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# Violence in Interpersonal Relationships: A Field Study in a Population of Psychologists in Panama

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## Abstract

A field study was carried out to measure interpersonal violence (violence scale) in a group of fifty Panamanian psychologists. The instrument was made of 35 items on a Likert Scales of 5 options. The reliability was calculated to be 0.89 (Cronbach's Alpha), and via a factorial analysis, the validity of the construct had a total calculated percentage of the explained variance of 51.57%. The instrument has four factors: control, threat, battery, and death threats. Each factor obtained values greater than 0.7, which is reliable for each factor. The sample is a non-probabilistic for convenience, with the experimental death of two participants. It is a cross-sectional, correlational study with a non-experimental design. It was found gender violence is increasing, partly because of the complacency showed to international organisms by implementing measures that do not consider the trait of the cultures. The authors conclude that being a victim is currently associated with weakness, failure, defeat, and cowardice; therefore, social psychology through active minorities, attitudes, and social representations of the victimizer and masculinity must approach interpersonal violence.

## Introduction

Per international legislation, it is called femicide, an aggravated homicide based on gender [1]. Even though violence has been approached from different perspectives, the statistics continue to increase worldwide [1-3]. Specialists have developed models of explanation and intervention for risk factors, individual models, family models, and sociocultural models. However, the impact has been almost negligible [4]. Other experts have classified violence to deal with it separately through theoretical, legal, and humanitarian perspectives [3-7]. The best-known violence classification is: physical, psychological, verbal, economic, sexual, patrimonial, obstetric, and structural. Other categories include virtual violence, child, early and forced marriage, adolescent motherhood, genital mutilation, human trafficking, and femicide [8]. Bosch-Fiol and Ferrer-Pérez [9] reveal a study in which they conclude that the explanation of violence lies in a series of myths that permeate generations in modern societies. In this way, they reach the false belief that violence only occurs in poverty. In other words, violence is exclusive to social outcasts or abusers are people with severe psychiatric disorders are therefore not responsible for their actions. The aforementioned minimizes the importance of violence, such as comparing the phenomenon with others of greater relevance to humanity. Furthermore, it opens the way for the delusion of the responsibility of women for their mistreatment because she could have avoided the abuse, probably caused it, and, unconsciously, wanted it. The most visible consequences of myths are endorsing violent behaviors because they are legitimized and reproduced in the same way as children who experienced the cruelty of their parents [9]. There are false beliefs regarding the causes of violence and its justification in daily life, namely, jealousy, separated parents, and alcoholism, among others [9].

On the other hand, Rivero et al. [10] found that the relationships developed between the woman and the aggressor's family are a powerful motivation for not leaving. Victims opted to stay, given the belief that it is better to raise children next to a father, even if the father can destroy his life. They precisely convince their peers not to seek their freedom and independence. Concerning international organizations, according to the report presented in 2017 by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), there is no progress in preventing violence. In this region, one in three women experiences physical abuse; regardless of her age, the abuse is sustained throughout her life. PAHO attempts to reduce violence through the dissemination of information, the organization of workshops, training sessions, and the strengthening of networks and coalitions. However, these strategies are not working. Therefore, proposing the same approach to the rest of the countries in the Pan American region as part of the plan to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development related to eliminating all forms of violence is unproductive. (reference) UNESCO [11] pointed out that society's expectations normalized the negative aspects of violent behavior towards women. There is a need for multi-level and multi-faceted approaches because the interventions have been short-ranged and suggest a long-term strategy to safeguard victims. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has proposed gender equality policies that include economic autonomy, autonomy in decision-making, physical independence, and the interrelation of freedoms [1]. However, crimes against women are rising in most countries despite the efforts (increased sanctions in countries like Panama, Brazil, and Mexico). On February 14, 2018, Panama decreed Law 7 to prevent, prohibit, and punish discriminatory acts and violence by generating awareness among

the population and imposing responsibility for guaranteeing human rights [1]. In 2019, Panama registered twenty-one femicides, five attempted femicides, and twenty-nine violent deaths. Unfortunately, the latter was not considered femicide according to the evaluation of the Prosecutor of the case) [12]. According to CEPAL and INEGI, the number of femicides in México has increased yearly for the last decade. According to official figures, it went from 780 cases in 2017 to 898 cases in 2018 to 976 in 2019. Brazil went from 1151 in 2017 to 1206 in 2018 [1]. The femicide rate per 100,000 women has also increased in the Central American region, as shown in (Figure 1).

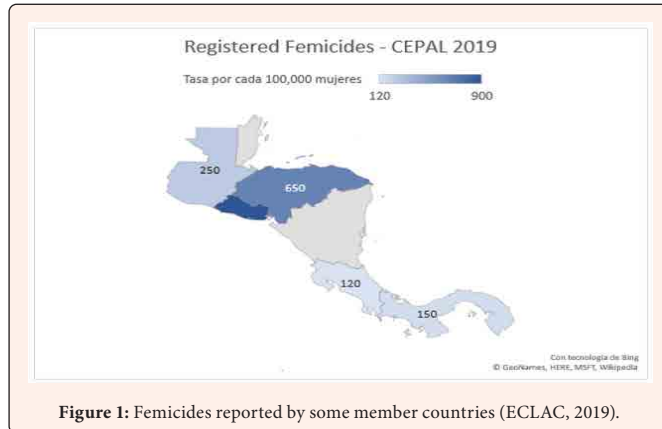


Figure 1: Femicides reported by some member countries (ECLAC, 2019).

Source: Self-made.

From this, it is understood that neither public policies, international organizations, the educational sector, the health sector, nor the family has obtained results to stop this holocaust that women live throughout their lives [13]. Unfortunately, gender violence increases in couple relationships. Between couples, progressive violence ends in femicides, which in most cases, occur in their own homes. The social nucleus is in crisis, and Panama is not exempt. The present study evaluates the level of violence in interpersonal relationships among psychologists. For this, a group of questions was asked: Are there statistically significant differences between the level of violence reported and sex; between gender and different factors of violence; between age and violence factors; there is a correlation between the factors of abuse and age; and what is the level of violence by factor?

**Methods**

In the framework of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, a forum was held at the Universidad Latina de Panamá on November 25, 2019, where the modified Violentómetro (a violence scale developed at the Instituto Polytechnic Nacional de México, which translates into English as “Violent meter”) was applied to a non-probabilistic sample for the convenience of 50 cases (Panamanian psychologists). It is a cross-sectional, correlational field study with a non-experimental design. During the experiment, two participants died. The psychometric characteristics of the instrument show a global Alpha Cronbach value of 0.892, which allows us to conclude that the instrument is reliable. Likewise, construct validity was obtained through factor analysis using the principal components method with varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization, whose rotation converged in six iterations. The total percentage of the explained variance selected is 51,569%, which represents four factors: control, threat, battery, and a death threat. Each factor obtained values greater than 0.7, which is reliable.

**Results**

Men represent 25.53% of the participants and 74.47% of the participants to women.

The age range is 18 to 63 years, 35 belong to the female sex. 36.2% are married or live in a free union, 6.4% are divorced or separated, and 57.4% are single who answered the instrument based on previous relationships. The total values of violence in the participants show a high standard deviation. The mean for the violence factor was 55.95±14.68. The maximum possible total score was 175 (35 items of the instrument multiplied by the 5 Likert-type response options). This level implies extreme violence. However, the data found by sex indicates that, on average, they have seldom experienced gender violence as shown in (Tables 1,2&3).

Table 1: The data found by sex indicates that, on average, they have seldom experienced gender violence.

Group Statistics					
	Sex	N	Mean	St. dev	Mean standard error
Total	Female	35	56.31	15.26	2.57
	Male	12	56.16	13.46	3.88

Table 2: In the case of violence reported by women, a slightly higher score can be observed than in men. However, the differences are not statistically significant.

Nonparametric Inferential Test Statistics	
	Total
U de Mann-Whitney	206.5
W de Wilcoxon	284.5
Z	-0.085
Asymptotic Sig. (bilateral)	0.932

Source: a. Grouping variable: Sex

Table 3: A Mann-Whitney non-parametric inferential analysis was used to search for significant differences between the level of violence reported by the factors and the gender of the participants. The results reveal that the value between men and women is very similar, and the differences are not statistically significant.

Nonparametric Inferential Test Statistic <sup>a</sup>				
	Factor 1: Control	Factor 2: Threat	Factor 3: Battery	Factor 4: Death Threat
U - Mann-Whitney	190	195	204.5	181.5
W - Wilcoxon	820	273	282.5	259.5
Z	-0.49	-0.368	-0.135	-1.123
Asymptotic Sig. (bilateral)	0.624	0.713	0.893	0.261

Source: a. Grouping variable: sex

The Kruskal Wallis test was employed to study the factors by age. The results are shown in (Table 4). It is observed that there are no statistically significant differences in the level of violence between the factors and age group.

Table 4: Chi-square by factors.

Nonparametric Inferential Test Statistic <sup>a,b</sup>				
	Factor 1: Control	Factor 2: Threat	Factor 3: Battery	Factor 4: Death Threats
Chi-squared	1.632	5.482	2.041	2.114
gI	3	3	3	3
Asymptotic Sig. (bilateral)	0.652	0.14	0.564	0.549

Source: a. Kruskal Wallis test; b. Grouping variable: Ages.

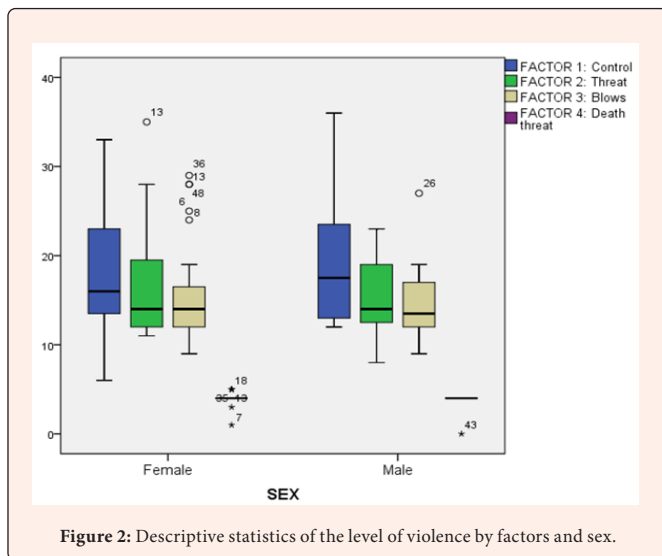
Spearman’s Rho test was used to search for a relationship between factors and age groups (Table 5).

**Table 5:** Spearman's Rho correlation between factors and age.

		Factor 1: Control	Factor 2: Threat	Factor 3: Battery	Factor 4: Death Threats
Factor 1: Control	Correlation coefficient				
	Sig. (bilateral)				
Factor 2: Threat	Correlation coefficient	0.547**			
	Sig. (bilateral)	0			
Factor 3: Hits	Correlation coefficient	0.427**	0.421**		
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.003	0.003		
Factor 4: Death threats	Correlation coefficient	0.045	0.217	0.012	
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.764	0.139	0.933	
Age	Correlation coefficient	-0.157	-0.323*	-0.21	-0.037
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.299	0.028	0.16	0.809

Source: \*p<0.01, two tail; \*\*p<0.05, two tail.

As shown in the previous table (Table 5), there is a correlation between control and threat, control and battery, threat and battery, and threat and age, all statistically significant. The only correlation between factors and age is with the number 2 Threat, with a p-value of 0.02. The descriptive values of the level of violence by factors are shown in (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Descriptive statistics of the level of violence by factors and sex.

Source: Survey of psychologists.

The population used for this study may be biased due to their knowledge and direct relationship with victims of violence as part of their profession. However, the results are still revealing. There are no statistically significant differences between the level of violence reported by men or women, which can be interpreted positively since on average no gender feels more violated than another in their relationships with their partner. It is worth mentioning that there is a wide standard deviation, which implies a wide range of violence. Regarding the violence factors measured by the modified Violentómetro (control, threat, beatings, and death threat), no statistically significant differences were found between the level of violence reported by men and women. To search for a relationship between factors and age, only factor two, threat,

has a statistically significant correlation with age. The level of violence is higher in the control factor, followed by the threat factor, then the battery factor, and finally (close to negligible) death threats factor for both sexes. The results are shown in (Figure 2). However, it is necessary to recognize that the participants register the violence through the control of their partners,  $\bar{x} = 3.6$ ,  $D_s = 0.69$ , on a scale of one to 5. In the case of the threat and battery factor, the statistics are low and very similar ( $\bar{x} = 1.5$ ,  $D_s = 0.51$  and  $\bar{x} = 1.6$ ,  $D_s = 0.57$ ), which allows us to consider that this level of violence has not been reached. In the case of death threats, despite being only four participants, it requires the attention of specialists since there are three for women and one for men. Thus, the level of interpersonal violence registered by the group of Panamanian psychologists occurs through the control that one exercises over the other, restricting the individual freedom to relate to other people, whether at work or mainly with family and friends.

**Discussion**

In the framework of the international day for the elimination of violence against women 48 participants answered a questionnaire of 35 questions based on the Vieolentómetro [14], the results show interpersonal violence at all levels, which should be a focus of attention for femicide prevention actions. The levels of violence are smaller in two factors; the death of threat factor and the battery factor. These findings can be mainly related to three aspects: the educational level of the participants since numerous studies have shown that education is a protective factor against exposure and risk of violence [15-17]. Another possibility is associated with the bias of social desirability that has been reported in studies on violence, as stated by Nair et al. [18]. The final aspect could be founded on the normalization and legitimization of violence. [19,20]. The limitations of our findings correspond to the number of participants and their sensitization, although the evidence suggests potential since they are consistent with the studies reviewed. It is clear that the pressure exerted by the influence group works to the detriment of the victim and that the need to appear a happy family has become a broad objective [10]. Likewise, although there have been modifications in the legal framework to protect victims, violence continues and, in extreme cases, femicides, which means that the institutions' efforts have failed. Bareket and Shnabel [2] explain that gender violence will continue until men stop feeling the need for dominance and supremacy that they acquire from their early childhood, and, therefore, it is the mother's responsibility to transform the abuse system and oppression.

For his part, Nelson [21] suggests that male violence is a mechanism to stop the challenge of cultural traditions anchored in religion and the consequent transgression of gender roles due to the inability to bring food to the family. While Beiras, Cantera, et al. [22] affirm that, in a patriarchal system, men feel compelled to offer evidence of their masculinity in a world that reinforces the traditional masculine image. Finally, Graaff, et al. [23] propose the intervention focused on masculinity because violence against women increases despite numerous proposals for a decrease.

**Conclusion**

Gender violence has become a social problem in all latitudes; some governments, institutions, and non-governmental organizations have expressed interest and proposals to reduce the dilemma. However, the results have not been sufficient, given their complexity. It is essential to rethink other forms of coping; Alternatives are required that do not seek female empowerment but equality as a human right. In some cases, women legitimize their victim status because it is part of their culture and religious beliefs; in other cases, they take up a fight to defend their rights. But the results are still in vain. The formulation of public policies has also been insufficient and shows essential gaps. The private and public implications continue to be significant to their detriment due to regional, educational, and economic circumstances.

**Future Work**

As has been widely documented, gender-based violence occurs mainly by the victim's partner or a family member, and femicide occurs by stabbing, bruising, suffocation, and firearms, primarily on Saturdays and Sundays [24]. Risk factors such as poverty, alcoholism, low level of schooling, drug use, and disease have been accessible explanations for understanding gender violence. Still, there is now numerous literature worldwide that denies these hypotheses. Furthermore, being a victim is currently associated with weakness, failure, defeat, and cowardice [25]. As part of our future work, it is crucial to elucidate the correlation of all the factors above with femicide. Social psychology can provide a solution to the violence problem. Theories on social domination, gender stereotype, social representations, attitudes, social comparison, and active minorities of the victimizer and his masculinity play an essential role in reducing femicides [26-30].



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