

Severity of physical dating violence among Spanish adolescents: a matter of meaning?

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Background

During last years have risen a lot of studies about **Physical Dating Violence (PDV)**. Boys and girls are involved in these behaviors more than expected (Foshee & Mathew, 2007; Simon et al., 2010; Strauss, 2004). However the most of this literature has not identified the severity of the aggression or the frequency in which it occurs. Some previous studies have pointed out that PDV follows an increasing aggressive pattern, beginning with moderate forms of violence and developing them to more severe aggressive behaviors (Foshee y Reyes, 2009; 2011; O'Leary et al., 2009).

Method

Participants:

2695 Spanish adolescents (48.6% boys, 51.4% girls), aged 15-20 ($X=16.76$; $s.d.=1.24$), with present or past romantic relationship were interviewed in terms of their involvement on PDV.

Instrument:

Physical Dating Violence (Straus, 1979; adapt. Nocentini et al., 2010): 9 items aggression/victimization.

AGGRESSION: 2 scales: moderate/severe aggression

Girls: CFA (N=1388; $df=17$; $c^2=118.538$ ($p=.000$); $NFI=.950$; $CFI=.956$; $RMSEA=.066$ (.055-.077))

Boys: CFA (N=1126; $df=18$; $c^2=104.296$ ($p=.000$); $NFI=.974$; $CFI=.979$; $RMSEA=.065$ (.053-.078))

VICTIMIZATION: 2 scales: moderate/severe victimization

Girls: CFA (N=1401; $df=17$; $c^2=146.451$ ($p=.000$); $NFI=.944$; $CFI=.950$; $RMSEA=.074$ (.063-.085))

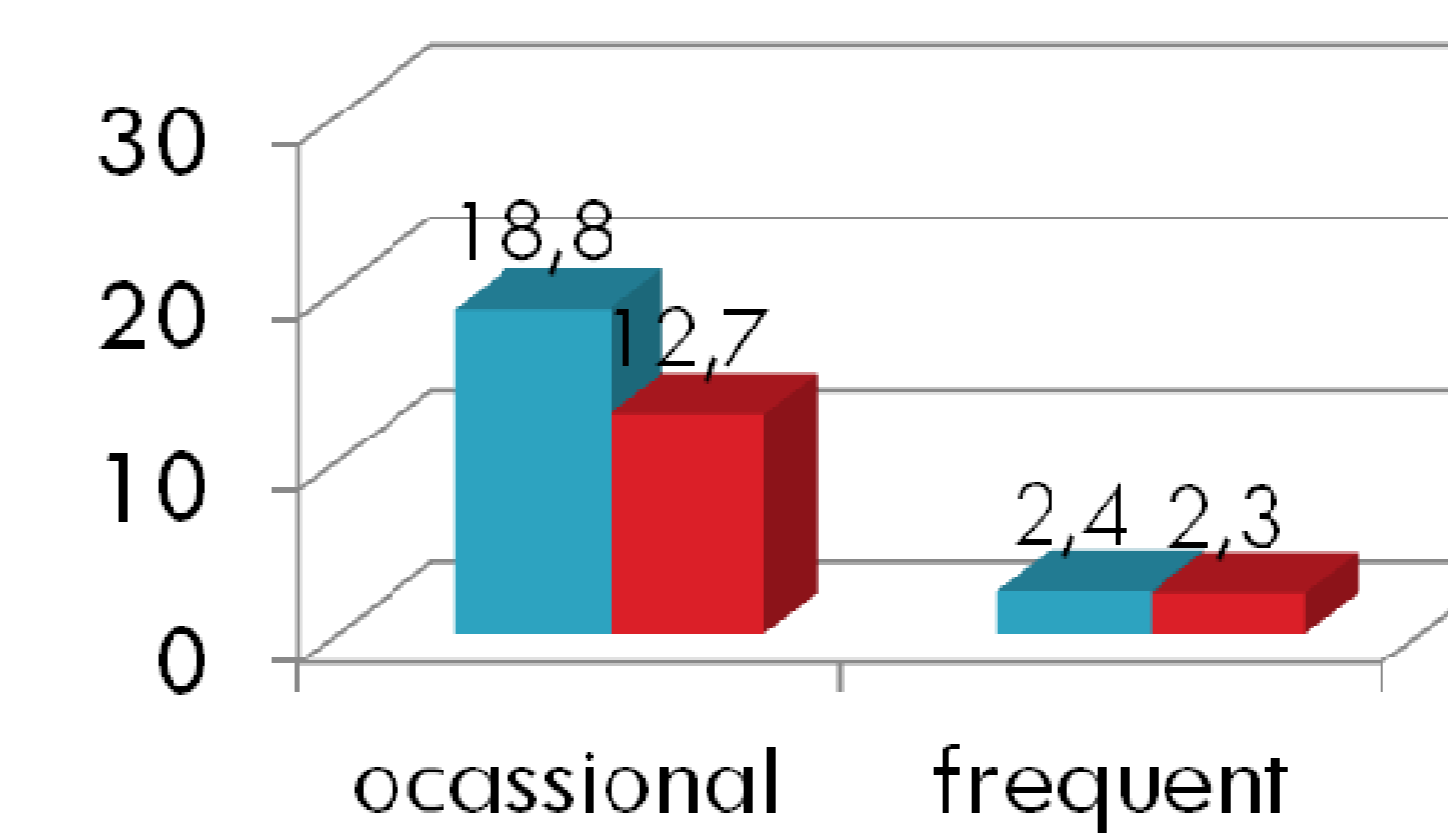
Boys: CFA (N=1147; $df=23$; $c^2=190.629$ ($p=.000$); $NFI=.961$; $CFI=.965$; $RMSEA=.080$ (.069-.090))

Analyses:

Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) and descriptive analyses. Software SPSS 15.0 & AMOS 16.0

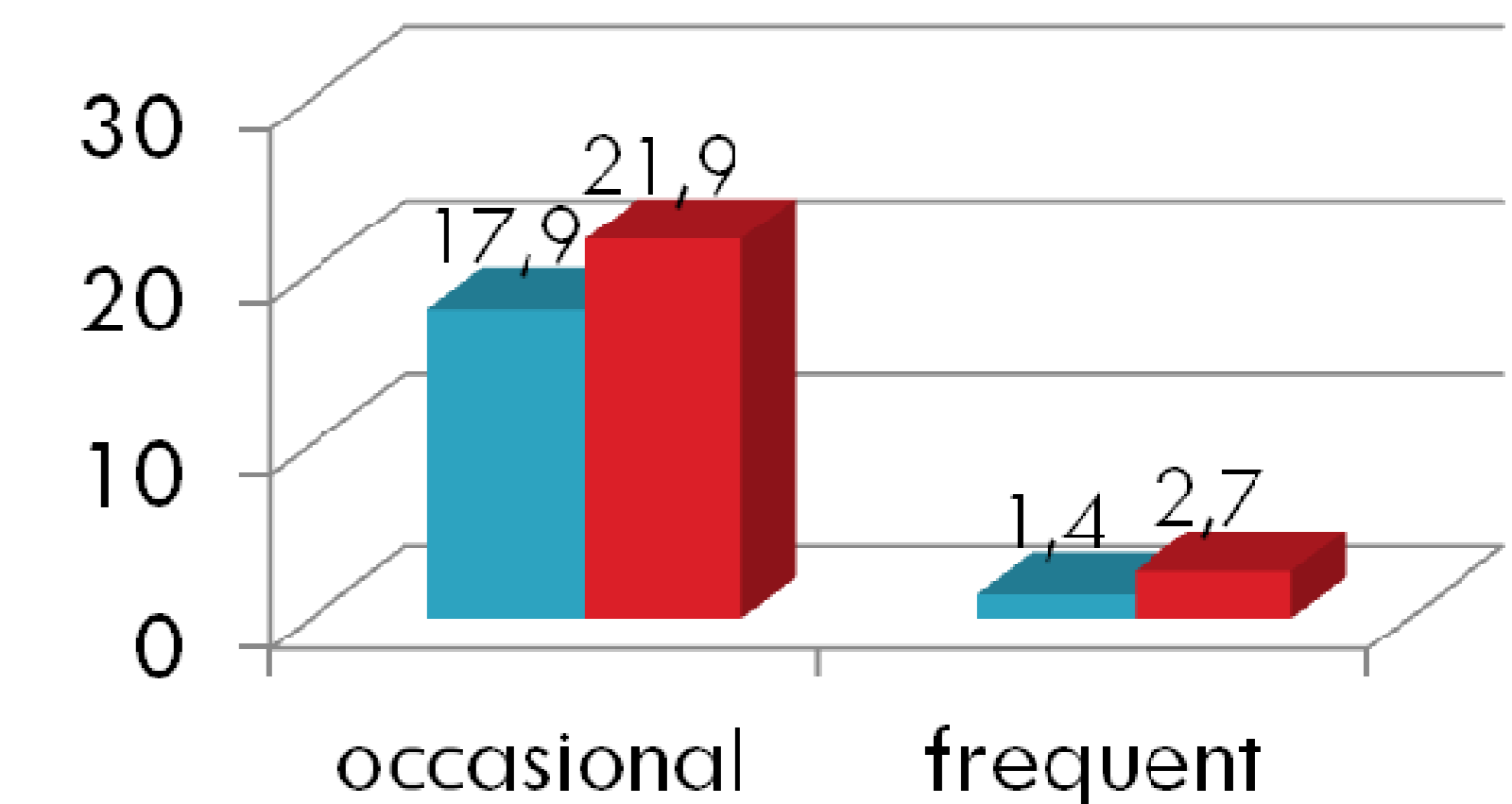
Aim
 To analyse boys' and girls' involvement in PDV within their couples, as well as the severity of these aggressive behaviours.

Moderate aggression

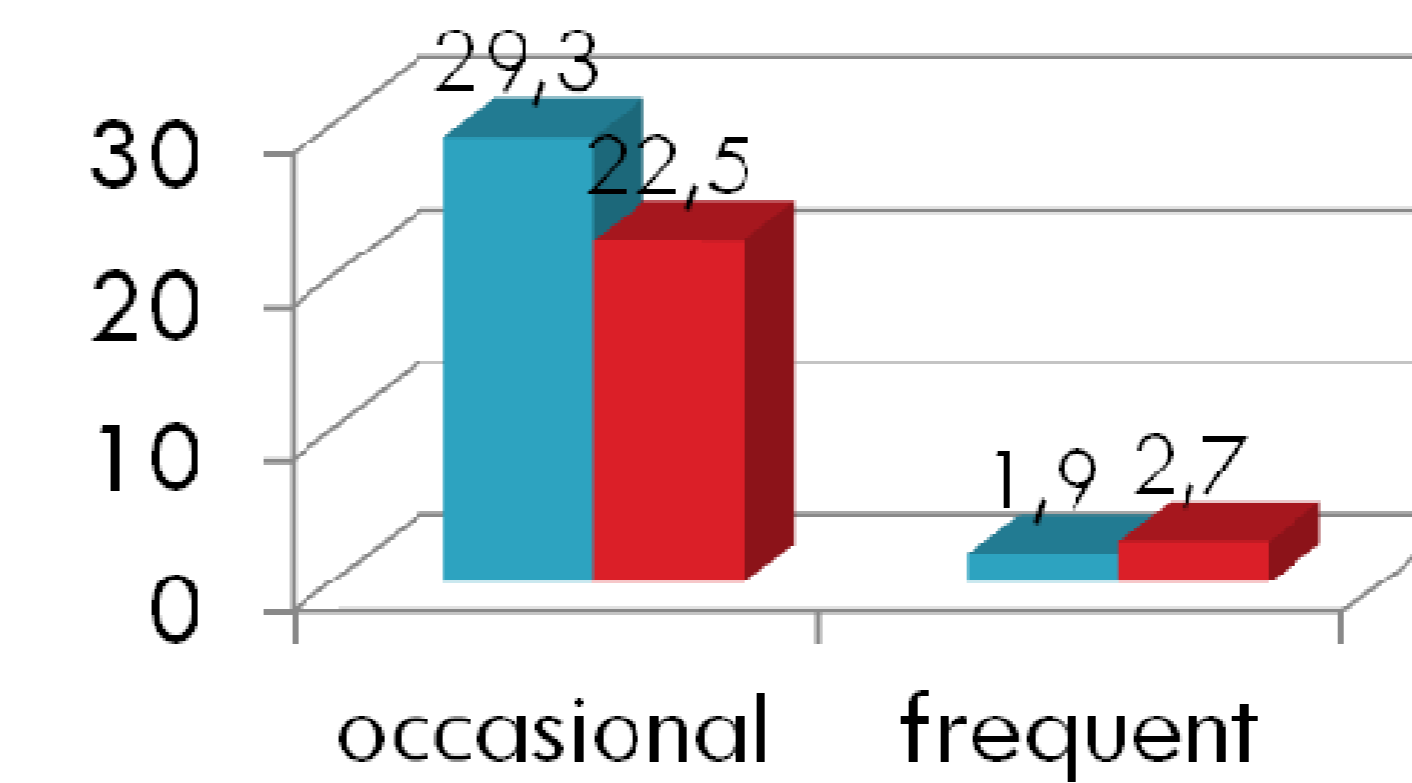


INVOLVEMENT

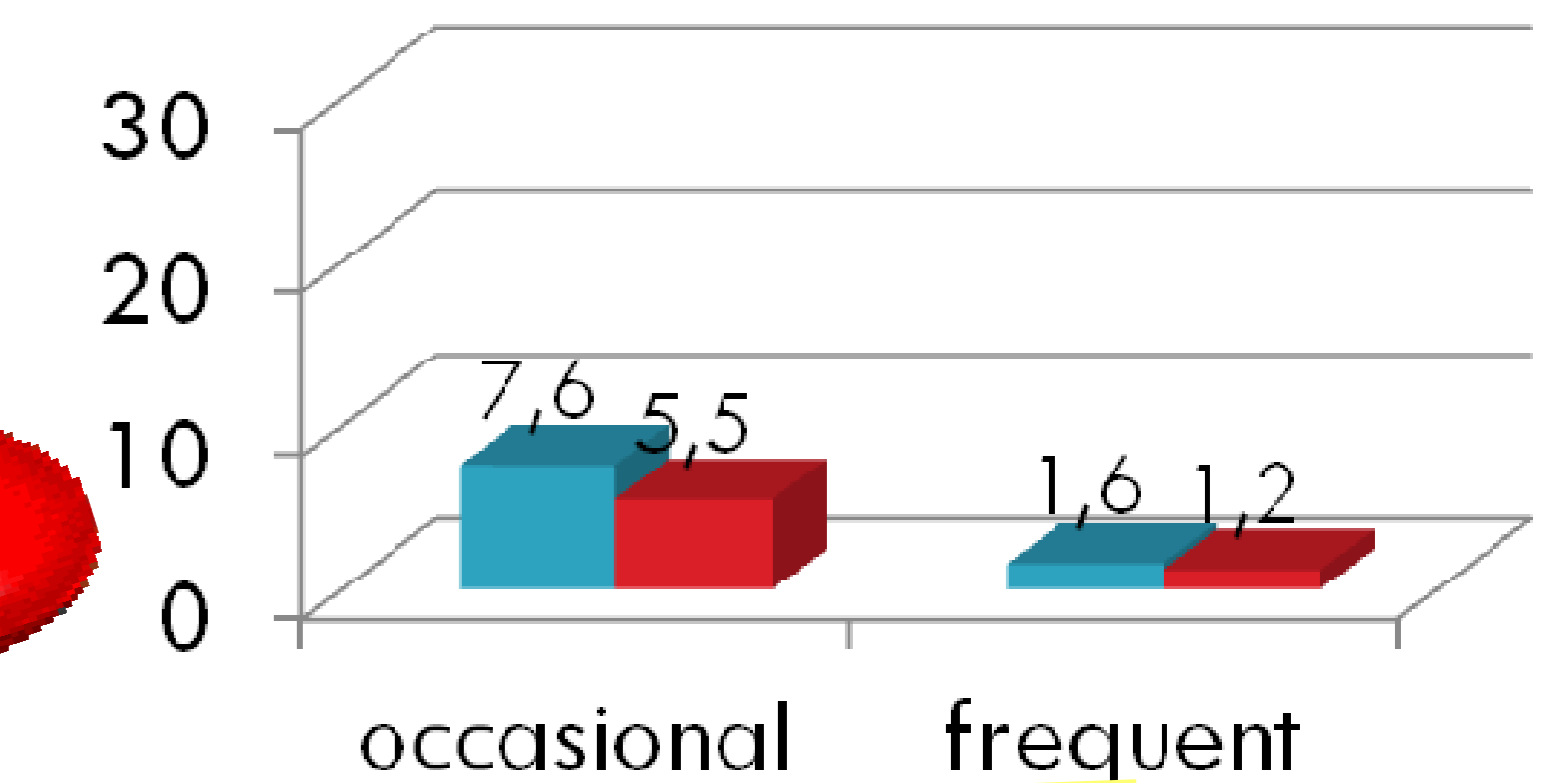
Severe aggression



Moderate victimization



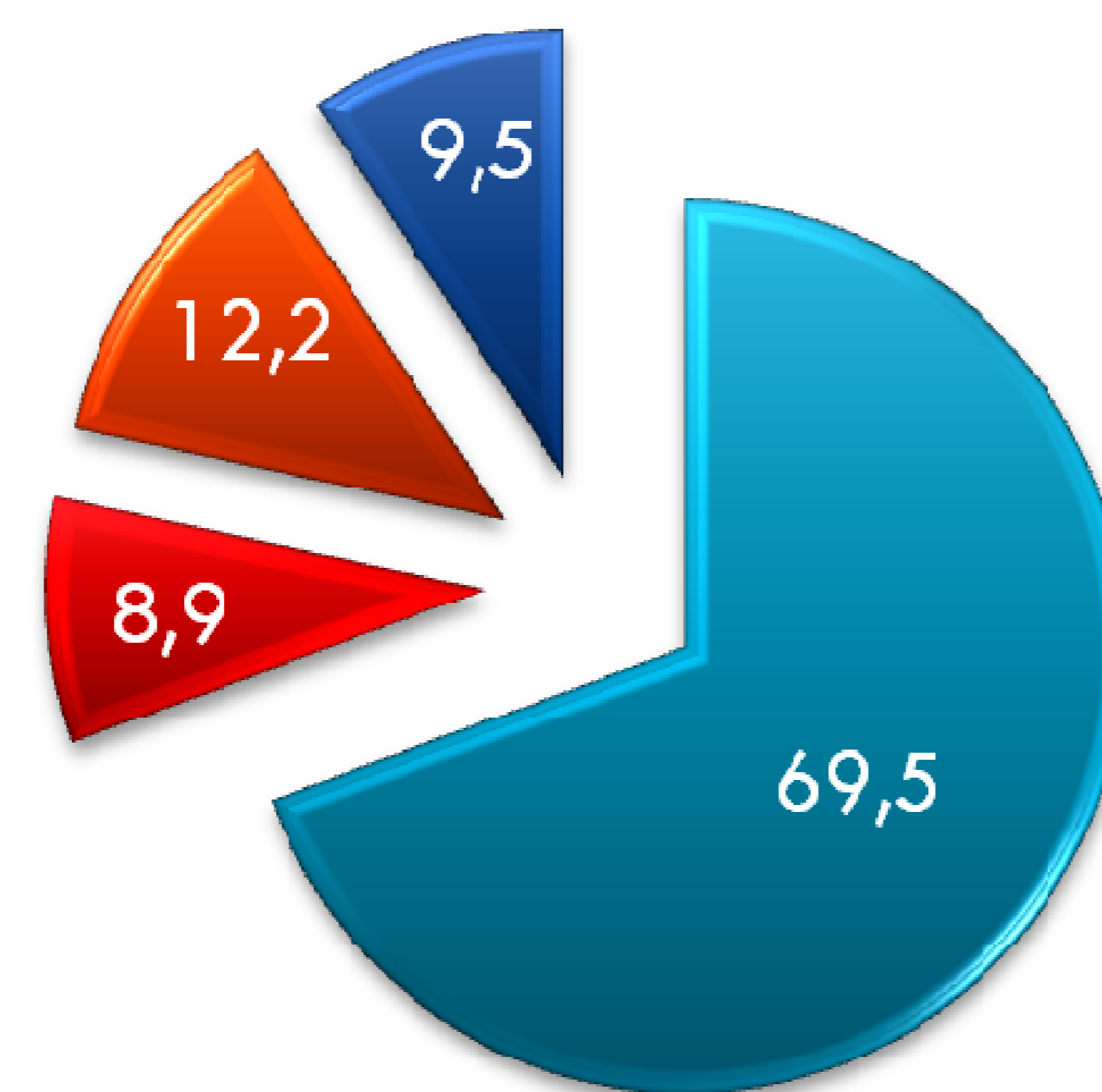
Severe victimization



SEVERITY



- Not involved
- Moderate victimization
- Severe victimization
- Moderte+severe victimization



- Not involved
- Moderate aggression
- Severe aggression
- Moderate+severe aggression

Results and discussion

INVOLVEMENT. As shown in earlier studies, involvement was shown to be above all occasional (Menesini & Nocentini, 2008; Ortega et al., 2008; Sanchez et al., 2008), with very similar results for both boys and girls. The higher involvement levels found (around 23% victims and 30% aggressors) may support the theoretical approach taken by Ortega et al. (2008; 2011), which suggests the establishment, at the outset of the dating relationship, of an erotic-aggressive pattern consisting of simple, relatively unstructured communicative elements manifested in the form of mutually aggressive behavior (dirty dating). This dynamic would act as a crude pattern of interaction for establishing initial affective contact with a partner. Nevertheless, the results have pointed out different patterns for moderate and severe violence: even when moderate aggression and victimization showed similar rates, it doesn't occur for severe aggression. The explanation may lie in the different ways boys and girls interpret dating violence. As White et al. (2000) pointed out, this type of behavior must be evaluated in context, taking into account not only the conduct *per se* but also how it is interpreted by the person involved and the factors which leading up to it. No sex or age differences were found.

SEVERITY. The results also showed that abuse and victimization followed different patterns. In line with scaling theory (for example, Straus & Gelles, 1987), victimization may be interpreted as following a pattern which begins with milder forms and gradually progresses to include more severe forms of suffering. Aggressiveness, however, is seen to occur indistinctly in both mild and severe forms, sometimes even combined. This may indicate that boys and girls do not really perceive a scale of seriousness in these forms of violence. However, no firm conclusions can yet be drawn in this regard. Future studies specifically focusing on adolescent perception of violent behavior may throw more light on the issue.