

Adolescents' Comprehension of Gender-Related Violence: Gender and Cultural Influences

Influencias culturales y de género en la comprensión de las violencias de género en adolescentes

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Abstract

Many studies show that Gender-Related Intimate Partner Violence (GRIPV) is a persistent problem among young Europeans, yet there is a significant gap in the literature when it comes to comparing the Italian and Spanish contexts. This survey study, grounded in a feminist ontological and political perspective, explores how gender ascription and cultural elements shape Barcelona and Milan secondary school students' awareness and perception of GRIPV. We collected 1,216 responses and after a first descriptive analysis, we created some indicators to identify variations in the responses corroborating their consistency through a Validation Factor Analysis. We then used Spearman's coefficient to identify correlations by gender and city. The main findings reveal a general awareness of IPV, which does not immediately translate into the ability to perceive such violence in one's environment or comprehend its gender aspects. Interestingly, young people in Barcelona show a higher level of awareness regarding this issue, whereas those in Milan more frequently perceive the existence of violence in their environment. However, it is crucial to note that gender differences outweigh the cultural ones in terms of awareness of GRIPV. These findings should be considered for future interventions addressing the complexity of GRIPV.

Keywords: youth; intimate partner violence; gender; comparative analysis; survey; cultural influences.

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Resumen

Muchas investigaciones muestran que la Violencia de Género en la Pareja (GRIPV, por sus siglas en inglés) es un problema persistente entre la juventud europea, sin embargo, son escasas las comparativas entre Italia y España. Este estudio por encuesta, basado en una perspectiva ontológica y política feminista, explora cómo género y elementos culturales influyen en el reconocimiento y percepción de la GRIPV por parte del estudiantado de secundaria de Barcelona y Milán. Después de un primer análisis de las 1.216 respuestas recolectadas, hemos definido unos indicadores, cuya consistencia validamos mediante un Análisis Factorial. Tras ello, utilizamos el coeficiente de Spearman para identificar correlaciones por género y ciudad. Los resultados principales revelan que el reconocimiento general de la IPV no se traduce automáticamente ni en capacidad para percibirla en el entorno, ni para comprender sus implicaciones de género. Asimismo, si el estudiantado barcelonés muestra más habilidades para reconocer la problemática, el de Milán la percibir su entorno con más facilidad, no obstante, las diferencias intergénero en el reconocimiento de las GRIVIP son más notables que las culturales. Los resultados que presentamos pueden ser extremadamente relevantes para futuras intervenciones que quieran abordar la problemática en objeto.

Palabras claves: jóvenes; violencia de pareja; género; análisis comparativo; encuesta; influencias culturales.

Introduction and objectives

Research on Gender-Related Violence, as we will explain in this introduction, is a persistent problem among young Europeans. Yet, it is extremely important to understand teenagers' comprehension of it, especially to design and implement effective prevention practices. In this article, based on the results of a study adopting a feminist approach, we would like to present insights for making international action research projects more effective and to avoid the homogenization of interventions. We contribute to this debate starting from an exploratory comparative diagnosis of Italian and Spanish teenagers' knowledge and ability to identify IPV as a form of GRV (hereinafter, GRIPV). Our primary research objective is to detect similarities and differences in GRIPV awareness and perception between adolescents in two large European cities, Barcelona and Milan. Also, given the gender difference detected in the literature between the awareness and perception of GRIPV (Gracia et al., 2020; Rollero et al., 2021), our second objective is to understand how they operate in these two specific contexts.

However, before considering the substance of our research, it is necessary, as we do in the following section, to contextualize and understand the problematic from a feminist theoretical and empirical perspective.

Gender-related violence in contemporary society

In recent decades, there has been significant change to traditional gender roles and improvements in terms of gender equality. However, intimate partner violence (IPV) is

still a serious and widespread problem that affects people of all ages and cultures. Data are not easy to collect, but the WHO (2021) estimates that almost one in three women (aged 15 or above) worldwide have been subjected, at least once in their life, to physical and/or sexual violence, primarily by an intimate partner.

However, the problem has been viewed and tackled very differently. For instance, the expression 'Violence Against Women' (VAW) has become particularly popular and is mostly misused as a synonym for gender-based violence, emphasizing the gender of the subject who suffers the violence rather than its cause.

This misconception also leads to "a social constructionist assessment of 'gender' as a sociocultural overlay upon male and female bodies" (Fox & Alldred, 2022, p. 2). To overcome this reductionist vision, the Spanish expression *Violencias de género* (Biglia, 2007), which can be translated as Gender-Related Violence (GRV) (Alldred & Biglia 2015), is "applied as a concept to critique the contemporary gender order, including gender binarism and gender and sexual normativity's [and] to problematize inequalities and power differentials across all forms of social difference, including race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual orientation" (Alldred & David, 2014, p. 15).

Although, the response to the different expressions of GRV has improved worldwide, it is currently being negatively affected by the political de-democratization process (Lombardo et al., 2021); the backlash against gender equality (Flood et al., 2021); anti-feminist countermovement (Bonet, 2021; Bonet et al., 2023); and post-feminist neo-liberal discourses (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Grint & Gill, 2013). For instance, the post-feminist approach taken by #WeAllAreEqual supports cis-hereto and patriarchal social norms while, at the same time, denying the inequalities that it creates (Gill, 2016).

In this context, it is extremely important to continue appreciating how crucial gender roles and norms are for the reproduction and maintenance of IPV, which must be viewed as a form of GRV, rather than being considered a mere expression of more gender-neutral domestic violence. This is particularly relevant considering that sexist attitudes and beliefs are generally associated with greater legitimization and acceptability of IPV (Gracia et al., 2020).

Furthermore, "the individuals' perspective, awareness, and attitudes about violence against women are strongly associated with actually committing violence" (Rollero et al., 2021, p. 14). Hence, we must consider how adolescents, in their initial sexual-affective relationships, learn to express their feelings, set limits, create relational dynamics, and establish future behavioral patterns (Cava et al., 2022). It is, therefore, particularly concerning that GRV is still extremely present among young people, who experience many of its different forms (Niolon et al., 2017).

But GRIPV expressions are becoming more complex and nuanced and consequently, increasingly harder to understand. On one hand, the political response to Covid-19 led to an intensification of this violence in homes (Casado, 2021; Mittal & Singh, 2020; Moreira & da Costa, 2020). On the other, the design of digital technologies has made the logic of gender violence more complex throughout the different layers of digital environments (Barrio, 2022; Rubio-Martin & Gordo, 2021; Thompson, 2018). This has led to the emergence of misogynistic digital practices that affect sexual-affective relationships (European Parliament, 2018).

Finally, we must consider that as a result of post-feminist neo-liberal discourse, which is quite common among young people in western societies, IPV tends to be attributed to individual failures or wrong choices, where women are mostly to blame, rather than recognizing its structural implications (Storer, 2017). This confirmed tendency to attribute the responsibility for violence to the people who suffer it is an essential simplification of the problem (San Martín, 2022), which also leads to a limited capacity to acknowledge that attacking women's rights is a form of GRV (Rollero et al., 2021).

Gender-related violence among young Italians and Spaniards

International comparative studies in this area are not frequent, and alignment of the data is a complex endeavor due to different data collection processes (Corradi et al., 2020). However, they can provide important insight to help identify trans-cultural patterns and differences.

While Spain is included in many comparative studies (Krahé et al., 2015; Ivert et al., 2018), Italy is much less represented, which is probably because fewer data have been collected in that country (exceptions are FRA, 2014 & Palmén et al., 2016).

The analysis presented in this article compares these two realities as part of the European project Cut All Ties (REF/101005305/CUTALLTIES/REC-AG-2020) that carried out an intervention, using peer counselling and gamification techniques, to change attitudes and awareness of GRV in affective-sexual relationships among young people (ADB & ACRA, 2022; Biglia & Barrio, 2022). Italy and Spain are culturally similar countries, sharing a Catholic background and some common historical specificities in terms of gender roles and feminist movements (Biglia, 2020). They also have similar Mediterranean Welfare States and, due to the recent crises, have experienced parallel reductions in fundamental rights (Gascón-Cuenca, 2019).

However, legislation on gender rights is much more advanced in Spain than it is in Italy (Allred & Biglia, 2015). Spain ranks 6th in the EU Gender Equality Index (2021), while Italy is just 14th (Paniccia et al., 2021).

According to the FRA study published in 2014, lifetime prevalence of IPV in Spain was the lowest in the EU and both its social awareness of the problem and its prevention-assistance services are among the best in Europe (Gracia et al., 2020). On the other hand, the 2019 results show that in the 12 months preceding the survey, Italians not only experienced less discrimination because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or sexual characteristics in their daily life than Spaniards but were also more willing to report it to the authorities, including equality bodies (FRA, 2020).

However, both countries are facing a similar decline in terms of GRV (Palmén, et al., 2016). They are also confronted by a similar crisis-ridden scenario of grievances (regarding precariousness, austerity, material deprivation and so on) that has led to a resurgence of inter-generational solid feminist movements (Chironi & Portos, 2021). But at the same time, the percentage of adolescents who denied the existence of such violence or downplayed its importance is increasing (from 46.1% in 2017 to 67.1% in 2021) (Calderón Gómez et al., 2021).

A recent macro survey of violence against women in Spain (2019) shows that of all young women who had a partner, 19.3% suffered physical or sexual violence, 46.1%

suffered psychological abuse, and 43.8% had been controlled by their partner. The data collected in Italy by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2014), which do not refer solely to IPV, show a downward tendency in the physical and sexual violence experienced by 16-24-year-old females but a higher rate of psychological violence (35%) than among older people.

A small comparative study conducted as part of the WAVE project revealed a similar tendency between the two countries; according to this data, 33% of Spanish female adolescents and 38% of Italians had experienced IPV (Palmén et al., 2016). The latter study also finds that the belief that IPV is ubiquitous in one's environment is greater among Spanish (51%) than among Italian (35%) women. These Italian data are consistent with the finding that as young adults (19-29) hold fewer stereotypes about traditional gender roles, but they are more likely to accept GRV behaviors between partners than older people (ISTAT, 2018).

Method

Population and sample

Three state-funded secondary schools in each city were involved in this research. They were selected from purposeful sampling based on the necessities of the intervention program: the age groups that attended the schools, and the gender ratios were similar across both cities, and the socio-economic status of the areas was also considered.

The two cities involved in this project are quite similar in numerous aspects. Both are the second largest and second most important cities in their country, as well as being the most cosmopolitan and economically very active. They also have similar gross domestic products per capita and progressive city councils. However, Barcelona is more directly committed to feminist demands, as demonstrated by the city having a feminist and LGTBI issues council office with a dedicated budget, while the Milan city council has no such entity (nor any other gender area). Similarly, while in both contexts in 2015, the importance of a coeducational approach was politically recognised, only in Catalunya was this practically observed through implementing via the direct intervention of the administration (Agud et al., 2021; Perez et al., 2023). In Italy, and therefore in Milan "the projects that are increasingly spreading in schools are part of the specific school education plans and therefore are dependent on the choices of managers and teachers, as well as on the economic support which, even today, appears to be absolutely inadequate" (Covato, Borruso, 2020, p.261).

An exploratory analysis of Twitter comments conducted in the framework of this same project (ADBet al., 2021) revealed a backlash against women's rights in both cities.

The study population consisted of students aged 15- to 17-year-old from the participating schools. The sample was 661 in Milan (out of an N of 666) and 554 in Barcelona (out of an N of 567). Almost 98% of the respondents self-identified as girls or boys, and only a tiny percentage as non-binary. In Barcelona, 20% had attended previous training on gender issues at their schools in the last academic year, and almost 30% had participated in women's demonstrations. In Milan, this percentage was significantly

lower; just 6% had received previous training, and 15% had been on a march. In both cases, females more actively pursued women's rights.

Instrument and data collection

The survey (Biglia & Barrio, 2023), administered in the schools between 2021/10 and 2022/02, was rooted in a feminist ontological and political perspective (Bonet & Biglia, 2017) and was evaluated by four experts and five student peers. The project coordinators obtained the approval of ethical consent of all the participants, and of their parents or legal guardians. Before starting the questionnaire, the students were reminded about the confidentiality of their information: neither their teachers, parents nor the school had access to their answers. The participation was voluntary, and respondents could deposit their completed paper questionnaires in a sealed ballot box that could not be opened by the school staff.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed by means of a descriptive statistics analysis. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results show that they do not follow a normal distribution; therefore, we used Spearman's Rank test to analyze correlations. After a first analysis, we decided to group some of the GRIPV-related items in our survey into indicators to better identify differences in the responses for gender and cities. We performed this process from a theoretical point of view; however, this grouping was corroborated through a dimensionality reduction analysis. Validation Factor Analysis (varimax rotation) confirmed the consistency of the indicators, showing a robust interrelationship between their items (KMO = 0.89; Berlet's test = 7644.2; Variance analysis = 37.42).

The first indicator was created using the items that test students' awareness in relation to GRIPV. We group here (a.) their evaluation of the behaviour of the protagonist of the short story presented below and (b.) their agreement or disagreement with the GRIPV behaviours presented.

The students were asked to read the following story and answer question 10 ("How do you rate..." the participants' behaviours) on a scale from 1 (very good) to 5 (very bad).

One Friday afternoon, Laura, who is dating Xavi, tells him that she wants to go out with her friends that evening. While they are partying, Xavi, who knew where they were going, shows up unannounced with some friends. At the party, there are a lot of people from school, including Marcos (Laura's ex). Seeing him, Xavi gets jealous and tells Laura that she should stop seeing Marcos because he is probably still interested in her. Laura gets angry with Xavi. Xavi yells at her, and she decides to break up with him.

For the analysis (a.), we first weight the expressed agreement with the behaviors of the two protagonists of the story, as presented in table 1. We attribute the lowest scores (-3) when students disagree that the female protagonist should be free to see her friends and when they agree with the most violent behaviors. Meanwhile, we give the highest

scores (+3) to the ability to recognize more subtle forms of violence or to support the direct response to the violence.

Table 1

Indicator 1: (a.) Weighting for Control practices aggregate variable

Item		Very good	Good	Indifferent	Bad	Very bad
10.1	Laura goes out with her friends	1	0	-1	-2	-3
10.4	Laura is still Marcos' friend	2.5	1.5	0	-1.5	-2.5
10.6	Laura gets angry with Xavi	2	1	0	-1	-2
10.8	Laura breaks up with Xavi	3	2	1	0	-1
10.2	Xavi appears unannounced	-1	0	1	2	3
10.3	Xavi gets jealous	-2.5	-1.5	0	1.5	2.5
10.5	Xavi asks Laura not to see Marcos	-2	-1	0	1	2
10.7	Xavi shouts at Laura	-3	-2	-1	0	1

Therefore, as shown in Table 2 we aggregate some of the agreement and disagreement with GRIVIP behaviours presented and a couple of items for testing the recognition of the gender dimension of GRIVIP.

Table 2

Indicator 1(b.) Agreement with GRIPV behaviours presented

Aggregate variable	Item	
Non- Accountability of girls	11.1	Girls who are still with a partner who treats them badly are also responsible for the problem
Recognising gender aspects of GRIPV	11.3	Between girl-boy couples, violence occurs in a similar way on both sides

	11.6	When you are dating, letting a partner read your social media messages and sharing your unlock pattern or code is a sign of trust
Digital control	11.7	It is abusive to ask a partner to delete a photo of them from social media because we find it explicit or inappropriate
	11.8	No one should feel obliged to make their relationship visible on social media
Sexual violence	11.10	It is okay to refuse to have sex when you do not feel like it, even if the person you are dating really wants to

(1) *Totally Disagree*; (2) *Disagree*; (3) *Neither agree nor disagree*; (4) *Agree*; (5) *Totally Agree*. *Item with the score reversed*

Finally, we calculated the mean between (a.) and (b.) responses and normalized their results on a scale of 1, representing a lack of awareness, to 5, high awareness.

The second indicator was related to the perception of the existence of GRIPV among peers and was constructed by grouping the responses associated with the same form of violence. Hence, a value of 1 indicates that students consider that these specific behaviors never happen in their environment (no perception), while 5 means they perceive that GRIPV occurs very often (high perception).

The questions were: (q.12) Mark with an X how often you have heard that one of these situations has happened at your school or among your friends and (q.13) For each of the actions that might happen in your class or your environment, state whether you think it happens.

Table 3

Indicator 2. Perception of GRIPV behaviours presented

Aggregate variable	Item	
Sexual violence	12.1	That someone insists until convincing another person to engage in a sexual practice that they do not want
Control practices	12.2	Giving up plans or not seeing friends to please a partner
	12.3	Change of clothing style at the request of a partner
Physical violence	12.5	Receiving a push, slap or hit from one's current partner

Digital control and violence	13.1	Using a mobile phone to control a partner
	13.2	Spying on a partner's cell phone
	13.3	Asking a partner to delete photos from their social media
	13.4	Controlling what a partner does on social media
	13.5	Interfering with a partner's relationships on social media
	13.6	Requiring a partner to send their geolocation
	13.7	Forcing a partner to send intimate images
	13.8	Pressuring a partner into providing their passwords
	13.9	Forcing a partner to show messages from a chat with another person
	13.10	Getting angry about not always getting an immediate online response from a partner
(1) Never; (2) Almost never; (3) Sometimes (4) Often; (5) Very often		

The responses to the items related to question 14: Speaking about yourself, say if these statements are correct or not, shown in table 4, are not part of an indicator but represent a third element that depicts a self-evaluation of implication in GRIPV.

Table 4
Self-perception of participation in GRIPV

Variable	Item
Control perpetration	14.2" I have attempted to control my partner, either online or offline
Bystander	14.4" I often do not get involved in what happens between a couple even if it seems violent to me
Supporter	14.6 I have supported people who have not been treated well by a partner
(1) Yes (2) Sometimes (3) No ² "Item with the score reversed	

² We also offer to the option "I prefer not to answer" but in the analysis we will exclude this percentage of respondents (in this case less than 5%)

The third step of our analysis involved evaluating the differences in each indicator for gender and city using Spearman’s rank correlation. Because of the limited self-ascription to non-binary identities, we present the correlation by gender solely divided into girls and boys. However, the results indicate a tendency of people who self-identified as non-binary to respond in a somewhat similar way to young self-identified girls.

Results and discussion

Comparing Spanish and Italian girls’ and boys’ comprehension of Gender-Related Inter-Partnership Violence

When directly questioned, a little less than three-quarters of the students consider GRV to be a serious, widespread problem. This percentage is far higher for girls (almost 88%) than for boys (around 61%), but the difference between cities is not very big. However, the students from Barcelona are slightly more aware of the problem. On the other hand, it is striking that a quarter of Milanese students consider GRV inevitable, while just 18% of boys and 7% of girls hold the same opinion in Barcelona. The different pattern in the responses by city and gender is clearly represented in Graph 1.

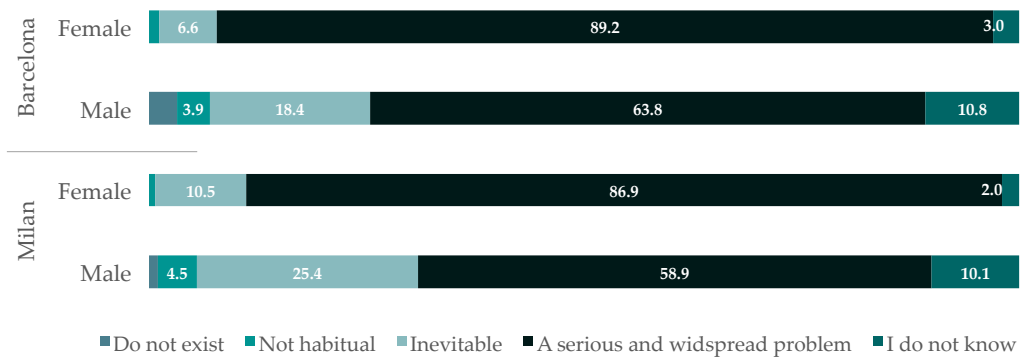


Figure 1. GRV considerations by city and gender (%)

Overall, self-identification as a feminist is much higher (40%) than self-identification as a machist (10%); a statistically significant proportion of respondents from Milan ($p=0.000$), mainly boys, are more willing to identify as a machist than those in Barcelona. It is also important to note that 75% of respondents declare that they do not identify at all with machism. However, we should also note that 30% of Barcelonan students preferred not to answer this specific question. Finally, it is due to mention that in both cities’ females identify significantly much more frequently than their male peers as feminists.

Our indicators suggest a fairly high awareness of GRIPV, but a much lower perception of it in one’s environment. However, heightened awareness does not necessarily imply better identification of such violence in the participants’ daily lives. As shown in table 5, statistically significant differences by gender and by city are present in the two indicators.

Table 5

Distribution of indicators by gender and city

Indicators	Gender			City		
	Girls	Boys	DiM	Mi	Bcn	DiM
1. Awareness	3.88	3.48	0.4	3.62	3.75	-0.13
2. Perception	1.87	1.70	0.17	1.89	1.63	0.26

*All results reported are significant at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$)

While we notice that the awareness score is slightly higher in Barcelona than Milan, the latter city shows greater perception of the violence present in schools. On the other hand, mean gender differences regarding awareness are relevant in both cities, whereas it is less pronounced for perception. This suggests that girls more readily condemned 'violent behaviors' presented in a story-scenario or in a sentence. Similarly, inter-gender dissymmetry between cities is less pronounced for perception than for awareness.

Undergoing GRIPV training the year prior had no significant impact on GRIVIP awareness or perception. By contrast, people who participate in feminist or women's rights movements are more aware and perceptive in relation to this problem ($p = 0.000$).

GRIPV Awareness

Considering the variables for indicator 1 (see table 1 and 2 for details) we find that in both cities, the form of violence that participants are more able to identify is sexual (means 4.36). This is followed by GRIPV control practices in a specific story that are identified slightly more frequently (mean 3.77) than digital control behavior (mean 3.50). For these two kinds of violence recognition was slightly higher in Barcelona. In relation to all the GRIPV presented, girls' greater ability for identification is statistically significantly greater to that of their male peers. More details are represented in Graph 3.

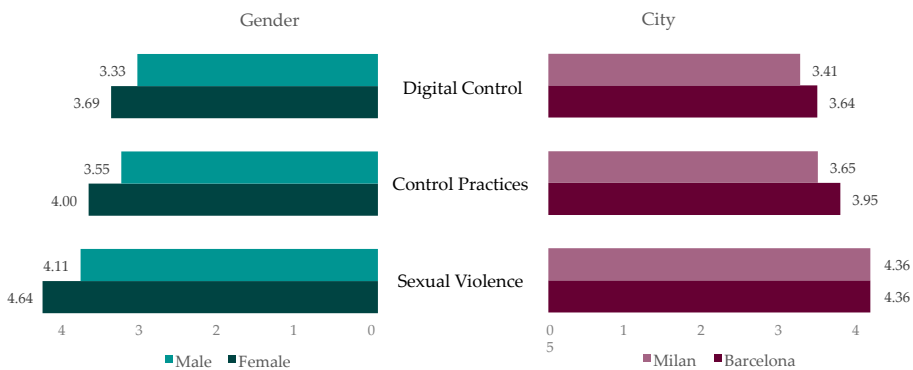


Figure 2. Means of awareness of different expression of violence by city and gender

Investigating the data more closely, we found that females in both cities are more aware of control practices (89% of girls are moderately/extremely aware vs 61% of boys).

Students from Barcelona of both genders are also more aware of control practices (moderately or extremely 83%) than their Milan counterparts (68%). Boys from Milan are poorest at identifying such control, with 48% being somewhat or slightly aware. Looking in greater detail at the single-item responses to the behavior of the characters in the story, we found that almost 90% of the students are moderately or extremely aware that violent verbal aggression is reproachable and consider that somebody should feel free to go out without their partner. This percentage decreases to 50% when evaluating the appropriateness of being friends with an ex or condemning the decision to follow a partner when she goes out with friends. However, 76% declare that it is (very) bad to ask a couple not to see their ex-partner. The angry reaction to a partner's intent to exert control is declared (very) adequate by just 62%, while 15% (very much) disagree with this action. There are fewer young people, 55%, who consider it (very) adequate to break up with a controlling and jealous partner. There is greater variability in the condemnation of jealousy; 22% sustain that becoming jealous is (very) adequate and only 36% view this attitude as very inappropriate or inappropriate.

Taking into account the identification of sexual violence more closely, we observed a significant difference by gender. While 94% of females being moderately or extremely aware of this violence this percentage drops to 76% for males. A remarkable percentage of boys from Barcelona (7% vs 5% in Milan) (strongly) disagree with the idea that it is appropriate to refuse to have sex with a partner when one does not feel like it.

It is important to highlight however, that in both cities, the students' significant readiness to condemn GRIPV practices does not directly mean that they understand its gendered implications, as we can see in the results of table 6.

In fact, only half of the respondents recognize that GRIPV between adolescents does not occur equally for both genders, while another 28% remain unsure. In other words, just 53% of girls and 45% of boys are aware of the direction of GRIPV. Surprisingly, girls from Milan have slightly greater propensity than their peers from Barcelona (non-significantly) to declare the violence as bidirectional.

Table 6

Acknowledgement of the gender aspect of GRIVIP

Awareness level		Milan		Barcelona		
		Female	Male	Female	Male	
Recognising gender aspects of GRIPV	1	Not at all	9.5	6.2	6.7	8.5
	2	Slightly	15.2	19.3	5.6	12.5
	3	Somewhat	23.3	22.1	32.4	37.9
	4	Very	37.5	34.1	26.8	28.6
	5	Extremely	14.5	18.3	28.5	12.5

Non-accountability of girls*	1	Not at all	4.9	12.1	5.7	11.6
	2	Slightly	22.0	26.8	7.8	17.9
	3	Somewhat	17.8	22.1	26.0	30.4
	4	Very	28.8	18.1	21.9	22.3
	5	Extremely	26.5	20.8	38.5	17.9

Even more worrying is the fact that 28% of students attribute co-responsibility for GRIPV to a girl who does not split up with a partner that mistreats her, and another 24% are uncertain about her responsibility. In this case, there are significant differences by gender: 22% of the girls and 35% of the boys believe that blame is shared.

GRIPV Perception

Between the different expressions of GRIPV presented (see Table 3 for details), face-to-face intimate partner control practices are the most perceived forms (mean 2.18). In fact, twenty-four percent of students consider that these practices happen sometimes or often.

The other forms of violence were less perceived (sexual and physical violence mean 1.70 and digital violence 1.56). Notably, 58% believe that sexual violence never occurs between a couple in their environment and 60% declare the same in relation to physical violence. However, there are statistically significant differences, shown in Graph 4, for genders and cities for all the expressions of GRIPV apart from the physical one whose difference is not significant by gender.

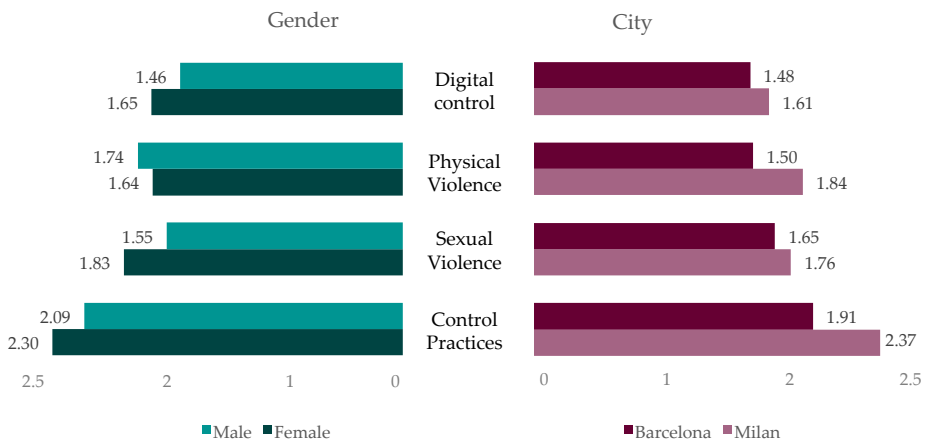


Figure 3. Perception of different expressions of violence by city and gender (means)

Looking more closely at the data, we found that around 80% of students from Barcelona (and 75% of boys) claim that they never perceive face-to-face control or violence

from their partners, while in Milan the percentage is 65% (almost the same percentage for girls, 67%).

Going into greater detail, we see that having to “change clothes at the request of a partner” is not considered very common, with 72% of students stating that it (almost) never happens and 11% that it occurs frequently.

Regarding the practice of “refraining from making plans or seeing friends to please a partner”, 24% consider it (very) common. On the other hand, 48% claim to (almost) never perceive this behavior.

The most perceived digital control is in relation to social media activities and “getting angry when not always receiving an immediate digital response from a partner”. This occurs (very) often, according to around 24% of respondents. A smaller but still high percentage of students, 16%, consider that the use of mobile phones to control and interfere with other relations on social media is also (very) frequent in sexual-affective relationships.

Moreover, the greater perception of sexual violence among girls (mean 1.83) than boys (mean 1.55) is statistically significant. It is worth noting that 11% of boys in Milan declare that they perceive physical violence (very) often, while just 9% of girls in the same city do. For this violence there is no gender difference for perceptions in students from Barcelona. There is a greater difference between male (18%) and female (12%) students in Milan, who consider that this kind of violence happens sometimes (vs. 9% in Barcelona for both genders).

Self-implication

Looking at the results of the items shown in table 4 we can see that most students, 80%, claim never to have undertaken controlling practices towards a partner. Boys from Barcelona are the most certain of this (94% while 73% in Milan). In Milan, around 26% of both boys and girls recognize that they have exercised such control on at least some occasion, but only 16% of female students from Barcelona give the same response and 6% of boys. The differences by gender and city are significant for this item.

Table 7

Self-perception of participation in GRIPV by city and gender (%)

			Female	Male	Milan	Barcelona
Control perpetration**	1	Yes	77.7	81.5	74.2	89.1
	2	Sometimes	16.5	13.9	19.4	7.8
	3	No	5.8	4.6	6.4	3.2
Bystander	1	Yes	64.7	63	62.8	64
	2	Sometimes	23.8	21.2	22.7	22.7
	3	No	11.6	15.8	14.5	14.5

Supporter**	1	Yes	57.8	41.6	51.6	44.5
	2	Sometimes	23.0	21.8	23.5	21.8
	3	No	19.2	36.5	24.9	33.8

**Correlations by gender. **Correlations for city. Results significant at the 5% level (p<0.05)*

Another interesting result, thought statistically non-significant both by city and gender, is that 63% of the students claim that they never intervene when GRIPV occurs in their environments, and only 14% assert that they always intervene. This percentage increases among girls, who claim in both cities to never intervene (around 65%). The boys exhibit a different pattern of responses, for while in Milan 17% declare that they always intervene, in Barcelona only 12% make this statement. Even that, 28% of respondents claim to always support other students who have not been treated well by their partners, and additional 23% claim to do so at least sometimes. In this case, the differences are significant both by city and gender (p=0.000).

Conclusions: Closing the circle

Our results show that students are generally aware of the GRIPV problem and are able to identify inadequate behavior even in a given story. This is probably due to recent improvements in international responses to GRV (Lombardo et al., 2021), the prevention measures adopted in recent decades (Vives-Cases et al., 2021) and the online popularization of feminist discourses (Banet-Weiser, 2018). These changes are mirrored by the fact that two-fifths of our students feel comfortable identifying as feminists while three-quarters refuse to be identified in any way as machist. Feminist activism has also played an essential role in improving the understanding of GRIPV (Chironi & Portos, 2021), as shown by the fact that young people who have participated in such campaigns are more aware of the problem.

However, although GRIPV is a serious problem among Italian and Spanish adolescents (Ministry of Equality, 2019; ISTAT, 2018; Palmén et al., 2016), their perception of it in their own environments is not particularly high. Consistent with these results, our analysis shows that students' awareness of the problem is not correlated with the ability to perceive GRIPV in their context.

Also, in general, our respondents do not seem to have a thorough grasp of how gender dynamics intervene in the process. In a neo-liberal post-feminist context, the illusion of achieved equality obscures how cis-heteropatriarchal culture and structures operate in the reproduction and maintenance of this kind of violence (Gil, 2016; McRobbie, 2007). This has been detected in the interviews we held with Cut All Ties project trainers and can also be a clear impediment to engaging students with GRIPV problems because anti-feminist attitudes can complicate the sessions (Biglia & Barrio, 2022).

Another alarming result is that almost a third of the students hold girls co-accountable for GRIPV if they did not end a violent relationship. This is not surprising, in fact, the influence of machist culture on victim-blaming is well-documented (Baldry et al.,

2021). It is also especially noteworthy considering that almost half of the participants in the survey suggest that it was not appropriate for the protagonist of the presented story to end the controlling relationship. It seems there is still a widespread belief that regardless of the reaction to a GRIPV, she is at fault.

On the other hand, our results show that the recent social attention given in Southern European countries to the problem of sexual violence has been successful in making young people understand that some attitudes are unacceptable, but it has not created a clear awareness of the widespread nature of the problems among young couples.

Although young people do not exhibit strong awareness regarding the differences between face-to-face and digital violence in their relationships, they seem to perceive the latter violence less in their own environment. Our second objective was to compare awareness and perception of GRIPV in two similar, yet different, contexts. The results for awareness are consistent with the evidence that gender rights are more formally recognized in Spain, where there is also a significant implementation of prevention campaigns and training in this area (Gracia et al., 2020). The fact that far more students in Milan consider GRV inevitable also highlights a similar conclusion.

Likewise, GRIPV detection is less frequent in Barcelona. It is not clear, however, if this is solely imputable to a fundamental difference, or whether a “political correctness” effect has interfered with this result. For instance, a third of the students in Barcelona preferred not to respond when directly asked how machist they feel, while the students in Milan seemed to have far fewer qualms about declaring themselves so. Similarly, most (almost all) boys in Barcelona deny that they have ever attempted to control their partner, while more than a quarter of the other boys and girls acknowledge that they have. We cannot resolve this doubt here, but we would be willing to follow up with further research on the matter.

What our results clearly show is that international GRIPV training programs for adolescents should be carefully adapted to each specific context and cannot be reproduced uniformly. The fact that previous attendance of training does not have a direct positive effect on awareness of or the ability to perceive GRIPV must also be taken carefully into account (Biglia et al., 2022).

Our data show that the general cultural impact on the understanding of violence is not as strong as that produced by gender self-ascription. This is consistent with the gender gaps detected in the literature (Gracia et al., 2020). Generally, girls are still more likely to understand what elements constitute GRIPV; more aware of the gendered aspect of IPV; tend to blame the “victims” of GRIPV less than their male counterparts and, finally, more frequently perceive its presence in their environments. Nonetheless, we observed a significant difference in the perception of violence in the environment between the cities. This may indicate that in Milan there is a higher level of GRIVIP, an interpretation consonant with the results of (Gracia et al., 2020) but not so much with (Palmén et al., 2016). It might also indicate that in Barcelona there is a false perception of gender safety created by a more politically correct attitude. More specific comparative studies may be required to address this uncertainty.

Again, we confirm the girls are more willing to intervene in a case of GRPV (Gracia et al., 2020). We agree with Rollero et al. (2021, p. 12) that this difference is derived from

“gender-role attitudes that shape men’s and women’s understandings of the violence”. This implies that boys and girls have different training needs.

To temporarily close the circle, we will end by summarizing some of the possible avenues for future research. Firstly, more comparative international diagnoses are needed, which will directly influence the design and implementation of more accurate training and intervention plans. In this sense, it will be extremely important to overcome the effects of political correctness and improve the depth of understanding of the problem to introduce more reactive-based stories that require a clearer awareness of GRIPV to be understood. Similarly, training should be much less notional and more about experiences (Jimenez, 2022). Greater attention should also be given to what we consider to be the blended experience of GRIPV, rather than focusing exclusively on the need for more digital training to prevent GRIPV in adolescents. Last but not least, we consider that in the fight against GRIPV, society is advancing at two different speeds, and training for people socialized as boys needs to be carefully re-thought/re-imagined in order to address a complexity that current practices do not seem to be attending to properly.

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Ethics approval statement

The ABD Social Intervention Ethics Committee follows national an EU regulation Organic Law 15/1999, of December 13th, on the Protection of Personal Data (LODP), in Spain aligned with Regulation (EU) 2016/679, ensure the projects ethics. The ADB’s

Social Intervention Ethics Committee, accredited as an Ethical Reflection Space (ERESS) by the Ethics Committee of the Social Services of Catalonia, oversaw the ethics approval (ISO-9001).

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