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‘Between Coercion and Consent: A Study on Male Sexual Violence in Heterosexual Partner Relationships’.

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Between Coercion and Consent: A Study on Male Sexual Violence in Heterosexual Partner Relationship

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Abstract

Objective: We present an analysis of the main characteristics of male sexual violence in partner relationships (types of sexual behaviour, male coercion methods and women's reactions) as well as their prevalence. **Method:** The sample consisted of 110 women who attended public specialist support centres for women over 12 months. For the study, the women were grouped according to whether or not they mentioned partner violence (PV or NPV respectively), in an *ex post facto* design. Semi-structured interviews were used for the Exploration of Sexual Violence (ESV). **Results:** Descriptive, statistical and comparative analysis of the information showed no statistically significant differences in the types of sexual violence, that the most common method of coercion used is physical force, and that the most significant reactions are explicit refusal in the case of the PV group and active participation and feigning enjoyment in the NPV group. **Conclusions:** Our data shows that, when it is explored, both the PV and the NPV groups describe the male sexual violence exerted by their partners.

Keywords: Male Sexual violence; partner violence; types/methods; reaction/prevalence; ex post facto study.

Entre la Coacción y el Consentimiento: Un Estudio sobre la Violencia Sexual Masculina en las Relaciones de Pareja Heterosexuales

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Resumen

Objetivo: Presentamos un análisis de las principales características de la violencia sexual masculina en las relaciones de pareja (tipos de comportamiento sexual, métodos de coerción masculina y reacciones de las mujeres), así como su prevalencia. **Método:** La muestra constaba de 110 mujeres que acudieron a centros públicos de apoyo especializado para mujeres durante más de 12 meses. Las agrupamos, para su estudio, en función de haber referido (VP) o no violencia en la pareja (NVP), en un diseño ex post facto. Utilizamos la Entrevista Semiestructurada para la Exploración de la Violencia Sexual (EVS). **Resultados:** el análisis descriptivo, estadístico y comparativo sobre la información revela que no hay diferencias estadísticamente significativas en los tipos de violencia sexual; que el método de coerción más comúnmente utilizado es la fuerza física y que las reacciones más significativas son el rechazo explícito en el caso del grupo PV y la participación activa y el disfrute fingido en el grupo NPV. **Conclusiones:** Nuestros datos muestran que, cuando se explora, tanto el grupo PV como el NPV describen la violencia sexual masculina ejercida por sus parejas.

Palabras clave: Violencia sexual masculina; violencia en la pareja, tipos/métodos; reacción y prevalencia; diseño ex post facto.

Regarding sexuality as an essential part of being human is certainly nothing new, and yet there is still a long way to go when considering the sexual rights of women. The World Health Organization ([WHO], 2017, November 29), defines sexual violence against women in partner relationships as a serious public health problem and a violation of women's rights.

According to its figures, 30% of women who have had a romantic relationship during their lifetime will have experienced physical and/or sexual violence (...). However, a closer examination of sexual violence – one of three types of partner violence (physical, psychological and sexual) extensively identified in the scientific literature (Ferrer-Pérez, Bosch-Fiol, Sánchez-Prada & Delgado-Álvarez, 2019; Labrador, Fernández- Velasco & Rincón, 2010)– reveals the use of different terms that are not exempt from ideology. These terms, according to Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut & Johnson (2018), lead us to understand sexual violence against women as an internalised mechanism of inequality, which is made more effective by the silence surrounding its use, and has been targeted and given a voice by the feminist movement in recent years from a critical social perspective (Cobo, 2000; Garcia, 2020).

In what form is sexual violence present in partner relationships? What are its characteristics? In what form is sexual violence present in partner relationships? What are its characteristics? What methods are used to carry it out? What response does it produce in victims? How prevalent is it? There are two objectives guiding these questions: to raise awareness of sexual violence towards women in heterosexual partner relationships and to identify its characteristics, offering knowledge applicable to clinical and educational interventions.

In-depth research into sexual violence against women within partner relationships has found few studies and a lack of tools to help establish its prevalence and characteristics (Bagwell-Gray, Messing & Baldwin-White, 2015; Mahoney & Williams, 2007; Rubio-Garay, López-González, Carrasco & Amor, 2017). Some intervention protocols and risk assessments include sexual violence within non-physical violence and do not explore it specifically (Campbell & Soeken, 1999; Pérez & Stevens, 2019). Other authors, such as

Echeburúa, Amor, Loinaz & Corral (2010) and López-Ossorio, et al. (2018), examine it using a Likert-type scale; a dichotomous assessment resulting in a single item: your partner has sexually assaulted you/forced you into sex yes/no; a lot/not much, not at all, and so on; and there is little exploration of the frequency, type, coercion and reactions of women experiencing sexual violence.

Some authors attribute this lack of exploration and research to insufficient training for professionals working with women who have experienced gender violence, in areas such as primary care (Murphy, 2019), education services (Sanabria & Murray, 2018) and national security services and the armed forces (López-Ossorio et al. 2018; Menéndez, Pérez & Lorence, 2013), and the limited academic education available in the field of sexuality (Chen & Barrington, 2017). This lack of exploration is striking given that forced sexual activity is a risk factor associated with manslaughter and murder (López-Ossorio et al. 2018; Martínez-Sanz, Mañas-Viejo, & Pons-Salvador, 2016).

Forms of Sexual Violence Against Women within a Heterosexual Relationship

The literature reviewed identifies different criteria for studying the different forms of sexual violence: the victims' perspective, aggressors' motivation, sexual activity and the type of coercion used. From the victims' perspective, the 2005 multi-country study by the WHO names three types of male sexual violence behaviour that women experience in their partner relationship: being forced to have sexual intercourse against their will, having sexual intercourse out of fear and being sexually humiliated.

The 2007 review by Mahoney and Williams, meanwhile, suggests aggressors have four motivations for raping their wives (romantic relationships). These are: a desire for sexual, and not necessarily physical, dominance; to cause physical and sexual injury; to act out sexual fantasies and deviances, and, finally, any other reason not covered by those above.

The type of activities criteria is explored by authors such as Dutton & Painter (1993); Mestre, Tur & Samper (2008); and the Professional action

framework protocol for gender violence of Council of Social Welfare (2003) and Council of Family and Equal Opportunity (2008), which establish up to 15 types of non-consensual forced sexual behaviours that are neither exclusive nor excluding and that may occur simultaneously: sexual touching without masturbation; sexual touching with masturbation; vaginal penetration; anal penetration; using objects to penetrate the rectum or vagina; oral sex, cunnilingus or fellatio; exposure of the genitals and/or naked body; viewing pornography; using objects or clothes for sexual purposes; sexual activity with people outside the couple; sexual activity with minors; sexual activity with animals; watching others engaging in sexual activity; filming or photographing people who are naked or engaging in sexual activity.

Behind all these types of sexual violence lies a disregard for consent and male sexual pleasure. Lastly, a study by Finkelhor and Yllö in 1983 examines criteria relating to types of sexual violence and ways it is carried out (coercion). It acknowledges four different types of coercion in which forced sex takes place within a partner relationship (marriage in their case): 1) Social coercion (beliefs related to marital duties and expectations about the role of sex. 2) Interpersonal coercion, men using their resources: threats of leaving the family, financial and social abandonment and even extramarital affairs. 3) Threats of force, which may be implicit or explicit. 4) Physical coercion, beating, asphyxia... simply physical force.

Dutton & Painter (1993) also suggested four very similar types (physical force, threats of physical injury, threats of negative consequences and social pressure). Stermac, Bove & Addison (2001) added drug and alcohol abuse, which removes women's free will and, to a lesser degree, assaults on women while they are asleep and the use of weapons. More recently, the 2015 study by Bagwell-Gray et al. distinguishes four categories according to the combination of two dimensions: the type of sexual activity (sex acts with penetration) and the type of coercion (with or without physical force).

Finally, the review by Rubio-Garay et al. (2017) discusses three basic methods: the use of physical force, sexual abuse and violating women's freedom. Our view of women's sexuality is defined by physical, psychological and social coercion, and consent, a consent not exempt from complexity

(Afloarei & Martinez, 2017). First defined in California in 2014 (Perez, 2017), the concept of consent requires a cognitive change (Mañas, et al., 2017) in the power relations between the sexes.

Women's Reactions to Sexual Violence in Heterosexual Partner Relationships

There is scant analysis of women's responses and/or attitudes to sexual violence in partner relationships in the reference literature. In the USA, a nationwide study on female rape and other types of sexual coercion within partner relationships (Basile, 2002) found that women who did not want to engage in sexual activity with their partners gave in and consented when presented with the following behaviours: when they felt it was their duty (61%); when their partners forced them to have sex after a romantic situation such as giving them a massage, kissing them, etc. (33%); when they hoped to get something in return, such as a present (32%); when their partners relentlessly asked or begged them (23%); when their partners threatened to physically hurt them (20%); when their partners used verbal intimidation or any kind of humiliation relating to their self-worth (14%).

The 2015 macro survey on violence against women, conducted by the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality ([MHSSE]), asked how women reacted after violence. Participants reported feelings of powerlessness about the situation (60.7%), sadness (59.8%), anger (58.4%), fear (51.6%), anguish (49.9%), shame (38.7%), guilt (30.1%) and aggression (19.1%). The 2018 Partner Relationship Violence Protocol (López-Ossorio, González, Buquerín, García & Buela-Casal, 2017), used a dichotomous approach to ask whether women reacted defensively to violent situations.

The Prevalence of Sexual Violence in Heterosexual Partner Relationships in the General Population

The WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women (2005) reports the prevalence of sexual violence inflicted by

partners as varying between 6% and 59%. Japan has the lowest figure of recorded sexual violence and Ethiopia the highest. The study of European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) reports that 22% of women experience physical or sexual violence. The WHO world report on violence and health (2017, November 29) estimates that the prevalence of sexual violence ranges from 23.2% in developing countries and 24.6% in the Western Pacific to 37% in the Eastern Mediterranean and 37.7% in East Asia. A study at European level indicates a prevalence of 6.1% (Sanz-Barbero, Pereira, Barrio,&Vives-Cases, 2018). The MHSSE (2015) reported a prevalence of 6,6% and it indicates that only one in three women reports their partner to the police, which gives an idea of the difficulty of gaining a clear picture of the real figures. In Spain, the General Council of the Judiciary (2019) reports that sexual violence has increased by 7.9% in the last five years. In addition, it reports that the type of violence and its duration – of between two and eight years – are related to academic education and age.

Prevalence in Women Who Mention Gender Violence

In Mexico, Saltijeral, Ramos & Caballero, (1998) observed that three out of four women taking part in their study had been forced into sexual activity by their partners. The study by Sosa & Menkes (2016) reported that 1.7% of women had been raped by their boyfriend. A study in Ecuador found the prevalence of sexual violence to be 20.3% (Yera Alós & Medrano Allieri, 2018). Rubio-Garayet al. (2017) found that sexual violence varied between 0.1% and 64.7% in studies of unmarried couples.

This high variability coincides with other studies also conducted with young unmarried couples (Meza, 2018). All these data underscore the importance of this research, the objective of which is to study and conduct an in-depth analysis of male sexual violence against women in partner relationships.

Method

Participants

A total of 110 women attending a public specialist support centre for women (local authority and/or community-based) were studied over 12 months. The group consisted of 80 women who had requested psychological care due to gender violence (PV) within their partner relationship, and 30 women who had requested legal assistance for relationship issues and who *a priori* had said they had not experienced gender violence (NPV) in their partner relationship. Intentional sampling was used with a selection strategy based on the following criteria for PV ($n= 80$), excluding women whose attendance related to sexual abuse or sexual assault outside the partner relationship, such as abuse suffered in childhood, sexual assault at work, etc. In the NPV group ($n= 30$), those attending the centres for other reasons, such as for problems with their children, work-related issues, etc., were excluded. Women diagnosed with a serious mental disorder were also excluded from both groups. Two groups were formed for the study: PV ($n= 80$) and NPV ($n= 30$). The aim was to analyse and explore sexual violence within their relationships, as well as its characteristics, the women's reactions to it, and its prevalence. Sociodemographic information and details of their relationship history were collected.

Instruments

The instrument used was the semi-structured interview for the exploration of sexual violence towards women in partner relationships (ESV) (Martínez-Sanz et al. 2016), specifically designed to explore sexual violence in heterosexual relationships and based on work by Echeburúa et al. 2010, Labrador, Rincón, De Luis & Fernández-Velasco (2004) and Matud, Padilla & Gutiérrez (2009).

Procedure

In all cases the ESV was conducted by professionals from the fields of psychology and sexology with over five years of experience working with women experiencing partner violence. All the women were told the purpose of the study and gave their consent. The interviews were conducted over one or two sessions of one and a half hours each, depending on the needs of each person, and within an atmosphere of empathy. A cross-sectional and comparative descriptive statistical analysis was carried out between the PV and NPV groups in an *ex post facto* design (Montero & León, 2007). It was expected that statistically significant differences between the two groups would be seen in the variables that make up the characteristics of sexual violence: types of forced sexual behaviour, male coercion methods used by partners, women's reactions and the prevalence of sexual violence. This study met the ethical standards of the last version of the Declaration of Helsinki and has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Alicante (Spain). All 110 participants provided written informed consent.

Statistical analysis

Calculations were performed for the frequencies and percentages of the different variables in the descriptive analysis of the sociodemographic characteristics, the partner relationship, and the sexual violence, and the PV and NPV groups were compared. To verify the existence of statistically significant differences between the two groups, the most appropriate statistics were used for each: *Chi-square* for the variables of “nationality” and “have been forced to...”, and *Cramer's V* for the variables of “age”, “marital status”, “number of children”, “level of education”, “employment status”, and “partner relationship history”. *Fisher's exact test* was used for the variables of “unwanted sexual behaviours”, “coercion method”, and “woman's reaction”.

Results

The sociodemographic profile consisted of women primarily between 30 and 60 years old, with a basic level of education and in very insecure employment, with young children, and who were divorced or going through divorce proceedings. As expected, no statistically significant differences were found when comparing the two groups (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Results of sociodemographic analysis, comparing PV and NPV

	Total(N=110)		VP (n= 80)		NVP (n= 30)		V/X ²	p
	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Nationality							X ²	p
Spanish	105	95.5	75	93.8	30	100	1.96	.16
Immigrant	5	4.5	5	6.3	0	0		

Table 1 (Continued).

Results of sociodemographic analysis, comparing PV and NPV

Age							V	p
<29	17	15.4	14	17.6	3	10.0	0.20	.60
30-59	91	82.7	36	45.1	13	43.3		
>60	2	1.8	2	2.5	0	0		
Marital status								
Single	28	25.5	22	27.5	6	20.0	0.24	.26
Married	16	14.5	8	10.0	8	26.7		
Separated/divorced (legal or in process)	66	60.0	51	63.8	16	53.3		
No. children								
0	15	13.6	13	16.3	2	6.7	0.41	.68
1-2	80	72.8	53	66.2	27	90.0		
3-4	15	13.6	14	17.5	1	3.3		

Table 1. (Continued)

Results of sociodemographic analysis, comparing PV and NPV

Education level								
Uneducated/primary education	48	43.6	37	46.3	11	36.7	1.96	.05
Graduate	34	30.9	18	22.5	16	53.3		
Vocational education/ Baccalaureate	19	17.3	16	20.0	3	10.0		
University studies	9	8.2	9	11.3	0	0		
Employment situation								
Unemployed	49	44.5	36	45.0	12	40.0	0.66	.51
Employed (self-employed/employee)	35	31.8	26	32.5	10	33.3		
Undeclared work	21	19.1	13	16.3	8	26.7		
Student	4	3.6	4	5.0	0	0		
Retired	1	0.9	1	1.3	0	0		

Analysis of the history of the partner relationship and the duration of its different phases showed that the length of time spent as a couple before living together (unmarried couple) was less for the PV group ($V= 0.37$; $p<.01$). In addition, it is notable that 88.2% of the women (97 W) who took part in the research (73 PVW/91.3% and 24 WNPV/80%) said that they had ended the relationship and cohabitation (see Table 2).

Table 2

Results of analysis of the history of partner relationship, comparing PV and NPV groups

	Total		VP		NVP		V	p
	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Current situation								
No breakup and No cohabitation	2	1.8	1	1.3	1	3.3	0.22	.16
No breakup and cohabitation	9	8.2	4	5.0	5	16.7		
Breakup and Cohabitation	2	1.8	2	2.5	0	0		
Breakup and no cohabitation	97	88.2	73	91.3	24	80.0		
Duration of dating relationship (without cohabitation)								
< 1 month	5	4.5	4	5.0	1	3.3	0.37	<.01
≥1 month <6 months	16	14.5	16	20.0	0	0		
≥6 months <1 year	28	25.5	22	27.5	6	20.0		

Table 2 (Continued).

Results of analysis of the history of partner relationship, comparing PV and NPV groups

≥1 year < 5 years	37	33.6	26	32.5	11	36.7
≥5 years <10 years	17	15.5	7	8.8	10	33.3

The descriptive analysis of the characteristics of sexual violence highlights that there were no statistically significant differences between the PV and NPV groups in terms of the types of sexual behaviour they felt forced into. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the highest frequency behaviours among both groups were vaginal penetration (62 PV W/ 77.5%; 9 NPV W/30%) and sexual touching (59 PV W/ 73.8%; and 10 NPV W/ 33.3%). Next, although at distance, women from both groups mentioned oral sex (35 PV W/ 43.8%; and 3 NPV women, 10%) and masturbation (32 PV W/ 40%; and 3 NPV W/ 10%). In the PV group, 25% (20 women) and almost 7% of the NPV group (2 women) said that they had engaged in unwanted anal sex. The women in the study reported other types of sexual behaviour with lower frequency, such as using pornography (12 PV women, 15%; and 3 NPV women, 10%) or exhibitionism (3 PV women, 3.8%; and 2 NPV women, 6.7%).

It is striking that “felt forced into sexual activity with other people” was not mentioned by any of the participants. (see Table 3)

Table 3.

Results of types of unwanted sexual behaviours, comparing PV and NPV groups

	Total		VP		NVP		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Touching	69	62.7	59	73.8	10	33.3	0.67	1
Masturbation	35	31.8	32	40.0	3	10.0	1.50	.31
Oral sex	38	34.5	35	43.8	3	10.0	2.26	.18
Vaginal penetration	71	64.5	62	77.5	9	30.0	2.29	.26
Anal penetration	22	20.0	20	25.0	2	6.7	0.57	.71
Insertion of objects	7	6.4	7	8.8	0	0	1.23	.58
Use of pornography	15	13.6	12	15.0	3	10.0	0.63	.42
Sex with other people	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-
Use of clothing/objects	5	4.5	5	6.3	0	0	0.88	1
Exhibitionism	4	3.6	3	3.8	1	3.3	0.46	.45
Sex with animals	1	1.0	1	1.3	0	0	0.17	1

With regard to the coercion method used by their romantic partner, gathered through questions such as: “What does he do when you say no?”, statistically significant differences were obtained for the PV group in the categories of: physical force, 35% of the women in the PV group (31 W) and

none of the women in the NPV group ($F = 8.55; p < .01$); emotional blackmail and/or insistence was noted by 67.5% of the women in the PV group (54 W) and 20% of the NPV group (6 W) ($F = 11.05; p < .01$); insults and/or being belittled was stated by 53.8% of the women in the PV group (43 W) and 6.7% of the NPV group (2 W) ($F = 7.85; p < .01$); and finally, financial blackmail was identified by 23.8% of the women in the PV group (19 W) and none of the women in the NPV group ($F = 4.08; p < .05$) (see Table 4).

Table 4.

Results of coercion methods, comparing PV and NPV groups

	Total		VP		NVP		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Physical force	31	28.2	31	38.8	0	0	8.55	<.01
Threats	49	44.5	44	55.0	5	16.7	1.54	.28
Emotional blackmail, insistence	58	52.7	54	67.5	6	20.0	11.05	<.01
Financial blackmail	19	17.3	19	23.8	0	0	4.08	<.05
Insults and/or belittlement	45	40.9	43	53.8	2	6.7	7.85	<.01
Shouting	37	33.6	34	42.5	3	10.0	1.98	.19
Hitting furniture	30	27.3	28	35.0	2	6.7	2.13	.18

For women's reactions to sexual violence, the analysis shows that 73.8% of the women in the PV group (59 W) and 26.7% (8 W) of the NPV group said they reacted with explicit refusal. This difference was statistically significant for the PV group ($F = 4.79$; $p < .05$). 61.8% of the PV group selected passive participation (68 W), making it the most common reaction for this group, while active participation was most often stated by the NPV group, at 36.7% (11 W). Among the NPV group, feigning enjoyment was reported in the same proportion as explicit refusal (8 W, 26.7%) (see Table 5).

Table 5.

Results of women's reactions, comparing PV and NPV groups

	Total		VP		NVP		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Explicit refusal	67	60.9	59	73.8	8	26.7	4.79	<.05
Passive participation	68	61.8	59	73.8	9	30.0	1.76	.22
Feigning enjoyment	58	52.7	50	62.5	8	26.7	0.24	.69
Active participation	65	59.1	54	67.5	11	36.7	1.79	.34
Crying	47	42.7	41	51.3	6	20.0	0.45	.52

The descriptive analysis of the prevalence of sexual violence was carried out by analysing the variable “have felt forced to engage in a sexual behaviour”, which as expected, showed there was greater prevalence among the PV group (63 W, 78.8%) than the NPV group (10 W, 33.3%); a statistically significant difference ($X^2 = 20.16$; $p < .001$) (see Table 6).

Table 6.
Results of analysis of sexual violence, comparing PV and NPV groups

Have felt forced	Total		VP		NPV		X^2	<i>p</i>
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Yes	73	66.4	63	78.8	10	33.3	20.16	<.001
No	37	33.6	17	21.3	20	66.7		

Conclusions

This research was carried out with the participation of 73 women who said they had experienced sexual violence and 37 who said they had not. The sociodemographic data obtained is consistent with the results of other studies also involving women using public support services (Sanabria & Murray, 2018; Sanz-Barbero et al. 2018; Yera Alós & Medrano Allieri, 2018), who have insecure employment and social status, are caring for children, and have a low level of education. This may increase the perception of financial and emotional dependence, encourage the victim’s family and social isolation and increase the severity of violent physical and sexual behaviour by the aggressor (Martínez-Sanz et al. 2016; Rubio-Garay et al. 2017; Year, Alós & Medrano Allieri, 2018). Only 8.2% (9 W) of all participants had not ended the relationship or cohabitation, but the decision to move in together was taken more quickly by women in the PV group.

This can be related to the impulsiveness, emotional dependency and lack of assertiveness which many studies have suggested are psychological characteristics of victims of gender violence (Momeñe, Jáuregui & Estévez, 2017; Santos-Iglesias & Sierra, 2010).

When examining the sexual behaviours they have been coerced into and focusing on their partner's reaction to their refusal, women identify the

different types of violence, the coercion methods, their reaction and its prevalence. (Demers, Roberts, Bennett & Banyard, 2017). No statistically significant differences in the types of sexual violence were found between the two groups (PV and NPV). The frequencies are statistically similar, in both ascending (oral and vaginal penetration, touching and masturbation, etc.) and descending form. Only one behaviour, “forced to have sex with third parties”, was not mentioned by any of the participants, which would coincide with the invisibility and internalised normalisation of sexual control and the deterrent to infidelity (Armstrong et al. 2018; Saltijeral et al. 1998).

Coercion methods, just like other types of violence, are neither exclusive nor excluding. Our results concur with those found by Dutton & Painter (1993), Mestre et al. (2008), Pérez & Stevens (2019) Rubio-Garay et al. (2017) and Yera Alós & Medrano Allieri (2018), and coercion methods can be considered in terms of physical force, psychological and social coercion, and violation of free will through the use of drugs and weapons, etc. (assault or abuse).

When asked the question, “how do you react to sexual violence?” the women in the PV group answered, “by explicitly refusing”, in keeping with the results of those who feel that they suffer the greatest physical and sexual punishment and who are at greatest risk (López-Ossorio et al. 2018 and Martínez-Sanz et al. 2016). For the NPV group, however, the most common reactions are letting it happen, active participation and feigning enjoyment to “get it over with as soon as possible”. A response that points to better economic and social adaptation to the heteronormative (Sosa & Menkes, 2016), which would demonstrate that the perception of physical and sexual violence increases with age, education and reduced financial dependency.

None of the women’s reactions are effective; none of them manage to stop their partner, and so forced sexual activity, which lasts eight years on average, often seems normal to them (Garcia, 2020). Along the same lines, the macro survey on violence against women in Spain (MHSSE, 2015) notes that most women do not report their partners because they do not think the sexual violence that they experience is important.

The 2017 review by Rubio-Garay et al. also suggests that we relate it to a socio-cultural context which has been unable to destroy the myths around sexuality and false beliefs, such as sex being a “marital duty”, that men need more sex than women (Finkelhor & Yllö, 1983) and the woman's responsibility for her partner's actions (Sosa & Menkes, 2016). Again, the complexity of consent (Afloarei, & Martínez, 2019) highlights, on the one hand, the need for a cognitive change in the perception, understanding and relationship between the sexes (Mañas, et al. 2018). On the other hand, a precise definition of consent is key to overcoming sexual violence, which in turn underpins gender violence.

Lastly, we note that the studies reviewed for the examination of the prevalence of sexual violence reported lower frequencies than those found by this study (66.4%). Year, Alos & Medrano Allieri, (2018) reported sexual prevalence to be 20.3%. Labrador et al. (2010) reported sexual prevalence varying between 20% and 54%. Basile & Hall (2011) and Sanz-Barbero et al. (2018) found the prevalence of sexual violence to be 8.8% and noted that it was associated with the financial, social and personal vulnerability of women with children in their care.

The difference may be due to the fact that none of the studies reviewed specifically explores sexual violence in partner relationships. In our study, which is limited in its sample and in which the NVP group is receiving psychological support, the data indicate that women in neither group admit at first any abuse and/or sexual aggression by their partners. We relate this to the invisibility of sexual violence and its consequent “normalisation” (Armstrong et al. 2018; Saltijera et al. 1998; Sosa & Menkes, 2016). In this regard, it is not paradoxical that the use of fun wanted pornography is more frequent in the NVP group (Cobo, 2019).

In our study, whether or not the women mentioned an experience of gender violence had no bearing on whether they suffered sexual violence and none of the strategies used to stop it was effective.

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