



Psychological violence against women: What factors increase the risk of this kind of intimate partner abuse?

Violencia psicológica hacia la mujer: ¿cuáles son los factores que aumentan el riesgo de que exista esta forma de maltrato en la pareja?

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ABSTRACT Using data from Argentina's National Study on Violence Against Women [*Estudio nacional sobre violencias contra las mujeres*] carried out in 2015, the article identifies the risk factors that increase women's vulnerability to psychological abuse. Findings show that women who are more prone to be victims of this kind of partner violence are those who are less educated, older, do not earn a wage for their work, live with children at home, are involved in less "formal" long-term relationships, as well as those whose male partners have a lower educational level than their own and/or have alcohol problems and/or were victims or witnesses of violence during their childhood. The article suggests possible intervention strategies to eradicate abuse, which should be primarily targeted at empowering women and strengthening their independence from their partners.

KEY WORDS Violence Against Women; Risk Groups; Prevention; Argentina.

RESUMEN A partir del análisis del Estudio nacional sobre violencias contra las mujeres, realizado en Argentina, en 2015, se identifican los factores de riesgo que incrementan la vulnerabilidad de las mujeres hacia el maltrato psicológico. Los resultados muestran que las mujeres más proclives a ser víctimas de este tipo de violencia en la pareja son quienes tienen menos educación, mayor edad, no trabajan por un salario, conviven con hijos en el hogar, se encuentran inmersas en relaciones menos "formales" en vínculos de mayor duración, están emparejadas con varones que tienen menos educación que ellas y/o tienen problemas con el alcohol y/o fueron víctimas o testigos de violencia durante su infancia. El artículo sugiere posibles estrategias de intervención para erradicar el maltrato, las cuales deben dirigirse, principalmente, a empoderar a las mujeres y reforzar su independencia respecto de la pareja.

PALABRAS CLAVES Violencia contra la Mujer; Grupos de Riesgo; Prevención; Argentina.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women has been acknowledged as a violation of basic human rights, and it has far-reaching consequences for women, their children, and society as a whole.⁽¹⁾ This is a public health problem that not only has a physical impact but it also has an impact upon the work, economic, social, and family environments. Violence has adverse consequences on women's health – including both their sexual health and reproductive health⁽²⁾ – on their emotional well-being and on their dignity,⁽³⁾ and it is also a direct threat to their children's well-being.⁽⁴⁾

The last decades have seen great progress in regard to violence against women, which has become quite relevant on both the public and research agendas. In this context, physical assault has been the focus of attention of lawmakers and researchers.⁽⁵⁾ However, there is not only one type of violence, as it may be psychological, sexual, economic, property, and/or symbolic, as established by Act No. 26485, of Integral Protection of Women. Psychological violence is one type of violence that has not been studied extensively and, at the same time, it is possibly the most common type of violence suffered by women.⁽⁶⁾ In this regard, for instance, Romans et al.⁽⁷⁾ explain that psychological abuse is much more frequent than both physical and sexual abuse in Canada. This finding is consistent with studies conducted in Latin America, where findings confirm that psychological violence is the most frequent type of violence used against women (for instance, Ludermir et al.⁽⁸⁾ in Brazil; Gallardo Sánchez et al.⁽⁹⁾ and Hidalgo García and Valdés López⁽¹⁰⁾ in Cuba; Castillo⁽¹¹⁾ in Paraguay).

The scarce information available in Argentina also shows that this is quite a significant problem. According to Argentina's National Study on Violence Against Women,⁽¹²⁾ 23.7% of women who are in a relationship have been victims of one type of psychological abuse. Information supplied by the Department of Domestic Violence of the Argentina's Federal Supreme Court of Justice

shows that most of the police reports filed in 2014 in the City of Buenos Aires were on psychological violence (96%), followed by physical violence (67%), economic violence (37%), and finally sexual violence (10%). In the same line of thought, a study carried out in that city among female patients of the General Program of Internal Medicine at Hospital de Clínicas "José de San Martín" [*Medicina Interna General del Hospital de Clínicas*]⁽¹³⁾ highlights that psychological abuse is the most frequent type of abuse: 41% of women claim that they were victims of this type of abuse, whereas half of that percentage of women claim that they were victims of physical and/or sexual violence.

Physical violence has been the principal focus of attention, as it is believed to cause greater damage to the victims.⁽⁵⁾ Nevertheless, different studies show that psychological violence has negative consequences that are equally damaging.^(14,15,16) Moreover, the psychological factor of violence is the strongest predictor of posttraumatic stress.⁽¹⁷⁾ Furthermore, it has been proven that, on several occasions, psychological abuse is followed by physically aggressive behavior in the relationship.^(15,18,19) Therefore, in terms of prevention, the study of psychological violence is essential; given that it is followed by physical violence, it becomes necessary to make necessary interventions in order to prevent it from evolving into this type of abuse.

This paper is intended to contribute to the knowledge about psychological violence in Argentina. More specifically, it aims at identifying the factors that increase the possibilities women have of being victims of psychological violence in Argentina, and at establishing what risk factors make certain types of women more vulnerable to this type of violence. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the spread of knowledge about violence against women in Argentina and to be helpful for the development of programs and policies regarding violence prevention.

In Argentina, studies on violence against women are scarce. There are few publications based on empirical studies on this problem.

Most of the published articles available address this problem in the City of Buenos Aires, in the health care area, and use biased samples. For instance, Aleman et al.⁽²⁰⁾ carry out a study in different Primary Health Care Centers in the City of Buenos Aires. Using a survey answered by health care professionals who treat women, they analyze the response capacity of the health care system to gender violence. In the same line of thought, Amoroso and Fernández⁽²¹⁾ describe a few of the principal features of the approach to this problem at Hospital Magdalena V. de Martínez in the municipality of Tigre. Both studies highlight the need to train health care professionals in order to improve their capacity to detect cases of violence against women, and the need for them to use a gender-based health care approach. Furthermore, Amoroso and Fernández⁽²¹⁾ stress the importance of visualizing within the health care system not only physical violence, but also all other types of abuse that women are exposed to. Other studies^(13,22) focus directly on potential victims – women – using a survey amongst patients of the General Program of Internal Medicine at Hospital de Clínicas “José de San Martín”. Pontecorvo et al.⁽¹³⁾ intend to find the prevalence of the different types of violence, and conclude that psychological abuse is more frequent than physical and sexual abuse amongst the respondents. Tajer et al.⁽²³⁾ combine interviews with health care professionals and with women who are victims and determine how violence damages women’s health. This study was carried out in public hospitals, health community centers and NGOs located in the City of Buenos Aires. Regarding psychological violence, women acknowledge the great impact it has had on their lives: it has deeply affected their personalities, their self-esteem, their fears and because of this type of violence, they feel what they called “signal anxiety,” a concept that refers to a functionality model that helps them to preserve their lives and, at the same time, keeps them in a continuous state of alert.

In summary, the existing studies in Argentina show the need to visualize psychological violence,⁽²¹⁾ which is the most frequent

type of violence suffered by women⁽¹³⁾ and it causes severe damage to their health.⁽²³⁾ However, in Argentina, studies on which women are more prone to become victims of this type of intimate partner violence have not been carried out. Even worldwide, studies on psychological violence are scarce, which is strange, considering that this type of abuse has been acknowledged as one of the most serious types of abuse that demands full attention from investigators, physicians, lawyers, and governments.⁽¹⁴⁾ This article is groundbreaking because it analyzes a subject that has not been previously studied locally and addresses it from a quantitative approach, using a novel database: Argentina’s National Study on Violence Against Women. In this case, the subject matter of the study is the general population of women between the ages of 18 and 69 who live in Argentina, and the women who took part in the survey were randomly chosen (probability sampling and two-stage sampling). Analyzing psychological violence is essential not only because it is one of the most prevailing – and less visible – types of abuse suffered by women, but also because it has a great negative impact on the victims and their families and, furthermore, it is followed by physical violence. Recognizing the specific risk factors for psychological violence will show where it is necessary to make interventions in order to prevent not only this type of violence, but also the other types that follow it.

Theoretical perspectives on intimate partner violence against women

Theories from different perspectives – psychological, sociological, and feminist, principally – have been developed, which have attempted to determine why women are victims of intimate partner violence⁽²⁴⁾ (it is important to mention that the different theoretical approaches described here are on heterosexual couples, that is to say, women whose partners are men). These theoretical approaches do not completely exclude the others; instead, they overlap and interact with

each other. Nevertheless, each of them highlights the role of one or more of the main risk factors. These different factors are specially highlighted in this article, in order to help understand and contrast these perspectives.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that these theories focus, primarily, on physical abuse. Although the different types of violence are strongly interconnected,^(25,26) the risk factors for each one may be different. There is scarce evidence that shows the specific factors for psychological violence,⁽¹⁶⁾ although there are several relevant studies in this regard.^(27,28,29,30) The principal aspects of the different existing theoretical perspectives are described in this article, and then their usefulness for studying psychological abuse is assessed.

Sociological perspective

The subject matter of this perspective is focused on the *resources*, as risk factors for intimate partner violence against women. Diverse authors analyze the resources of the *family* environment, whereas other authors focus on the *absolute* or *personal resources* of women and/or those *relative* to men. Finally, a fourth group of authors focus their analysis on the neighborhood/community where women/the family live, that is to say, the *contextual* resources. Broadly speaking, this perspective assumes that the availability of resources, and having access to them, facilitate women's empowerment and, as such, they have consequences in relationships. Generally, it is believed that this empowerment diminishes the chances of experiencing violence; however, at the same time, other authors believe that, on the contrary, it may be the source of conflict and violence.

The influence of these resources should not only be analyzed on these four levels (family, absolute, relative, and contextual). There are different types of resources that should be taken into account as well. Existing literature mostly highlights the influence of educational, economic, social, and labor resources. Cunradi et al.,⁽³¹⁾ for instance,

highlight that educational resources are more relevant predictors of intimate partner violence than employment status. Nevertheless, other studies suggest that employment status and income are more important risk factors for violence than educational level.⁽³²⁾ At the same time, other authors study the influence of other types of resources such as, for example, age^(33,34,35) and/or marital condition,^(35,36,37,38) among others.

Family level

The importance of the place occupied by the family on the social structure is highlighted here: in families that have scarce economic and social resources, women are more likely to experience violence due to the conditions they live in.⁽³⁹⁾ In this respect, Steinmetz⁽⁴⁰⁾ and Straus et al.⁽⁴¹⁾ suggest that the connection between family resources and violence may be indirect, regulated by stress levels which, in general, are lower in families with more resources. Family resources are principally analyzed using family income and/or socioeconomic status of the family. Several empiric studies highlight their relevance as risk factors associated with violence against women: Moreno Martín,⁽⁴²⁾ in a study carried out in eight Latin-American cities and in Madrid; Cunradi et al.⁽³¹⁾ and Vest et al.⁽³⁴⁾ in The US; Hindin and Adair⁽⁴³⁾ in The Philippines; Tiesca and Borda⁽⁴⁴⁾ in Colombia; Jeyaseelan et al.⁽⁴⁵⁾ in India; Yount and Li⁽⁴⁶⁾ in Egypt. Nevertheless, it is important to take into account that, just as Hoffman et al.⁽⁴⁷⁾ and Heise⁽⁴⁸⁾ highlight, violence against women happens in all social classes, although they acknowledge that it is more frequent and severe in lower socioeconomic levels.

Presence of children, marital status and other conditions, and duration of the relationship are also considered to be relevant risk factors at the family level, associated with intimate partner violence. Firstly, Fagan et al.,⁽⁴⁹⁾ Vest et al.⁽³⁴⁾ and Yount and Carrera⁽²⁸⁾ show a strong positive connection between living with children and domestic violence against women. In this respect, it is essential

to prevent intimate partner violence, as it will not only benefit the direct victims, but their children as well.⁽³⁴⁾ Children who live in a violent environment are potentially vulnerable to be victims of some type of abuse and, at the same time, are more likely to become potential victims or perpetrators of violence as adults. Secondly, existing findings regarding the influence of marital condition show that women's exposure to intimate partner violence is higher in consensual unions than in marriages.^(35,36,37,38) Evidence seems to indicate that women who are in informal relationships suffer higher levels of intimate partner violence than married women; hence, marriage serves as a protective factor.⁽³⁵⁾ Finally, results regarding the duration of the relationship are inconsistent.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Several authors describe that men are more prone to use intimate partner violence as the duration of the relationship increases.^(38,50,51) Nevertheless, other studies say the opposite, and show that violence against women decreases over time^(52,53): men are less prone to use intimate partner violence as they become more committed to the relationship. Thus, commitment makes men renounce their own interest and, at the same time, prioritize the needs of the relationship. In this regard, findings by Kim et al.⁽³³⁾ support this theory in what refers to psychological abuse and show that it decreases over time.

Absolute/personal level

Another line of studies highlights the role of women's personal resources, regardless of the resources of the family environment and/or their partners. This perspective suggests that the principal cause of violence against women is the vulnerable situation they are in: the fact of having few resources of their own makes women dependent on their partners and, therefore, increases their probabilities of experiencing violence.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Women's education has been repeatedly considered a key protective resource, given that it grants them social consolidation via social networks and confidence, and the ability to use

information and resources available in society.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Several authors have shown that highly educated women are at a lower risk of experiencing violence: Thompson et al.⁽⁵⁶⁾ in The US; Jewkes et al.⁽⁵⁷⁾ in South Africa; Koenig et al.⁽⁵⁸⁾ in Uganda; Bates et al.⁽⁵⁹⁾ in Bangladesh; Flake⁽⁶⁰⁾ in Peru. Women's employment status is also considered an absolute resource that affects their risk of being victims of violence. In this line of thought, diverse studies show that women who work have less probabilities of experiencing violence, because they are less dependent on their partners.^(41,61,62) Women's age is also highlighted as a protective factor against violence.⁽³²⁾ Results show a negative association between age and violence against women,^(33,34,35,56) that is to say, younger women are more prone to experience intimate partner violence. It is important to remember that, just as Flood and Pease⁽⁶³⁾ explain, age is not just a number, as it also brings along development processes and associated relations, such as greater experience, self-confidence, and/or higher social capital, which serve as protective factors against violence. Finally, being part of a minority is highlighted as a risk factor for violence: immigrant women have higher probabilities of experiencing intimate partner violence,^(64,65) which is considered to be the result of their low social capital and their alienation.^(66,67) In short, this approach considers that women with fewer personal resources (for instance, those who are less educated, are unemployed, are young and/or are immigrant) are more vulnerable to violence not only because they are more exposed to the risk, but also because they have fewer possibilities of escaping from such situation.⁽⁶⁸⁾

Relative level

This perspective highlights the importance of the relative resources between the members of a relationship. The facts that women have fewer resources than men, as well as the opposite situation (when women have more resources) are highlighted as risk factors that make women more vulnerable to violence.

Basically, it is believed that imbalance of resources – therefore, imbalance of power – between the members of a relationship is a critical item.

On the one hand, a line of thought believes that women are more likely to experience violence when they have fewer social and/or economic resources than their partners, inasmuch as men use violence against women “because they can.”⁽⁶⁹⁾ Recent evidence supporting this approach can be found, for instance, in Yount⁽⁷⁰⁾ in Egypt and in Yount and Carrera⁽²⁸⁾ in Cambodia. It is suggested that women who are socioeconomically dependent on their partners are more tolerant to violence and are at a higher risk of experiencing it.⁽²⁸⁾ On the other hand, the status inconsistency theory also highlights the role of relative resources, but in an opposite direction: women are at a higher risk of suffering violence when they have *more* social and/or economic resources than men.^(71,72) According to this theory, the patriarchal order based on male domination is threatened when women have more resources than men and, therefore, violence is used in these cases in order to restore the traditional women subordination system.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Findings by MacMillan and Gartner⁽⁷³⁾ in Canada, by Flake⁽⁶⁰⁾ in Peru and by Antai⁽⁷⁴⁾ in Nigeria support this theory. Moreover, Yount and Carrera⁽²⁸⁾ stress the importance of this theory to explain, specifically, psychological abuse. These authors show that women who are more educated than their partners have greater probabilities of experiencing psychological abuse, but not physical abuse. They explain that men resort to psychological violence in order to restore their power when they feel threatened by women’s educational level, whereas women have enough power in the relationship – due to their higher educational level – to prevent physical abuse.

Relative resources between the members of a relationship are generally conceptualized in terms of education, employment status or income.^(75,76) Other types of resources have been less studied. For instance, MacMillan

and Gartner⁽⁷³⁾ corroborate the status inconsistency theory using the analysis of the occupational situation of the members of a relationship: when the woman has a job and the man is unemployed, women’s risk of being victims of violence increases substantially in Canada. Few studies have focused on the relative resources regarding ethnic/racial status of the members of a relationship. In this regard, Frías and Ángel⁽⁷⁷⁾ and Safranoff⁽⁷⁸⁾ examine, in Mexico and in Spain respectively, to what extent women’s risk of experiencing violence is different depending on the ethnic and racial composition of a relationship (if both members are immigrants/natives, or if the woman is an immigrant and the man is a native or if the man is an immigrant and the woman is a native), which is based on the fact that being an immigrant makes individuals vulnerable to their native partners.

Contextual/community level

A fifth and more recent analysis approach within the sociological perspective has as its subject matter the context where violence takes place. This approach suggests that there is a higher risk of intimate partner violence in unstructured neighborhoods with high poverty, criminality, and social problematic levels.^(41,79,80) This is based on two arguments: on the one hand, it is believed that, in these neighborhoods, social acceptance of violence as a means of solving conflicts is higher.^(79,80) On the other hand, it is mentioned that, due to the structural features of these neighborhoods, there are fewer social bonds among community members; therefore, informal control as a means of preventing violence against women decreases.^(79,80) Research studies carried out by O’Campo et al.⁽⁸¹⁾ and Benson et al.⁽⁷⁹⁾ conclude that, indeed, there are higher levels of violence against women in neighborhoods with fewer resources and higher economic and residential instability.

Feminist perspective

In addition to the sociological perspective, a second feminist analysis approach also tries to determine what factors increase the risk of intimate partner violence against women. This approach suggests that the principal cause for the existence of this type of violence is patriarchy,^(51,82,83) which is defined as a social domination system where women are subjugated to men. According to this approach, intimate partner violence against women originates in the asymmetric power relationships among men and women in patriarchal societies, that is to say, in gender inequalities of structural nature. The feminist perspective has received strong criticism because it assumes that violence against women is universal, that is to say, all women are potential victims of abuse given that the cause of violence is gender inequality based on the fact of being a woman itself.⁽²⁴⁾ Nevertheless, feminism is not a homogeneous movement, and different explanatory approaches to intimate partner violence against women have been developed within it, each with its own perspectives and beliefs.⁽⁸⁴⁾ In this regard, for instance, intersectionality theories appear within the feminist approach.⁽⁸⁵⁾ These theories account for violence against women based not only on structural gender inequality, but also on other types of inequality, such as those caused by ethnicity, religion or social class.^(85,86,87,88) Ultimately, this feminist approach associates violence against women with social exclusion, and therefore shares many subjects of study with diverse approaches of the sociological perspective, although they differ in the analysis of the results, precisely because the intersectionality theory adopts a view that also takes gender into account.⁽²⁴⁾ Therefore, according to this approach, the idea of the universal nature of violence conveyed by the previously described feminist approach disappears, because the risk of being a victim of violence would not only depend on being a woman, but on the intersection of being a woman and, for example, an immigrant, young and/or from a lower social class.⁽²⁴⁾

Psychological perspective

Finally, a third analysis approach focuses on the study of individual features, both of victims and perpetrators, from a psychological perspective. It is suggested that certain mental illnesses, defects in social skills, violence in the family of origin, and alcohol abuse are significantly associated with intimate partner violence against women.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Therefore, it is assumed that violence is an individual problem, independent from the socio-cultural context and structural matters.

On the one hand, this approach has focused on the study of certain personality disorders; the conclusions were that men who resort to intimate partner violence show more symptoms associated with these disorders.⁽⁹⁰⁾ One of the disorders analyzed was depression, and that study highlights that violent men suffer from depression on higher levels than non-violent men.^(91,92) Other factors analyzed from this psychological perspective are defects in psychosocial skills. For instance, showing defects in communication environments, sympathy and assertiveness have been positively associated with violence; therefore, the lack of skills at solving conflicts may contribute to a higher use of violence.⁽⁹³⁾

On the other hand, different studies show that men who have alcohol and/or drug problems are more prone to resort to intimate partner violence.^(94,95,96) While several authors do not think that this has a significant effect,⁽⁹⁷⁾ other authors believe that it is one of the most significant predictors of violence against women.⁽²⁷⁾ It is suggested that alcohol and drug abuse are associated with violence because they help consumers become uninhibited and it affects their skills to interpret social rules.^(55,98) A survey conducted in the City of Buenos Aires⁽⁹⁹⁾ shows that four out of ten women claim that their partners had consumed alcohol at the moment of the physical assault. In Peru, a study⁽³⁰⁾ carried out specifically on psychological violence shows that alcohol abuse by men is associated with this type of abuse and it increases women's risk of being victims of violence by 66%. However,

different studies emphasize that this is a complex association, and probably other factors of structural or individual type have an influence.^(24,100) At the same time, other authors stress that alcohol and/or drug abuse are not only associated with perpetration of violence, but also with victimization,^(97,101) that is to say, women who have alcohol and/or drug abuse problems are more prone to suffer intimate partner violence.

Finally, victimization in the family of origin has also been one of the most relevant variables to account for intimate partner violence against women from the psychological perspective, based on social learning theories and intergenerational transmission theories. This factor has been analyzed from two points of view: when, during their childhood, the individuals *witnessed* parental violence and when the individuals were *victims* of any type of parental violence. It can be seen that those individuals who come from a violent family environment (either as *victims* or *witnesses*) consider the use of violence for solving conflicts in the relationship to be normal and, therefore, it becomes a risk factor both for victimization and for perpetration of intimate partner violence.⁽¹⁰²⁾ These findings suggest that it is necessary to detect intimate partner violence against women at an early stage, in order to protect not only women, but their children as well, which would help to reduce the levels of intimate partner violence in coming relationships. Regarding victimization, different studies show that *having witnessed* intimate partner violence between their parents during childhood increases the risk of being victims of intimate partner violence in adulthood.^(27,95,103,104,105) Caballero et al.⁽³⁰⁾ and Castillo⁽¹¹⁾ show that, both in Peru and in Paraguay, having a father with a history of violence against the mother is associated with psychological violence and it increases women's risk of experiencing it. In the same line of thought, other research studies prove that having suffered violence during childhood (*victim*) is also positively associated with the risk of victimization.

DATA AND ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

This article is based on data supplied by Argentina's National Study on Violence Against Women, carried out by the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights within Argentina's Presidency in 2015.

The nationwide sample is comprised of 1,221 women over the age of 17. Questions about psychological abuse were only asked to those women who were in a relationship at the moment of the survey, that is why, for the analyses, only those women who were married, were in a consensual union, or in a non-cohabiting relationship were chosen (the survey only analyzes heterosexual couples). Furthermore, due to the existence of missing values in the principal variables, the sample used in the analysis was made up of 772 women. The primary technique used is logistic regression.

The dependent variable was a binary indicator about whether women were experiencing psychological intimate partner violence at the moment of the survey. This variable has been developed using a series of specific types of behavior: if their partners/boyfriends/husbands become angry if they are talking to another man; try to limit their contact with their family and friends; follow them or harass them in such a way that they feel they are under surveillance or scared; give them demeaning nicknames, insult them or display demeaning behavior toward them and make them feel badly and/or damage or destroy their belongings. Those women who "always," "frequently" or "sometimes" are victims of any of these specific types of abuse are considered to be experiencing psychological violence and, therefore, are given the value 1 in the dependent variable. Those women whose current partners "never" resorted to any of these types of violent behavior are given the value 0 in the binary variable. It can be seen in the descriptive analysis (Table 1) that, in Argentina, 24.5% of women who are in a relationship were victims of one of the types of psychological violence being studied.

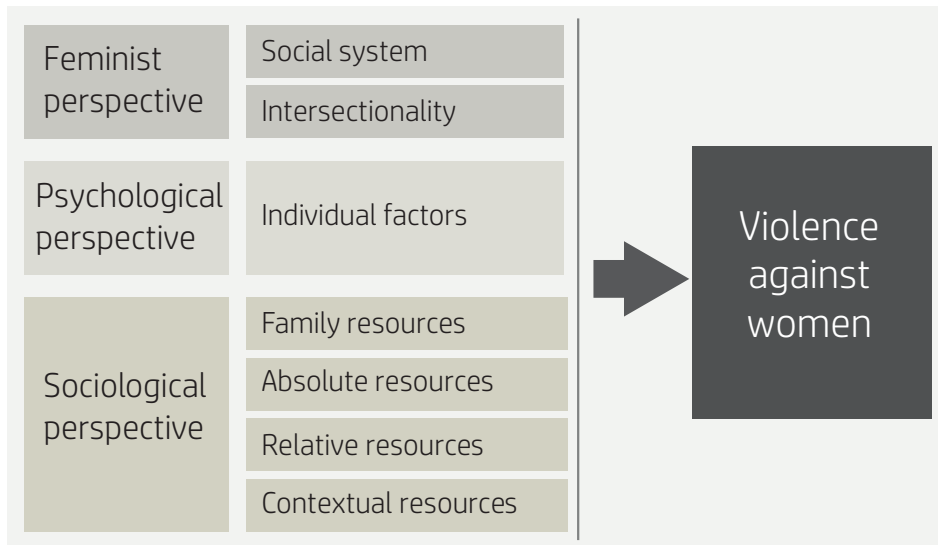


Figure 1. Theoretical perspectives on violence against women.

Source: Own elaboration.

Independent variables derive from the different factors that literature has considered to be risk factors for violence. The different hypotheses derived from the previously described theories will be tested. Each of these hypotheses highlights the role of a different descriptive factor of violence against women (risk factors). Unfortunately, the feminist perspective cannot be analyzed, as the survey does not have any information on sexist attitudes and/or patriarchal values, which have been the more commonly used indicators to test this approach.^(65,107)

Most of the risk factors have been extensively studied in connection with physical violence. This article examines to what extent they also have a significant influence on psychological violence. The factors will not be considered alternative, but complementary, as they are all believed to have an essential role. It is expected that, in Argentina, each

of the theoretical perspectives (sociological and psychological) can provide relevant descriptive items about psychological violence. It is important to remember that violence against women is a multidimensional problem,⁽¹⁶⁾ which means that neither of these theories by itself provides a necessary and adequate condition to account for it. As highlighted by Heise,⁽⁴⁸⁾ violence against women is not the result of just one factor, but the result of complex interrelationships among individual, relational, social, cultural, and contextual factors.

Independent variables: sociological perspective

A series of variables regarding *family* resources, *absolute* resources of women, and *relative* resources between the members of

Table 1. Percentage distribution of the sample according to the variables included in the analysis (N=722). Argentina, 2015.

VARIABLES	%
DEPENDENT	
Suffer some type of psychological intimate partner violence perpetrated by their current partners	
Yes	23.3
No	76.7
INDEPENDENT	
SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE	
<i>Absolute/personal resources of women</i>	
Age	
From 18 to 30 years old	26.4
From 31 to 45 years old	43.9
From 46 to 69 years old*	29.7
Education	
Did not graduate from secondary school	33.1
Graduated from secondary school-Went to university but did not graduate	39.8
Graduated from university*	27.1
Argentine nationality	
Yes	96.0
No*	4.0
Do not earn a wage for their work	
Yes (they do not earn a wage)	54.8
No (they earn a wage)*	45.2
Have not had any previous relationships	
Yes (their current relationship is their first relationship)	60.3
No (they have had previous relationships)*	39.7
<i>Family resources</i>	
Duration of the relationship	
Less than 5 years	23.4
From 5 to 10 years	20.8
Over 10 years*	55.8
Marital condition	
Consensual union	25.5
Non-cohabiting couple	15.9
Married*	58.5
Live together with children	
Yes	72.4
No*	27.6
<i>Relative resources</i>	
Age	
The woman is older than the man	4.8
The man is older than the woman	33.9
Both of them are the same age*	61.3
Education	
The woman has a higher educational level	24.6
The man has a higher educational level	18.3
Both of them have the same educational level*	57.1
PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE	
<i>Family of origin</i>	
Witnessed: violence perpetrated to their mother	
Yes	24.9
No*	75.1
Victim of: parental violence	
Yes	20.2
No*	79.8
<i>Alcohol</i>	
Their partners have alcohol problems	
Yes	9.4
No*	90.6

Source: Own elaboration using data from Argentina's National Study on Violences Against Women ⁽¹²⁾.

*Reference value

a relationship is added to the basis of the sociological perspective. *Contextual* resources are not analyzed, as the survey does not contain any information about the neighborhood where the couple live.

In order to understand the effect of *family* resources, three variables that derive from the previously explained theories are included in the analysis: *live together with children*, *marital condition*, and *duration of the relationship*. Although the variable *family income* is in the survey, the decision was not to include it in the analysis due to the debate regarding its reliability⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ and the high number of missing values. The variable *live together with children* is comprised of, on the one hand, those women who do not live together with children (reference category) and, on the other hand, those women who live together with one or more children. *Marital status or other conditions* is comprised of three categories: married (reference category), consensual union and non-cohabiting couple. *Duration of the relationship* is also comprised of three categories: less than 5 years, from 5 to 10 years and, lastly, over 10 years (reference category).

Absolute resources of women are analyzed using their *education*, *age*, *nationality*, *employment status*, and existence of *previous relationships*. *Education* is a variable that is comprised of three categories: the first category – lower level – includes women who, at the most, attended secondary school, although they did not graduate; the second category includes those women who graduated from secondary school, a few of whom attended university, although they did not graduate; lastly, the third category – reference category – includes women who started studying at a higher education level – university – and graduated. The variable *age* is also comprised of three categories: 18 to 30 years old, 31 to 45 years old and 46 to 69 years old (reference category). *Nationality* is a dichotomous variable, where immigrant (without Argentine citizenship) is the reference category. *Employment status* is comprised of those women who earn a wage for their work (reference category) and

those women who do not. The existence of *previous relationships* is comprised of, on the one hand, those women who have not had any previous relationships (their current relationship is their first intimate relationship) and, on the other hand, those women who have had previous relationships (reference category).

Lastly, variables connected to two types of relative resources are included in the sample: *education* and *age*. Each variable has three categories: *education* is comprised of those couples where both members have the same educational level (reference category), those couples where the woman has a higher educational level than the man and, finally, those couples where the woman has a lower educational level than the man; whereas *age* is comprised of the age of both members is similar (reference category), the woman is over 5 years older than the man or, on the contrary, the man is older.

Independent variables: psychological perspective

Finally, the psychological perspective is analyzed using three factors. First, a variable about having *witnessed* violence during childhood is included: those women whose father was violent to their mother are given the value 1 in this binary variable, opposed to those women who did not witness violence in their family of origin (value 0). Second, a variable about whether women were *victims* of parental violence is added to the analysis (value 1). The reference category (value 0) is comprised of those women who were not victims of any type of physical parental violence. Third and last, a variable regarding *alcohol* problems in the relationship is analyzed, which is developed using a question about how often their current partners (husbands or boyfriends) drink until they get intoxicated. Those women whose partners get intoxicated at least once a month are given the value 1 in this binary variable, whereas those women whose partners only get intoxicated once or twice a year, or they never

get intoxicated, are given the value 0. Different factors studied by the psychological perspective are not included in the analysis, as the survey does not have any information on whether, for instance, their current partners were victims of violence or witnessed violence in their family of origin and/or whether they have some sort of mental illness, and women are not asked if they have or used to have alcohol or drug problems either.

The analyses are carried out using logistic regression with the dependent variable about whether women are currently experiencing psychological intimate partner violence and all the previously explained independent variables, in order to identify the risk factors associated with psychological violence.

RESULTS

The sample of Table 2 shows the factors associated with psychological violence in Argentina. First, it can be seen that the three factors linked to the *psychological* perspective have a statistically significant influence on victimization. At the same time, regarding the *sociological* perspective, absolute resources of women (age, education, and employment status), family resources (duration of the relationship, marital condition, and live together with children) and educational resources relative to both members of a relationship also have an influence on the chances of experiencing psychological abuse. It was expected that, in Argentina, all the factors that were analyzed would have a significant role, which is not corroborated. Unlike previous findings in other contexts, particularly regarding physical violence, several factors, such as nationality, are not significant risk factors associated with psychological violence.

Sociological perspective

The sociological perspective has been analyzed using *family*, *absolute*, and *relative* resources.

Regarding the first type of resources, the three factors analyzed in the *family* environment have a statistically-significant influence on the chances women have of being victims of psychological violence. First, it can be seen that women who are in short-term relationships (less than 5 years) are less prone to be victims of this type of violence, that is to say, in line with a line of studies, it is suggested that intimate partner violence is more frequent as the *duration of the relationship* increases.^(38,50,51) Nevertheless, it is important to take into account that this cannot be certainly concluded, given that the survey does not have any information about the first time women were victims of violence. Therefore, it is not possible to know whether, in long-term relationships, women started to experience violence recently or, on the contrary, they have been experiencing it for a long time. At the same time, it cannot be conclusively confirmed that women who are in short-term relationships experience less psychological violence because it is possible that those women who have been dating their partners for a short period of time find it easier to end the relationship with their aggressors. In order to have a better understanding of this matter, future studies will also have to include separated women who have been victims of violence, which this survey did not. From this first approximation, it can be concluded that, in Argentina, the levels of psychological intimate partner violence are higher in long-term relationships. Second, findings regarding *marital condition* show that marriage is a protective factor against psychological violence,⁽³⁵⁾ in line with evidence found in other contexts.^(36,37,38) Women who are in non-cohabiting relationships are more prone to be victims of psychological abuse: their chances of being victims of violence are 3.2 times higher than the chances of married women. This difference is slightly smaller for consensual unions – cohabiting couples – (*odds ratio* 2.64) and it shows that women who are in informal relationships suffer higher levels of intimate partner violence. Lastly, in the family environment, *presence of children* is also a risk factor associated with

Table 2. Logistic regression of the probabilities that women have of experiencing some type of intimate partner violence perpetrated by their current partners according to the factors of the sociological perspective and the psychological perspective (N=772). Argentina, 2015.

VARIABLES	OR	SE	p-value
SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE			
<i>Absolute/personal resources of women</i>			
Age			
From 18 to 30 years old	0.523	0.354	0.067
From 31 to 45 years old	1.366	0.248	0.208
From 46 to 69 years old*	-	-	-
Education			
Did not graduate from secondary school	3.656	0.320	0.000
Graduated from secondary school- attended university but did not graduate	1.783	0.269	0.032
Graduated from university*	-	-	-
Argentine nationality			
Yes	1.766	0.486	0.242
No*	-	-	-
Do not earn a wage for their work			
Yes (they do not earn a wage)	1.677	0.206	0.012
No (they earn a wage)	-	-	-
Have not had any previous relationships			
Yes (their current relationship is their first relationship)	1.205	0.200	0.351
No (they have had previous relationships)*	-	-	-
<i>Family resources</i>			
Duration of the relationship			
Less than 5 years	0.550	0.346	0.084
From 5 to 10 years	1.001	0.281	0.998
Over 10 years*	-	-	-
Marital condition			
Consensual union	2.638	0.255	0.000
Non-cohabiting couple	3.244	0.366	0.001
Married*	-	-	-
Live together with children			
Yes	1.891	0.241	0.008
No*	-	-	-
<i>Relative resources</i>			
Age			
The woman is older than the man	1.327	0.400	0.479
The man is older than the woman	1.022	0.204	0.914
Both of them are the same age*	-	-	-
Education			
The woman has a higher educational level	1.772	0.263	0.030
The man has a higher educational level	0.729	0.270	0.242
Both of them have the same educational level*	-	-	-
PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE			
<i>Family of origin</i>			
Witnessed: violence perpetrated to their mother			
Yes	1.620	0.220	0.028
No*	-	-	-
Victim of: parental violence			
Yes	2.192	0.229	0.001
No*	-	-	-
<i>Alcohol</i>			
Their partners have alcohol problems			
Yes	7.385	0.309	0.000
No*	-	-	-
CONSTANT	0.013	0.631	0.000

Source: Own elaboration using data from Argentina's National Study on Violence Against Women⁽¹²⁾.

R² of Nagelkerke = 0.233. -2 Plausibility algorithm = 737.469

*Reference value

intimate partner violence: women who live together with their children are more prone to be victims of psychological violence, which highlights the need for prevention not just to protect women but their children as well.

Absolute or *personal* resources of women have been analyzed using their *education, age, nationality, employment status*, and the existence of *previous relationships*. Education, age, and employment status have a statistically-significant influence on women's risk of being victims of psychological abuse, whereas nationality and the fact of having had previous relationships are not relevant. On the one hand, it can be seen that more educated women are less prone to experience psychological violence. The chances of suffering psychological violence amongst less educated women (those who did not graduate from secondary school or less) are 3.7 times higher than the chances of more educated women (those who graduated from university). Although this difference is significant, it diminishes as educational level becomes higher. On the other hand, *employment status* is also a factor associated with psychological violence: those women who do not earn a wage for their work are more prone to experience psychological violence than those women who earn a wage for their work (*odds ratio* 1.68). Both findings show that women with fewer resources (less educated and/or without a wage) are more vulnerable to violence, which is consistent with empiric evidence found in other contexts.^(41,56,58,59,60,61,62)

However, findings regarding age show the opposite of previous studies.^(33,34,35) In Argentina, younger women experience less psychological violence, which seems to indicate generational progress, probably as a result of the higher exposure of younger cohorts to university⁽⁶³⁾ and other positive influences (for instance, awareness campaigns, and recently enacted laws).

Lastly, along with *family* and *personal* resources, *relative* resources are also a crucial factor for women. The status inconsistency theory^(71,72) is corroborated regarding *education*: when women have a higher educational level than their partners, they are more

prone to suffer psychological violence. This finding seems to indicate that men resort to this type of abuse as a way to restore the traditional women subordination system,⁽⁴⁷⁾ which is threatened when women have more educational resources. Age difference between the members of a relationship does not affect women's chances of being victims of psychological abuse, which suggests that age is a relevant factor in absolute terms, but not in relative terms.

Psychological perspective

The three factors analyzed from the psychological perspective are significantly associated with psychological violence. On the one hand, it can be seen that women whose partners have *alcohol* problems have 7.39 times more chances of suffering psychological violence than women whose partners do not have these types of problems, which means that men who have alcohol problems are more prone to use violence against their partners. On the other hand, the influence of having grown up in a violent family environment (either as victims or as witnesses) validates the social learning theory and the intergenerational transmission theory in Argentina: women who *witnessed* domestic violence during their childhood and/or were *victims* of parental violence are more prone to be victims of psychological violence in adulthood.

DISCUSSION

This article identifies the factors that increase the chances women have of suffering psychological abuse by male partners in Argentina. The results show that women who are more prone to be victims of this type of abuse are those who are less educated, older, do not earn a wage for their work, live with children at home, are involved in less "formal" and long-term relationships, and have male partners with lower educational level and/or have alcohol problems and/or were

victims or witnesses of violence during their childhood.

The findings of this article show the necessity of empowering women to reinforce their independence from their partners and, consequently, improve their well-being.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ It is observed that women with fewer resources (less education and/or without a wage) are more vulnerable, which can be attributed, at least partially, to their dependence on their partners.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Furthermore, older women and/or the ones involved in long-term relationships are probably more dependent on their partners, exposing them to an even higher risk of being victims, and narrowing the chances of escaping from such situations.⁽⁶⁸⁾ In this sense, it is crucial to make the best efforts to help this subgroup of women, because it is even possible that they are not aware of the abuse they are suffering if they have been experiencing that for a long time. It is essential to recognize every woman's history of violence, but this information is not available in the survey because it contains no question about the first time that their male partners exerted violence against them. Summarizing, the results show that women's dependence on their partners is a critical factor that increases the chances of suffering psychological abuse. The necessity of working on prevention strategies to eradicate violence is highlighted; such strategies specifically focus on empowering women to reinforce their independence. Evidence suggests that educational and labor resources help women's empowerment. Therefore, the interventions should aim to favor women gaining access to such resources; however, it is necessary to highlight that there have been generational improvements in Argentina because young women have less risk of suffering violence. This can be the consequence of a generational change of values in favor of gender equality,^(110,111,112) and the positive impact universities have on younger cohorts,⁽⁶³⁾ as well as other good influences (for example, awareness campaigns and recently enacted laws).

Prevention of violence toward women is essential to protect them and their children as direct targets.^(4,34) The results of this article

reveal that those women who suffered violence in their original family during their childhood (whether as witnesses or victims) are more prone to suffer psychological violence in adulthood. In this way, children who live in a violent environment are potentially vulnerable to be victims of direct violence and, at the same time, prone to become potential victims in adulthood. Additionally, the information reveals that women are more vulnerable to psychological abuse in households where children live, which highlights the necessity of making interventions specifically in those households to prevent violence in adulthood and also protect children's rights.

Similarly, from a preventive point of view, taking measures against psychological abuse is essential, as it may be followed by physical violence.^(15,18,19) The different theoretical perspectives studied in this article have been analyzed principally in connection with physical violence, given that this type of violence has been the main focus of attention.⁽⁵⁾ The findings of this article show that these perspectives are also relevant to study psychological abuse. In this way, it should be noted that the risk factors are similar to both types of violence, which suggest an identical source. Given that psychological violence, at least occasionally and at lower levels, is very common in couples,⁽¹¹³⁾ the emphasis has to be placed on the necessity of developing preventive measures because of its strong negative impact and the fact that it is not separate from physical violence.^(15,18,19)

One limitation of this study lies in the impossibility of considering the feminist perspective using the indicators that are most frequently used to test this approach because of the lack of information in this regard in the survey. However, it is important to highlight that violence against women can be rooted in structural gender inequalities. Several factors that represent other inequality systems have been considered in this article, such as age, social class, nationality, and employment. According to the feminist intersectionality theories, these systems interact with structural gender inequality, but it is important to bear in mind that the latter is a key element on

which violence against women is based. In this way, the study of risk factors connected to violence against women must be approached from an intersectional perspective, taking into account all the different types of inequalities, such as those based on structural issues based on gender, or women's social status or age, among others.

The results of this article show even the existence of structural gender inequalities in Argentina. Women who have a higher educational level than their partners are more prone to suffer psychological violence, which confirms the theory of status inconsistency. Only the existence of structural gender inequalities explains this finding; basically, the cause is the prevailing patriarchal system, that is, a traditional social system of male domination.⁽²⁴⁾ In this way, it is considered that men use psychological violence to restore the patriarchal order based on the subordination of women, which is threatened when they have more resources than men.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Given that violence has its roots in structural gender inequalities, big efforts will be needed to eradicate them, because a massive cultural change is necessary. The importance of this theory to

specifically explain psychological abuse has been stressed by Yount and Carrera.⁽²⁸⁾ These authors highlight that women who have a higher education level than their partners are more prone to suffer psychological abuse, but not physical: in these cases – because of their higher educational level – women have enough power in the relationship to prevent physical assaults. Future research studies should look into the way this theory also explains (or not) physical violence in Argentina.

This work has been an introductory approach to psychological violence in couples in Argentina, and there are still many topics to be delved into. Future research studies should consider other factors connected to violence, which have not been analyzed here, such as structural and/or contextual ones. At the same time, it is paramount that other types of violence – physical, sexual, economic – be explored, so that the specific risk factors connected to each of them can be identified. The development of combined intervention strategies to eradicate all types of violence is essential. This article is a starting point that sets the guidelines of future research studies.

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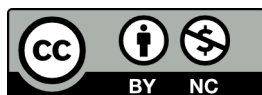
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