CARACTERÍSTICAS DE LOS AGRESORES EN LA VIOLENCIA HACIA LA PAREJA
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGGRESSORS TOWARD COUPLE

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RESUMEN

La violencia hacia las mujeres es un problema de salud pública que ha sido ampliamente abordado por la literatura. Los estudios centrados en el agresor son más escasos por las dificultades de acceder a la población. En este artículo se busca realizar un acercamiento a las características demográficas, de consumo de alcohol y psicológicas que particularizan a los agresores, para ello se triangulan los resultados de dos investigaciones llevadas a cabo en un asentamiento del distrito de Villa el Salvador. Los resultados muestran que ni las variables demográficas ni el consumo de alcohol de los agresores están asociadas a la aparición de la violencia física y emocional hacia las mujeres aunque el último factor puede ser considerado un desencadenante de la agresión hacia la mujer; la presencia de celos e inestabilidad afectiva percibidas por la mujer en su pareja son factores de riesgo para la violencia emocional mientras que la asertividad percibida en su pareja es un factor protector de la violencia emocional. En la discusión se aborda la insuficiencia de estas variables para explicar las razones de la violencia hacia la mujer por lo que se tiene que recurrir a elementos del contexto sociocultural para tener una mejor comprensión de la agresión.

Palabras clave: Agresores, violencia hacia la mujer.

ABSTRACT

Violence against women is a public health problem that has been widely discussed in the literature. The studies focusing on the aggressor are limited for the difficulties of access to the population. This article seeks to make an approach to the demographic, of alcohol consumption and psychological characteristics that distinguish to the aggressors, so, we analyze the results of two research carried out in a settlement Villa El Salvador. The results show that neither the demographic variables nor the consumption of alcohol by the aggressors are associated with physical and emotional violence against women although alcohol consumption may be considered a trigger for aggression toward women; the jealousy and emotional instability perceived by women in their couple are risk factors for emotional violence while assertiveness perceived by couple is a protective factor of emotional violence. In the discussion covers the insufficiency of these variables to explain the reasons for the violence against women, therefore it is necessary to resort to elements of the sociocultural context to get a better comprehension of the aggression of man against woman.

Key words: Aggressors, Violence Against Women.(estudio 1) y la experiencia de las autoras en el tema de violencia y en investigación cualitativa. Su naturaleza flexible permitió que ésta se convierta en un «disparador de información»

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Introduction

Violence against women in the interior of the homes is a problem of public health in Peru as evidenced by statistics. According to the survey of Mental Health held in Lima in 2002, 47% of women have been victims of some kind of violence in their life (National Institute of Mental Health Honorio Delgado - Hideyo Noguchi [INSM HD - HN], 2002). 90% of abuse reported to the national police of Peru in 2010 were carried out against women 18 years or older and have 82% of complaints as an aggressor to the couple or family (http://www.dirfapasec.gob.pe).

In addition, as evidenced by the news media, the violence of the man towards the woman has as a result in many cases the death of the victim. From the data collected between 2003 and 2005, the estimation was reached that each month, on average, at least eight women are killed by their partner or family in Peru. According to this study, murderers expressed the main reasons for committing the crime in 2005 were jealousy and infidelity (44 and 14% respectively) and denial of wishes to fulfill wishes of the murderous (11%) in particular denial of fulfillment of sexual desire in man (11%) (Flora Tristan, 2005).

Given this psychosocial problematic, at the Institute of Research of Psychology of the University of San Martin de Porres research and interventions have been realized in the theme backdrop of a human settlement in the area of Villa el Salvador. One of these studies carried out between the years 2008 and 2009, aimed to identify risk factors and protective factors for violence against women, the second study was a qualitative research carried out in the year 2009.

One common outcome to both researches is that the characteristics of offenders have greater weight in the presence of physical and emotional violence that women receive compared with the characteristics of the victims. In this way, the results allow us to describe the demographic, consumption of alcohol and psychological characteristics of men who commit acts of physical and emotional violence toward their partners.

In relation to demographic characteristics, recent surveys have shown that in our country, most of the attackers have a primary level of studies and lower percentage of higher studies (INEI, 2006). This survey also shows that a large percentage of offenders work providing lower services (masonry, plumbing, etc.) as well as also performing manual tasks. On the other hand, although age is not a distinguishing feature between violent and non-violent husbands according to INEI, it was found that most of the attackers were in higher age ranges (45 to 49 and 50 more years), still very few being young offenders.

Within the consumption habits of the aggressors, the literature gives special attention to the use of alcohol as a risk factor for violence against women (Keiley, Keller & Jasinski, 2009; Stikley, Timofeeva & Sparen, 2008; Thompson, Saltzman, & Johnson, 2003); in this sense, the meta-analysis of Black (1999) describes significant associations between 21 and 57 between the consumption of alcohol or excessive intake of alcoholic beverages by the couple and aggression towards women. The aforementioned INEI (2006) survey found that about 50% of battered women have alcoholic couples in Peru.

Despite these associations, the exact role that the alcohol use plays in violence against the couple is still in debate, so some authors consider that alcohol increases the probabilities of aggressive occurrence events in the couple by reducing inhibitions and impair judgment and proper interpretation of signals or to give rise to discussions. Meanwhile, other authors argue that this association only occurs in cultures in which there is social expectation that alcohol consumption releases the male from responsibility for their actions (World Health Organization [who], 2003). Finally, it is considered that the consumption of alcohol is a source of discrepancies to the inside dynamics of the couple (Stickley et al., 2009).

Within the psychological aspects that characterize the aggressors, the literature review reports that these show little tolerance to frustration as well as difficulties to solve problems and communicate properly. Other characteristics reported by the literature make reference to jealousy, irritability, impulsivity (Kaufman & Jasinski, 1998) and affective instability (sudden changes in mood) as psychological characteristics of the aggressors. Fernandez - Montalvo and Echeburúa consider that these characteristics create at home a propitious environment so different scenes of violence will trigger (cited in Echeburúa & De Corral, 1998).
These psychological or personality characteristics of the offender are influenced by the characteristics of the family of origin, thus it has been found that family breaking during childhood (Soria & Rodríguez, 2003) and the own experience of physical abuse during childhood (Echeburúa, 2003) are determining factors for a man exercising abuse towards their partner.

Another element in this sense, is the style of parenting received by the offender; Some authors argue that this may have been authoritarian (Owen & Straus, 1975 cited by Soria & Rodríguez, 2003) while others mentioned that many of the abusers were bred in an overprotective or permissive manner, where the mother kept a submissive behavior against the spouse and children (Echeburúa, 2003).

Dutton (2000), considered the early combination of having witnessed or having directly experienced violence or shame and a type of unsafe attachment contributes to the formation of a type of abusive personality in males.

In this sense, the subsequent conduct of males would reproduce the authoritarianism of the father and the role of women in the home, thus repeating the pattern of interaction of violent parents as a way to identify with him and to control the closeness and distance in relationships.

Based on these considerations, we analyze the demographic characteristics of alcohol consumption and psychological of the aggressors from the triangulation of results from two studies—one quantitative and other qualitative—performed on a human settlement in the area of Villa el Salvador.

Method

Study 1

This study of quantitative cut was carried out to identify protective and risk factors for violence against women.

Participants

Participants were 192 women whose ages range from 25 to 59 years (M = 34.09 and DE = 6.5). Almost all participants had primary studies (42%) or secondary (44%). Mostly they live with their partner (96%) and they have no work outside the home (76%). With respect to the couples, 56% have secondary education and 32% primary, almost all of them work outside the home in manual or technical occupations.

All of the homes in the community where the study was conducted (n = 606) were visited, but only 192 women were interviewed—one of each home—in the rest of the houses it was not possible to do the interview because (a) the houses were uninhabited, (b) the mother’s family was not present, or (c) the mother did not meet the inclusion criteria (be over 18, being married, being married or living with your partner in a stable way and have at least a son or daughter of 5 years of age). Only 5% (n = 9) of women that were found in their home met the criteria, and refused to participate in the study.

First, the leaders of the community gave its authorization for the study, then the women were visited in their homes, interviews were carried out in front of their homes or in a place that allowed them to maintain the privacy of the same. Prior to being interviewed, the participants signed the informed consent and retained the anonymity of the interviewed throughout the process.

Measurement

We used a survey specially built for this research. Given that the study considered other elements in addition to those reported in this article, the complete survey explored two themes: (a) occurrence of physical and emotional violence received by women and exercised by their current partners or ex-partners, and (b) presence of potential associated factors grouped according to the ecological model of Brofenbrenner (1979) in individual factors—report of the participants on characteristics of personality and style of communication of both themselves and their partners, consumption of alcohol of the couple, family of origin of the interviewee and their beliefs about violence against women—and relational—report of the interviewee about the behavior of the couple towards the members of the family and conflicts inside the family—.
The instrument was discussed by five researchers in order to evaluate its content, then two pilot studies were carried out to adapt the verbalization of the questions to the characteristics of the studied population.

The surveys were applied by students of past cycles of the psychology career, they received training in the handling of the interview and ethical aspects of working with victims of violence according to the recommendations made by the World Health Organization (1999).

The consistency of the answers was evaluated by the answers provided by participants to pairs of questions assessing the same content in different ways. The correlations obtained from this procedure were found between .240 and .377 ($M = .307, of = .05$).

**Procedure**

The data was processed on the basis of correlations of McNemar in the case of categorical variables. We then selected associations with high statistical significance defined as a $p < .001$; We used this breakpoint according to the Bonferroni adjustment considering the number of calculated correlations. The variables with this level of significance were processed using the logistic regression for possible protective factors and risk analysis.

**Study 2**

In this qualitative study it was explored the social perception of domestic violence by a group of local women.

**Participants**

Participants were 33 women whose ages were between 18 and 53-year-old ($M = 33.3$ and $DE = 7.7$), most of them had secondary education (91%) and engaged in household chores (76%). They were married or cohabitants 88%, while the rest were unmarried or separated; regarding the number of children, 21% had only one child, 64% from two to three children, and only 15% more than three children.

After the authorization of the leaders of the community, women were called through an informal leader of the area, the participants had to live in the area for at least five years. Once gathered it is explained to them the nature of the study requesting their informed consent.

In total six groups were formed with an average of five women per group, each session lasted between 60 and 90 minutes which were entirely recorded with permission of the participants.

**Techniques for collecting information**

Focus groups were used as a technique to collect the information; in this regard, the group was constituted as a space for discussion of ideas and arguments given by the own mothers and it was used to reproduce the social discourse on violence against women.

In the same way than with the previous study, the data presented here corresponds to a larger study (Noblega & Munoz, 2009) and included the exploration of different themes, so that the guide of the focal group explored issues such as:

- Characteristics of the relationship and interaction between the members of the family.
- Characteristics of the violence in the area: shape, intensity, main aggressors and attacked.
- Triggers and factors that impede the emergence of violence: sources of conflict, personal features and styles of communication of the woman and the aggressor.
- Knowledge and beliefs about family violence: types of violence, rights of women and support sites.

This guide was built based on the literature review, the results of the previous research (study 1) and the experience of the authors on the subject of violence and in qualitative research. Its flexible nature allowed this to become an «information trigger» (Gonzales Rey, 1999) which allowed to start the conversation about the issues raised.

**Procedure**

The transcribed material was revised to establish the categories of information emerging for each of the topics explored. All focus groups were encoded using the Atlas Ti program and were then interpreted in a constant dialectic process.
Results

Demographic characteristics of the aggressors

The main demographic variables reported as relevant by the literature review – age, level of education and occupation of couples – were explored in the study 1, the results show that there is no significant statistical association between physical and emotional violence that the female and age receive (r = 0.098 and r = 0.021 respectively for each type of violence), educational level ($\chi^2 = 2.824 p = 0.420$ and $\chi^2 = 0.432 p = 0.934$ to physical and emotional violence respectively) or occupation of the couple ($\chi^2 = 0.133 p = 0.716$ and $\chi^2 = 0.573 p = 0.449$ for both types of violence).

These results do not allow us to say that the demographic characteristics of the aggressors are an element that allows discrimination among women who receive physical or emotional violence and those who do not receive it in the sample.

Since no demographic variables obtained a high significance, these were not processed using logistic regression analysis to identify risk factors for violence against women. In the same way, by the nature of the variables there are no results in the qualitative study carried out.

Consumption of alcohol by the aggressor

Alcohol use by couples and their relationship with physical or emotional violence was explored both in study 1 and study 2. In the latter (Noblega & Munoz, 2009), it was found that when the man is under the influence of alcohol he becomes aggressive:

«Yes, he is pretty aggressive when dizzy, but when he is healthy no... when he is healthy, he is silent but when dizzy he does a lot of problems» (Woman from the District of Villa el Salvador).

«When the man drinks, abuses the wife, and if the children intervene, it also falls to the children, that is» (Woman from the District of Villa el Salvador).

Although these testimonies reveal the importance of the consumption of alcohol as a trigger of violence in the family, in the study 1 it was found no statistically significant association between the consumption of alcohol by the abuser and physical violence (r = 0.038) or emotional violence (r = 0.041) perpetrated against women.

These results allow us to conclude that for this sample, it cannot be attributed a determining role to the consumption of alcohol on the violence against women although it is possible to act as a trigger in cases in which there are other additional factors.

Psychological characteristics of offenders

The presence of the psychological characteristics reported by the literature as associated with physical and emotional violence towards women, was explored by the study 1. As shown in table 1, the results showed that both emotional instability and jealousy attributed by the wife to the couple, are associated with physical and emotional violence towards women while impulsiveness and irritability were significantly associated only to emotional violence.

Also, in this study a statistically significant inverse association between the attribution of assertive communication style of the aggressor and both types of violence against women, was found, that is when the couple is perceived by women as assertive, it is less likely to go to physical or emotional violence toward her.

Another result shows that the passive-aggressive style of the couple perceived by women has a low association with emotional violence against it; This means that in some cases, emotional violence is accompanied by a passive-aggressive communication by the couple.
Later, to determine risk and protective factors and the magnitude of these, an analysis of logistic regression with variables that reached a high level of significance ($p<.001$) was realized. The results showed that the jealousy and instability that women perceived in their partners are risk factors to make this a victim of emotional violence while the assertiveness of the couple is a protective factor.

In relation to the jealousy it was determined that if the woman has a jealous partner, it has a possibility 3.4 times more likely to be emotionally raped (Table 2). In this same sense, in the qualitative study, participants reported that jealousy is one of the triggers of violence inside of the couple.

«Why do you fix yourself up?, why go, where are you going, what are you doing, why are you late?. That is, it is not my case, but yes I have seen [that women] are hit, are locked up» (Woman from the District of Villa el Salvador).

With respect to emotional instability that women reported as characteristic of the males, it was determined that when the woman is aware of this feature in their partner, they’re more likely to be emotionally abused by 4.8 times (table 2). The importance given to emotional instability was corroborated in the qualitative study that was referred to as characteristic attributed to violent men (Noblega & Munoz, 2009):

«The man to renege must change character. Man is quiet, from one moment to another... the child or your husband already claimed something from you, the man didn’t like it and was already upset, it began suddenly... fast, he launches the hand and does not like being told nothing, a hard man» (woman of the District of Villa el Salvador).

The above mentioned logistic regression analysis that also allowed to show the assertiveness of the couple is a protective factor of emotional violence against women, i.e. when the couple is perceived as a person who uses an assertive communication, it is less likely to have emotional violence against women (Table 2).

### Table 1

**Correlation between characteristics of the couple perceived by women and received physical and emotional violence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics attributed by the female to her partner or ex-partner</th>
<th>Physical violence</th>
<th>Emotional violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impulsivity</td>
<td>.199**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instability</td>
<td>.180*</td>
<td>.401***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritability</td>
<td>.196**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>.219**</td>
<td>.315*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive communication style</td>
<td>-.151*</td>
<td>-.270***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive-aggressive Communication style</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication style</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .0001$

### Table 2

**Risk and protective factors for emotional violence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Exposed to emotional violence (n=72)</th>
<th>Not exposed to emotional violence (n=114)</th>
<th>Beta coefficient</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>X2Wald</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
<th>OR inf. 95%</th>
<th>OR sup. 95%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personality traits attributed by the female to her partner or ex-partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instability</td>
<td>46 (63,9%)</td>
<td>27 (23,7%)</td>
<td>1,575</td>
<td>.394</td>
<td>15,989</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>4,833</td>
<td>2,233</td>
<td>10,461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive communication style</td>
<td>55 (76,4%)</td>
<td>107 (93,9%)</td>
<td>-1,987</td>
<td>.620</td>
<td>10,287</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>0,137</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior of the partner or former partner to the members of the family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner or ex is jealous</td>
<td>47 (65,3%)</td>
<td>39 (34,2%)</td>
<td>1,235</td>
<td>.398</td>
<td>9,653</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>3,439</td>
<td>1,578</td>
<td>7,497</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

This article had as main objective to discuss demographic, consumption of alcohol and psychological characteristics of the aggressors in the violence against women based on the integration of the results of two investigations carried out on a human settlement of the District of Villa el Salvador.

The characteristics of the aggressors were divided into demographic, consumption of alcohol and psychological. Based on the results, we can say that age, educational attainment, occupation and the consumption of alcohol of the potential aggressors are not associated with the violence exercised against women in its physical or emotional manifestations in this sample in particular. While these results may be due to the limitations of size and representativeness of the sample, we can consider that low levels of these types of violence in the evaluated sample (Noblega & Muñoz, 2009) can be one of the reasons why the results raised do not reproduce the findings of national surveys. In this sense more research is needed whose design allows the generalization of the results in this field.

In relation to the absence of association between alcohol and violence, these results would be new evidence to the postulates of Klevens (2007) who believes that alcohol has little explanatory power on violence in Latino communities due to other cultural factors involved. However, we consider that it is needed to further deepen this topic to clarify the true role that alcohol serves in the violence against women in a culture like the one studied.

On the other hand, we can consider that the psychological characteristics of the abuser as they are perceived by the woman were found associated with the presence of physical or emotional violence towards them. Comparing both types of violence, it was found that the presence of emotional violence is related to more features of the aggressor than physical violence, therefore, we consider that this issue should be delved into in further research given the absence of studies that include the particularities of the dynamics of each of the types of violence: physical, emotional, and even the sexual kind that has not been included in this study.

Associations found among the violence towards women with jealousy, irritability, impulsivity and affective instability of the offender as they are perceived by women as well as the stories of these around the characteristics of offending men, corroborate the results of previous studies (Kaufman & Jasinski, 1998; Keiley et. al, 2009; Stikley et al., 2008; Thompson et al., 2003).

Despite physical violence being associated with instability, responsibility and assertive style than the women attribute to their partners, the low magnitude of these associations does not allow us to establish risk factors or protectors for this type of violence. Thus, it is important to continue this line of research to determine if these results are still corroborating and at the same time identify other factors that fulfill this role in the case of physical violence.

A possible line of study in this regard is the influence of the socio-cultural environment, in this sense Lawson (2001) argues that individual characteristics only come to explain the 10-25% of cases of violence. In Peru, the violence has been present throughout the history of the country not only within the family but also social and political scope so it can be considered that the violence is naturalized as a form of interaction in our midst (Flake, 2005; Flake & Forste, 2006). This heritage is expressed through cultural norms that support the operation of most of the families: machismo, Marianismo and familiarism. Therefore the study of risk or protective factors would also be focused on the analysis of these variables.

On the other hand, for the emotional violence the detected risk factors are the affective instability and the jealousy attributed to violent couples. In this regard, we believe that both oscillations between moods and the jealous attitude of the couple contribute to the cycle of violence characterized by alternating episodes of tension, explosion or aggression and reconciliation described by Walker (1989) and keep women in aggressive relations. Also, the results show that the proper resolution of disputes through assertive communication strategies avoids the difficulties of the relationship to be solved through violence.

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Despite that both studies have as limitation that features have been evaluated through few indicators and from women reports, they show results that orient the intervention to be in emotional violence, in the first place they revealed the importance of intervening with batterers providing them with more effective communication strategies and/or providing appropriate psychological care that will help them to better regulate their impulses and emotional states. Also it shows the need that once investigated, it is intervened on socio-cultural aspects that they justify and therefore keep the violence towards women.

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