, Clark, Weidler, & Bequette, 2011). Partners facing infidelity may also have difficulty managing their emotions, and resort to psychological aggression as a form of punishment, amplifying the conflict and contributing to impairments in the mental health of both partners. Therefore, infidelity - be it real or suspected - can contribute to the onset of intimate violence in all its forms (Ortiz et al., 2009).

Though the coexistence of infidelity and violence in marital relationships has not been extensively studied, it is known to result in considerable weakening of relational bonds (Brito & Cavalcanti, 2014; Colossi & Falcke, 2013; Conroy, 2014). Both topics are therefore commonly discussed in the context of psychotherapy, since they inflict suffering both on members of the couple but also on all other members of the family (Colossi, Razera, et al., 2015), who may repeat the patterns experienced in the family of origin in future relationships (Hetzl-Riggin & Meads, 2011; Paradis et al., 2009).

If infidelity is understood as a dysfunctional aspect of intimate relationships, then violence can be defined a dysfunctional pattern of conflict resolution. Violent relational dynamics cannot be reduced to a unidirectional phenomenon, with perpetrators and victims forming an asymmetrical pattern of dysfunction, where one individual has all the power over the other. Rather, it should be seen as an interactional model reinforced by the couple itself, where communication is incongruent, and the aforementioned features

emerge as possibilities of engaging with the other (Peixoto & Heilborn, 2016).

The analysis of a possible association between partner violence and infidelity may lead to the identification of predictors of marital violence, deepening the comprehension of violent marital dynamics. Violence may be expressed as a conflict resolution strategy in situations of infidelity (Flynn & Graham, 2010; Paixão et al., 2014; Quissini & Coelho, 2014; Wilson et al., 2011), which is why these phenomena sometimes co-occur.

These findings identify infidelity, experiences in the family of origin and circumstances of daily life as independent variables which may explain the occurrence of marital violence. Although these associations have already been proven, little is known about the interaction between specific experiences in the family of origin, the sociodemographic aspects associated with infidelity and the occurrence of intimate partner violence. In light of these observations, the aim of the present study was to investigate which experiences in the family of origin, sociodemographic variables and factors associated with infidelity would be the strongest predictors of intimate partner violence,

while also looking at the interaction between these variables. Rather than adopting a linear approach to presenting our findings, this study was conducted from a systemic perspective, with a focus on contemplating and integrating the different aspects of violence in order to discuss our results.

## Method

### Study Design

This was a quantitative study, with a correlational and explanatory design.

### Participants

The sample consisted of 216 men and 384 women ( $n = 600$ ) recruited through social media. Participants were at least 18 years of age, and had been in a heterosexual relationship (dating, common law or married) for at least six months. The sample was selected by convenience, where the first participants were recruited from the researchers' social networks and asked to refer other individuals who may wish to take part in the study, as per the "snowball" method.

The sample characteristics are shown in Table 1:

**Table 1**  
**Sample Characteristics**

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	384	64.0
	Male	216	36.0
Children	Yes	184	30.8
	No	414	69.2
Relationship type	Dating	215	35.8
	Cohabiting/common-law	179	29.8
	Married	206	34.4
Education	No formal education	1	0.2
	Primary education	12	2.0
	Secondary education	219	37.0
	University degree	202	34.1
	Graduate degree	158	26.7
Currently employed	Yes	482	80.9
	No	114	19.1

### *Instruments*

**Sociodemographic Questionnaire.** A specially designed self-administered questionnaire was used to collect information on sociodemographic characteristics. This instrument contained 13 questions about gender, age, romantic partnership status, children, education and current employment.

**Family Background Questionnaire (FBQ).** This is a self-administered instrument with 179 questions to be answered on a five-point Likert scale. The questions comprise 22 subscales which refer to different aspects of respondents' recollected experiences in their family of origin. In the present study, the following FBQ subscales were used: physical neglect, maternal and paternal physical abuse, sexual abuse, maternal and paternal substance abuse, maternal and paternal psychological adjustment, and parental coalition (Melchert, 1998). The Cronbach's alpha of the subscales ranged from 0.737 to 0.894, while the instrument as a whole had an alpha value of 0.909, demonstrating excellent reliability.

**Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS 2).** This instrument was developed by Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, and Sugarman, (1996) and adapted to Portuguese by Moraes, Hasselmann, and Reichenheim (2002). The aim of the CTS2 is to evaluate intimate partner violence. It contains 78 closed questions, and evaluates the extent to which the respondent and their partner engage in negotiation, psychological aggression, physical violence, assault and sexual coercion. The present study used the CTS2 subscales pertaining to physical, psychological and sexual violence.

**Perceptions of Dating Infidelity Scale (PDIS).** The PDIS was developed in North America by Wilson et al. (2011) and adapted to Portuguese through a rigorous translation process. The instrument was independently translated by four professionals who worked in the area of interest, two of whom were involved in the adaptation study, while the other two were not. The four translations were compared and synthesized into a single version, resolving any semantic ambiguities and giving rise to

a fifth version of the scale, kept as similar as possible to the original instrument. This version was back-translated to English by a bilingual professional, in order to confirm the accuracy of the translated words and expressions. The individual responsible for the back-translation then compared his work to the original scale to resolve any linguistic ambiguities. The accuracy of the translation was confirmed by a pilot study which produced similar findings to those obtained with the original scale. It is a checklist which evaluates the extent to which the respondent approves of a series of infidelity-related behaviors. The present study used participants' total scores on the scale, which has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.846.

**Attitudes Toward Infidelity Scale (ATIS).** This is a North-American instrument developed by Whatley (2008), which requires that the respondent indicate the extent to which they agree with 12 infidelity-related behaviors. It was also submitted to a rigorous translation process into Brazilian Portuguese and yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.796.

**Tendency to Infidelity Scale (TIS).** This instrument was developed and validated in North America by Drigotas, Safstrom, and Gentilia (1999). It evaluates the likelihood of an individual committing infidelity. It has also undergone a rigorous translation process into Portuguese. The scale contains 11 items answered on a Likert scale which evaluates the intensity of the emotional, physical and cognitive intimacy between the respondent and individuals outside their main relationship. In the present study, it had an alpha coefficient of 0.917, reflecting an excellent ability to measure the intended construct. Given the complexity of the phenomenon of infidelity and the difficulties in its measurement, the present study evaluated the construct in three dimensions: perceptions of infidelity, attitudes toward infidelity and tendency to infidelity.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

Data were collected by advertising the study on social networks and other electronic media, in order to publicize the study and inclusion criteria.



Individuals who were interested in participating and met the aforementioned criteria were provided with a link to an online data collection platform. Participants were asked to share the link to the study with anyone they felt may also meet inclusion criteria for participation.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Quantitative analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22. Data were analyzed through descriptive, correlational and inferential statistics. Violent behaviors, infidelity and experiences in the family of origin were compared between groups (men/women; children/no children) using independent samples t-tests. The predictive power of infidelity and violence in the family of origin on intimate partner violence was investigated using stepwise regression analysis.

### *Ethical Concerns*

After approval by the university ethics committee (Project number 13/182), the link to the study was posted and shared on social networks. This study was conducted according to the ethical guidelines for human research outlined in Resolution 510/2016 of the National Health Council. When participants accessed the data collection platform, they were initially presented with an informed consent form containing a description of the study as well as other relevant information they may wish to know before agreeing to participate. The data collection was only initiated after participants agreed to the conditions presented. Since the topics investigated in the present study may be considered taboo, digital data collection was preferred in order to allow participants to respond to the questionnaires in the safest and most appropriate times and locations possible.

Participants received information about the contents of the study, the anonymity of data collection, the fact that IP addresses were not tracked in this investigation, the safety of data

storage, and the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time. They were also informed that they would be contacted by the researchers if a need for psychological assessment or treatment was identified at some point in the study. Participants were also free to contact the researchers for referrals to the psychology clinic of the university where the study was conducted (where treatment is provided at no cost), or to a health service in their own community.

## **Results**

The prevalence of different types of violence in the sample was 29.9% for sexual coercion, 31% for physical violence and 86.7% for psychological aggression. An independent samples T-test was used to compare violent behaviors between genders. A significant difference in the incidence of psychological aggression ( $t=3.979$ ;  $p<.01$ ) was identified, with females ( $m=7.59$ ) engaging in this type of violence more often than their male counterparts ( $m=5.50$ ). The prevalence rates for sexual coercion also differed between genders ( $t=-5.078$ ;  $p<.01$ ), as evidenced by the higher scores of men ( $m=1.98$ ) relative to women ( $m=0.76$ ) on this scale. No significant differences were observed in the prevalence of physical violence ( $t=1.830$ ;  $p>.05$ ).

The same statistical test was used to investigate differences in the types of intimate partner violence between couples with and without children. The results revealed a significant difference in the frequency of psychological aggression ( $t=3.465$ ;  $p<.001$ ) between these participant groups, where a higher frequency of this behavior was reported by couples with children ( $m=0.9314$ ). Rates of sexual coercion and physical violence did not significantly differ between couples with ( $p>.05$ ) and without children ( $p>.05$ ).

Differences between the different types of relationship were evaluated using ANOVA. A significant difference in the frequency of psychological violence was observed depending on the type of relationship ( $F=4.137$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

The comparison between dating ( $m=0.82$ ) and cohabiting/common-law couples ( $m=0.92$ ) showed that the latter had a significantly higher frequency of psychological violence than the former ( $p < .05$ ). The remaining values did not differ between groups ( $p > .05$ ).

A comparison of mean violence scores across education levels was also performed using ANOVA. Results revealed significant group differences in the frequency of psychological aggression ( $t=2.296, p < .05$ ) and sexual coercion ( $t=4.182, p = .001$ ), which were both more frequent in individuals with no formal education or primary school only. Age was not significantly associated with psychological ( $p > .05$ ) or physical ( $p > .05$ ) violence, though it was weakly correlated with sexual coercion ( $r=-0.123, p < .05$ ), suggesting that older individuals were less likely to engage in this type of violence.

Results regarding infidelity revealed that 45% ( $n=270$ ) of the sample currently or previously engaged in some form of this behavior, while 55% of participants ( $n=300$ ) reported to having been faithful in every previous relationship. The difference in self-reported infidelity between males and females was evaluated using Chi-square tests, which revealed a significant difference between genders ( $\chi^2=0.016; df=3; p < .05$ ), where males (51.9%) had a higher frequency of extradyadic involvement than females (41.1%). A similar statistical procedure was used to evaluate gender differences in the prevalence of perceived partner infidelity. However, these scores did not differ between groups ( $\chi^2=3.043; df=1; p > .05$ ).

The occurrence of different forms of infidelity was compared between males and females using  $t$ -tests. Men obtained higher scores ( $m=29.84$ ) than women ( $m=25.64$ ) in the ATIS ( $t=-3.681; p < .001$ ). Similarly, the *tendency* to infidelity was significantly higher ( $t=-3.758; p < .001$ ) in males ( $m=39.26$ ) than females ( $m=32.65$ ). However, women obtained higher scores than men in a measure of *perceptions* of infidelity ( $t=4.104; p < .001$ ), where women exhibited more moral behavior ( $m=40.31$ ) than the men in the sample ( $m=35.71$ ).

The association between type of relationship and prevalence of different dimensions of infidelity was evaluated using ANOVA. No significant differences were identified in terms of *perceptions* ( $F=1.118; p > .05$ ) and *tendency* to infidelity between the participant groups ( $F=1.223; p > .05$ ). However, *attitudes* toward infidelity did differ between relationship types ( $F=5.050; p < .05$ ). The comparison between dating ( $m=25.01$ ) and cohabiting/common-law couples ( $m=28.76$ ) showed that infidelity was significantly less common in the former relative to the latter ( $p < .05$ ).

Associations between experiences in the family of origin, dimensions of infidelity and intimate partner violence are shown in Table 2.

A history of physical neglect was associated with all three types of violence in both males and females. A similar finding was obtained with regards to the tendency to infidelity. The data also showed that the association between experiences in the family of origin, infidelity and intimate partner violence were stronger in females than males. Regression analysis was then used to determine the predictive power of each dimension of infidelity, experience in the family of origin and current life circumstance on different expressions of intimate violence, as shown in Table 3.

The regression models show that although correlations were identified between dimensions of infidelity and different types of violence, the former did not predict the latter in the present study. However, experiences in the family of origin had a clear impact on intimate partner violence, since parental coalition, sexual abuse and physical neglect were all significant predictors of both physical and psychological violence.

Gender was also a predictor of different types of violence. Current life circumstances as represented by sociodemographic variables such as gender, age, presence and number of children were significant predictors of psychological violence. Sociodemographic variables were also significant contributors to sexual coercion, as evidenced by the predictive power of gender and education in the regression analysis.

**Table 2**  
**Correlation between Experiences in the Family of Origin and Intimate Partner Violence**

	Women			Men		
	Psychological violence	Sexual coercion	Physical violence	Psychological violence	Sexual coercion	Physical violence
Paternal Physical Abuse	.156**	.082	.045	.139*	.084	.136
Maternal Physical Abuse	.230**	.055	.173**	.143*	.070	.082
Sexual Abuse	.155**	.232**	.138*	.052	-.057	-.073
Physical Neglect	.196**	.153**	.189**	.193**	.197**	.147*
Paternal Substance Abuse	.238**	.215**	.088	-.149	.112	-.104
Maternal Substance Abuse	.070	.040	.047	.022	-.066	.007
Paternal Psych. Adj.	-.183**	-.116*	-.156**	-.273**	-.093	-.186*
Maternal Psych. Adj.	-.250**	-.113*	-.226**	-.174*	-.089	-.085
Parental Coalition	-.262**	-.157**	-.242**	-.292**	-.114	-.090
Infidelity-Attitudes	.092	.023	.095	.113	.029	.133
Infidelity-Perceptions	.120*	.056	.131*	.028	-.040	.015
Infidelity-Tendency	.199**	.163**	.180**	.115	-.055	.156*

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

The present study corroborates previous findings regarding the higher prevalence of psychological aggression over other forms of intimate partner violence (Black et al., 2010; Colossi, Razera, et al., 2015). Comparisons of the frequency of different types of violence among men and women agree with previous studies which identify men as the most likely perpetrators of sexual coercion (Schraiber, D'Oliveira, & França, 2008) and women as the most likely perpetrators of psychological violence (Carvalho et al., 2010). As such, despite the findings of previous investigations conducted from a relational perspective (Colossi & Falcke, 2013; Falcke & Wagner, 2011), gender continues to play an important role in psychological and sexual intimate partner violence. However, it must be noted that in the present study, women were more likely than men to commit both physical and psychological violence, disagreeing with previous research which identified men as the most common perpetrators of intimate violence, especially physical aggression (Rosa

et al., 2008; Tichy, Becker, & Sisco, 2009). The aforementioned studies were conducted from a gender perspective, which tends to characterize men as perpetrators and women as victims. The feminist perspective considers intimate partner violence as a form of gender violence, perpetrated against women (Barros et al., 2016; Dourado & Noronha, 2015; Vieira et al., 2011; WHO, 2016). The systemic approach adopted by the present study, on the other hand, sees violence as the product of a violent partnership and its relational features. Though these perspectives are distinct from one another and proposed different intervention strategies, they cannot be considered "dichotomous or concurrent perspectives, since systemic studies simply adopt a relational approach to a phenomenon that is already addressed in feminist studies" (Colossi & Falcke, 2013, p. 311).

The present results also identified sociodemographic variables, such as age and the presence of children, which may contribute to the development of a violent marital relationship, a pattern already encountered in previous studies (Colossi et al., 2015; D'Oliveira et al., 2009).

**Table 3**  
**Predictors of Intimate Partner Violence**

Predictors of psychological violence	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
Predictors	B	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	-2.130	14.329		-.149	.882
Parental Coalition	-.204	.047	-.262	-4.296	.000
Gender	-2.028	.847	-.147	-2.393	.018
Sexual Abuse	1.687	.640	.161	2.638	.009
Children	-3.622	1.092	-.254	-3.318	.001
Age	-.129	.057	-.176	-2.278	.024
<i>R</i> = .460; <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .212; adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .194					
Predictors of sexual coercion	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
Predictors	B	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	2.176	.918		2.370	.019
Gender	1.158	.347	.213	3.335	.001
Education	-.640	.195	-.209	-3.285	.001
<i>R</i> = .300; <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .090; adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .082					
Predictors of physical violence	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
Predictors	B	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	-15,433	6.316		-2.443	.015
Sexual Abuse	1.162	.284	.255	4.095	.000
Physical Neglect	.183	.042	.269	4.320	.000
Gender	-.989	.372	-.164	-2.657	.008
<i>R</i> = .438; <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .192; adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .181					

The present findings helped identify the life circumstances and demands which contribute to increasing stress levels, interfering with the maintenance of emotional equilibrium and selection of functional patterns of conflict resolution, as reported by Kline, Pleasant, Whitton, and Markman (2006) who found that marital conflict increases as couples become involved in daily problems.

The present findings also support previous observations regarding the relationship between partner violence and individual experiences

in the family of origin (Colossi, Marasca, et al., 2015; Marasca et al., 2013; Milner et al., 2010). The experiences of each partner in their original family system make independent contributions to the onset of violence, and the experience of neglect, parental physical abuse, sexual abuse, and parental substance abuse in the family of origin are especially associated with future involvement in intimate partner violence (Fergusson, 2011; Godbout et al., 2006; Whiting et al., 2009). On the other hand, maternal and paternal psychological adjustment, as well as

parental coalition, are protective factors against this form of violence. The fact that associations between dysfunctional family experiences and intimate partner violence were stronger in women than in men may reflect the greater involvement of daughters in mediating family relationships. This finding underscores the emotional burden of negative experiences in the family of origin, as they may be transferred to romantic relationships in adulthood, perpetuating a dysfunctional relational model (Marasca, et al., 2013; Santos, Marin, & Castoldi, 2013).

Present findings regarding infidelity highlight possible differences between the moral behavior taught to men and women. Men were more likely to engage in extradyadic relations, and showed more favorable attitudes and a higher tendency toward infidelity than women, as has been reported in previous studies (Martins, 2012; Martins, Pereira, & Canavarro, 2014). Differences between the attitudes of men and women toward infidelity may reflect a more general pattern of gender differences, since, socially, men have more permissive attitudes than women toward extradyadic involvement (Wilson et al., 2011). Similarly, female participants in the present study showed higher levels of moral judgment toward infidelity-related behaviors, which may also be related to moral learning, as has been suggested in previous studies (Giordano, Manning, Longmore, & Flanigan, 2012; Wilson et al., 2011).

Comparisons of the prevalence of different forms of infidelity across relationship types revealed a significant difference between dating and cohabiting/common-law couples ( $p < .05$ ). The former were less likely ( $m = 25.01$ ) to have been unfaithful than the latter ( $m = 28.76$ ), which raises a series of questions about established relational models. It may be expected that partners in dating couples would be less committed to their relationship, given its relatively short duration. However, results showed that these individuals were actually more faithful than those who lived with their partners. It is therefore possible that partners in dating couples may feel less emotionally attached than those in longer relationships; dating couples may also be less

exposed to daily conflicts involving children, for example. The duration of relationships must also be considered, since participants were required to have been in a relationship for at least six months prior to taking part in the study. A 6-month relationship is distinct from ten years' cohabitation, for instance, and may be less burdened by daily conflicts (Kline et al., 2006).

Previous studies have found infidelity to play a predictive role in intimate partner violence (Conroy, 2014; Ortiz et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2011). However, in the present study, although correlations were identified between these variables, regression models did not find that the dimensions of infidelity explained a significant amount of the variance in intimate partner violence. The present study therefore demonstrated the relative strength of previous life experiences and circumstances over infidelity as contributors to violence, disagreeing with the findings of Flynn and Graham (2010), who found that immediate precipitators were the strongest predictors of different manifestations of intimate violence. This observation underscores the importance of considering a wide range of variables when evaluating intimate violence, highlighting the multifactorial etiology of the phenomenon and the contribution of different factors to the establishment of violent marital contexts in adulthood.

## Final Considerations

Intimate partner violence is a multifactorial phenomenon, and a comprehensive approach is required to address the different aspects involved in these situations. The present study sought to identify aspects associated with the onset of intimate partner violence, including sociodemographic variables, the experiences of each individual in their family of origin, and factors related to infidelity, such as perceptions, attitudes and likelihood of extradyadic involvement. The results highlighted the connection between the experiences of the subject in their family of origin, their sociodemographic characteristics, and the different expressions of intimate violence. Current life circumstances

were identified as important precipitators of violence, and it is possible that the negative or dysfunctional experiences of each partner in their family of origin may interfere with their ability to make use of healthy conflict resolution strategies.

Dysfunctional experiences in the family of origin may resurface in adulthood as a result of the repetition of relationship patterns learned in the past. Therefore, family-based interventions are crucial for promoting healthy family dynamics which can disrupt the cycle of violence, preventing the suffering of generation after generation. The cessation of violent behaviors such as neglect, different types of intrafamilial abuse and parental psychological maladjustment may be able to diminish, to some extent, the occurrence of violence in future partnerships. This would contribute to the psychological protection of children, who will have the opportunity to grow up in an environment that is more conducive to mental and relational health. This, in turn, may create a pattern of affective relationships that are more satisfactory and functional for the couples themselves, and more protective for any children born out of these relationships.

The present findings confirm those of the literature with regards to the variables studied, but also provide novel insight into these phenomena, since studies which have looked into the incidence of violence in intimate relationships often identify men as the main perpetrator. Yet the present findings revealed that women are the most common perpetrators of psychological violence, while men were usually responsible for incidents of sexual coercion. The absence of significant differences in the expression of physical violence between men and women highlights the interactional and recursive nature of intimate partner violence. Couples therapy may therefore play a crucial role in managing these situations, since its aim is precisely to care for and treat the structural and relational aspects of the marital relationship, promoting a more balanced, stable and functional relational model.

Though infidelity-related variables were not identified as causes of intimate partner violence

in regression models, their correlations with this phenomenon warrant further investigation. The variables evaluated in the present investigation must undergo further study in order to comprehend how infidelity is associated with the onset of intimate partner violence. Though prior studies have found that the former predicts the latter, this was not the case in the present investigation. It is possible that when this variable is considered in combination with experiences in the family of origin and other characteristics of the individual or their current relationship, these factors may outweigh infidelity as predictors of intimate partner violence. However, intimate violence is a multivariate construct, and its association with infidelity must be considered, regardless of its strength. This is crucial for couples therapists responsible for the prevention and treatment of situations of marital conflict and emotional distress.

In order to extend and deepen the comprehension of the independent variables which may contribute to such an important marital context for couples and children born out of the relationship, future studies with similar goals to the present investigation must be carried out in different situations and samples. This may allow for the identification of new factors, allowing for the creation of interventions which may be more suited to the relational issues expressed in contexts of intimate partner violence. Since intimate violence is a multifaceted phenomenon, several factors may contribute to its onset in addition to those addressed in the present study, which may be an important limitation of the present study.

Nevertheless, this investigation hopes to contribute both to the advancement of theoretical knowledge, and to the development of intervention strategies. The present findings underscore the importance of counseling and treating couples with a focus on the constituent aspects of the marital relationship, regardless of the type of partnership (dating, common-law or marriage), rather than addressing each partner individually. The present findings may therefore shed light on the importance of addressing the marital dynamics and the way

learned transgenerational patterns contribute to the development of the marital relationship in the context of couples therapy.

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