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NARRATIVES AND BELIEFS ABOUT GENDER VIOLENCE AND DATING RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract

For this research we intend to analyze gender violence and couple relationships, where we study what kind of attitudes and perceptions young adults and adolescents have about gender violence and analyze the symbols and meanings that they manage in their relationships. The methodology used is qualitative: creation of focus groups, in-depth interviews and participant observation in social and educational scenarios. This design allows the study of both individual thoughts, rhetoric and perspectives, as well as group narratives. Society, school and family play a fundamental role in deconstructing and de-normalizing these discriminatory and violent attitudes and behaviors that have survived over the years and are occupying a real and prominent place in society. Young people and adolescents assume, in many cases, these premises as truthful and incorporate them into their life patterns. In conclusion, educational options are presented from the contributions of the research participants, in a meeting of authors and good practices that can avoid gender violence and open up new theoretical discussions.

1. Introduction

Gender violence is recorded because it includes multiple representations such as: psychological violence, physical aggression, abuse and sexual exploitation that affect women simply because they are women. We can say that gender acquires relevance in violence since the beliefs and stereotypes assumed from generation to generation are still present and stipulate the guidelines of the attitudes and behavior of many adolescents in the different scenarios of both their private and public lives (Iniesta, 2015; Muñoz and Iniesta, 2016). Gender violence becomes increasingly more complex to register and address, since the social normalization of gender inequality explains its deep roots and permanence and, therefore, the difficulty of its elimination in individual thinking and behavior, as well as social relationships.

Analyzing the relationship of couples in adulthood is currently indisputable due to its social relevance, it is even more highlighted by the data found at the beginning of the first affective relationships between young adults and adolescents where the primitive emotional bonds are established. It is at this stage where abusive and dependent relationships can be established and formalized, which leads to the establishment of oppressive relationships (Rodríguez, Sánchez, & Alonso 2006).

At present, many young people maintain toxic and harmful relationships where dependence and emotional exclusivity is the main foundation on which the so-called "love" is based (Bosch et al., 2007). This leads to a situation of normative violence that remains subject to acceptance and social invisibility, it is followed as a form of communication approved by young adults (De Miguel, 2015; Bonilla, Rivas, & Vázquez, 2017). In recent years, social networks have transformed the way in which young adults speak, communicate, relate and interact with each other, giving the virtual world an extended time in their lives (Estébanez and Vázquez, 2013). This virtual space becomes the context and space for the reproduction of gender inequality and sexism where factors such as ideals of romantic love and the exhibition of personal life converge that result in new signs of control and violence within the couple (Megías and Rodríguez, 2014).

If we study how the escalation of violence happens, we see that it is an ascending process that happens in a very subtle way. It is hidden and accepted under the mistaken beliefs of romantic love (Esteban & Tavora, 2008). The cycle of escalation of gender violence begins with behaviors that are socially normalized and hide under loving expressions. These behaviors reproduce over time, with greater power, and reduce the capacity for trust, confidence, and self-esteem (Rodríguez et al., 2006; Díaz-Aguado, 2006). The way these behaviors proceed in the beginning are isolated events that are justified and that tend to increase in their frequency and intensity. These behaviors are denied as gender violence by both victims and perpetrators who understand this way of relating as part of their way of life (Garaigordobil, Aliri, & Martínez-Valderrey, 2013; Canals and Megías, 2016).

This escalation of violence develops gradually, from expressions of psychological violence, with controling behavior, deprivation and humiliation to other types of manifestations that increase in severity such as verbal aggression or physical aggression. The ambition to control and obtain power over the other person or even verbal violence is justified as a manifestation of love that is accepted by the victim as part of the relationship. The numbers increase as more and more young adults are mired in violent relationships but do not recognize, in many cases, that they are experiencing gender violence (Iniesta and Invernón, 2015; Díaz-Aguado, 2006; De la Peña, Ramos, Luzón, & Recio, 2015; Díaz-Aguado and Carvajal, 2011).

To prevent gender violence, it is fundamental to influence the cognitive aspects of the construction of identity, the deconstruction of the concept of love and of desirable love models, and of the male and female models that we consider attractive. The work of raising awareness with young adults necessarily involves making manifest what is not recognized even as we have seen it "systematized". In this sense, psychological violence, in its multifaceted expressions, happens unnoticed in many cases and in others it is "assumed" as part of the dating relationship, with physical violence being the fastest recognized and denounced (Ruiz, 2016).

2. Research Methods

The empirical phase of the study was aimed at identifying the social conditions and variables associated with attitudes, beliefs and behavior of young adults regarding gender roles, relationships and gender violence. The qualitative methodology was used because there was no barrier to limits the communication between the researched object and the researcher. The two main techniques of qualitative methodology are discussion groups, also called group meetings, and in-depth interviews, also called qualitative interviews (Corbetta, 2003).

The main tools utilized in this study were the formation of discussion groups. This is a technique that guarantees the free play of opinions of a group of people (Martínez, 2006), groups of 7 to 9 young adults were chosen, selected according to the variables considered a priori, and what has happened in their lives surrounding the topic of gender violence. The authors Dorio, Sabariego, & Massot (2004) summarize it as follows: "the discussion groups consist of a qualitative technique that enables the researcher to become alienated from the participants and discover how they see reality" (pp. 343).

The heterogeneity of the discussion groups facilitated the achievement of the different objectives and obtained information from the subjects, while at the same time obtaining more operational information on a specific topic and the relationships between the subjects. The most commonly used instruments were: participant observation, field diary, discussion groups, group interviews and in-depth interviews.

We intend to create an open circle, in which the collaborators can reflect and re-construct their own narratives.

3. Findings

The researchers observed to subjects' rhetoric about how love should be: assertive, tolerant, respectful, "think for the other person", have a project for the future, emotional stability, feedback, feel loved, maintain independence, among many other characteristics that identify behaviors and beliefs of what is established as romantic love.

Through the use of new information and communication technologies, the control of their private lives and their friendship relationships was perceived and established, continuous harassment is through the networks by which private secrets or disclosure of private images, propagation of offenses, insults, threats, extortion, coercion.

"Another girl said that her partner has asked for her cell phone to see her whatsapp, and she showed it to him without any problem" (Girl).

"I know friends who this has happened to them and that they control everything in their social networks. If they upload photos, if they like something from other guys and they give them passwords so they can see everything" (Girl).

"They pretend to be their partners on social networks as they have their passwords, it's so easy. I've met girls who have had it happen to them and [their partners] have insulted the boys they had tagged" (narratives of the discussion group).

"It is so normalized today. On Instagram you can access all other sites if you know the last connection. (narratives of the discussion group).

In their recountings they express the lack of respect, the verbal abuse that is also shown through manipulation, personal ridicule in front of family or friends, insults, verbal humiliations, and shouting:

"The boyfriend of my friend does not let her have her own opinions; he is always right about everything, and she already created this notion and won't let go of it. We have already spoken with her, in many occasions, but we are already tired of it because she just doesn't what she wants "(Girl).

"The verbal abuse is the most common because it is easy for them to insult you" "that does not seem violent" "Through the Internet is easier to insult you because you do not know who it is and they can hide" (report of the workshop).

Domination and authority is presented as a barrier and restricts the decisions and free opinions of the victim. It limits them from going out and interacting with friends, imposes their partner's authority and silences their decisions.

"We have a friend that her boyfriend took her off the city bus because she was dressed in tight white pants and a shirt with a low neckline and she got off and went to her house to change her clothes and she did not come out. She's still with him "," If he tells you that he is alone so you can't leave him, you can't leave him alone, then you stay with him and you stop going out with your friends and in the end you are alone without any friends "(report of the workshop).

Isolation precludes and / or hinders their social relationships with friends and family, limits their outings exclusively with him and represses all contact in social networks.

"This is not that strange, it happens a lot in a couple, in the end they are left alone, they become dependent on each other" "I could not stay with my lifelong friends because he did not like them and I said that he always wanted to be with his friends, and [my friends] were a good influence on me but I did what he told me. I came to believe him. Now that I'm not with him, I realize things and I think how I could have done it. You are not aware of what you're doing. "(narratives of the discussion group).

Emotional harassment is present in the group's conversations, exposing that indifference is a common characteristic. In many cases, a partner does not show attitudes of affection or support. They reward or punish with their expressions of affection or indifference:

"If they leave you aside and do not pay attention to you that is not right, they do it hoping that you'll suffer", "many boys want to date the prettiest girl but then they do not let her leave. They leave her

in the house, or let her only go to the movies and that's it, but only with him "(narratives of the discussion group).

Intimidation is another form of gender violence that is presented with threats and physical approach to create fear, control and submission in the victim. He makes clear the physical power he has over her, resorts to shouting as a means of intimidation and power. He destroys her personal objects and uses driving to scare them:

"The girls who put up with this do not leave them because they are scared, they have to be very afraid because there is no explanation for being with someone who does those things" (narratives of the discussion group).

Physical violence is presented with pushing, pulling hair, slapped, kicking, throwing objects, burns, assault with weapons until, in the worst case scenario, murder:

"Many girls put up with this, I have a friend whose boyfriend started hitting her across the face or pushing her, but she justified it and did not say anything. Her parents did not know anything. She hid it and we could not do anything, nothing would happen when we tried to tell her, she was so blind." (narratives of the discussion group).

Sexual violence: Obligation to have unwanted sexual relations, either by force or through the use of intimidation, aggression, coercion or blackmail. Rape.

"You keep having sex without really knowing what you're doing, without any love, just to please your partner, and as she has told you that you have to do it, so you do it, many girls do this" "many do not feel anything and do things because they are threatened or because he tells her that she has to do it and that's what girlfriends do" (narratives of the discussion group).

4. Conclusion

The situation we found is alarming. The sexest ideas and behavior do not diminish as people grow older, but actually increase from a young age. It is therefore essential to build trainings in favor of equity, visualization and recognition of unequal behaviors and attitudes. These trainings should promote prevention and awareness, starting in co-educational primary classrooms. (De la Peña et al., 2015; Díaz-Aguado and Carvajal, 2011). For this reason, we approached this study from the real and imminent need to establish spaces for reflection and construction of new paradigms that benefit personal relationships, and spaces where young people can express their stories and concerns about gender violence with the objective of investigating prevention proposals that eliminate behaviors and normalized attitudes of gender violence.

The first conclusion of the discussion groups is presented in the collaborative narratives. The qualitative analysis of the reflections of their narratives allows us to assess and identify the characteristics of the discussions and assess the position and relevance of gender violence by group. This favors generating collectivities where consciousness is awakened, and we emphasize that violence can not be prevented by just an individual, but by reflection and discussion where adolescents and young adults become aware and change their attitudes.

It is necessary to break down mental, social and institutional barriers so that transformation is possible and not mere lip-service that does not eradicate gender violence but makes it stronger at young ages, as we analyze in the speeches presented. It is necessary to evolve so that the changes actually reach institutional spheres and are effective. At the same time, the creation and / or modification of specific projects and programs of social intervention in gender violence is vital since those that already exist are scarce and, in many cases, ineffective, as the subjects recount in their narratives.

Throughout this process there are difficulties and benefits. The benefit generated by collaborative work is self-help: a synergy is generated among the participants, favoring networking. The main difficulty is time: the work never seems to be finished. At the same time, this is a benefit. Since there is more of a need to talk, transfer new themes, and return to the origin point, there is no hurry. The knowledge can wait to be democratized, because in the process new knowledge emerges, and old reflections are reiterated which educates the listeners and results in solidarity.

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