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THE MEDIATION OF SELF-ESTEEM AND HOSTILITY IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL SUPPORT AND DATING VIOLENCE

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate whether self-esteem and hostility mediated the relationship between social support and online and offline dating violence (DV) in 479 university students. All types of social support (family, friends and relevant people) were positively related to self-esteem and negatively related to almost all types of violence. In addition, self-esteem correlated inversely with levels of hostility, and the latter was positively related to online and offline perpetrated DV. Path analyses showed that lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of hostility mediated the relationship between family social support and online and offline DV. However, social support from friends and significant others only had a direct effect on online DV. Despite the limitations of the cross-sectional design, social support, self-esteem and hostility appear to be important aspects in the prevention and treatment of DV.

KEY WORDS: *Social support, self-esteem, hostility, dating violence*.

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio era investigar si la autoestima y la hostilidad mediaban la relación entre el apoyo social y la violencia en el noviazgo (VN) en línea y fuera de línea en 479 estudiantes universitarios. Todos los tipos de apoyo social (familiares, de amigos y personas relevantes) se relacionaron positivamente con la autoestima y negativamente con casi todos los tipos de violencia. Además, la autoestima correlacionó inversamente con los niveles de hostilidad, y este último se relacionó positivamente con la VN perpetrada en línea y fuera de línea. Los análisis de senderos mostraron que los niveles más bajos de autoestima y los más altos de hostilidad mediaban la relación entre el apoyo social familiar y la VN en línea y fuera de línea. Sin embargo, el apoyo social de amigos y otras personas significativas sólo tuvo un efecto directo en la VN en línea. A pesar de las limitaciones del diseño transversal, el apoyo social, la autoestima y la hostilidad parecen ser aspectos importantes en la prevención y el tratamiento de la VN.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *apoyo social, autoestima, hostilidad, violencia en el noviazgo.*

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Introduction

Dating violence (DV) is a worldwide problem with high prevalence and serious consequences for its victims. It includes any act of physical, emotional, or sexual violence that may occur face-to-face or electronically (Fernández-González et al., 2018), so it can happen in person (offline) or through new technologies and social networks (online).

Offline DV includes intentional abuse or sexual, physical, or psychological acts by one partner against the other. Physical violence involves the intentional use of physical force (e.g., hitting, pushing, shoving, slapping); psychological violence consists of acts that violate the partner's psychological and emotional integrity and dignity, such as threats, insults or emotional blackmail. Sexual violence is characterised by intimidating or forcing the partner to participate in sexual intercourse or other sexual acts, or compelling the partner to engage in sexual activities more frequently than desired. Online DV includes psychological control, harassment, and direct aggressive behaviours (Borrajo & Gámez-Guadix, 2016; Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2016). For example, these behaviours can be frequently visiting the partner's profile on social networks, sending insulting or threatening messages, spreading negative information about them, stealing or misusing their passwords, etc. (Borrajo & Gámez-Guadix, 2016; Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2016).

Research on online DV is very complex not only because of the different types of violence and the multiple factors involved but also because the roles of "perpetrator" and "victim" are often not clearly defined. Thus, bidirectional or reciprocal violence has been cited as the most common pattern for established couples (Straus, 2011), and it seems that this is also the case in DV (Renner & Whitney, 2012).

In terms of sex in DV, there is variability between different studies. In offline DV, a systematic review revealed that victimisation mainly affects women compared to men (Jennings et al., 2017), but other authors found no sex differences in victimisation (Wincentak et al., 2017), and other studies found higher physical violence and psychological aggression perpetration by girls than by boys (Capaldi et al., 2012; Swahn et al., 2008). However, a systematic review by Jennings et al. (2017) found similar DV perpetration rates by sexes: 9% - 37% in girls and 6% - 21% in boys.

As for online DV, there is also great variability in prevalence rates. One study performed in the United States found that men reported more e-victimisation and women reported more anticipated distress when experiencing cyber-violence (Bennet et al., 2011). On the other hand, several studies found no significant differences between boys and girls (Bennet et al., 2011; Borrajo et al., 2015), indicating that both genders perpetrate and suffer this kind of DV to the same extent.

Social support is understood as an individual's subjective judgement that their social network will provide effective help in times of need (Lakey & Scoboria, 2005), and this entails any form of emotional, informational or tangible support. Major sources of social support include family members, peers and significant others (Allen & Finkelstein, 2003).

Social support may significantly affect how romantic relationships are shaped (Collins et al., 2009). To date, numerous studies indicate the quality of social relationships and social support as possible protective factors against DV (Pérez-Martínez et al., 2021). For example, in a study by Richards and Branch (2012), participants who reported involvement in DV as perpetrators or victims also reported lower levels of social support from friends and family. Social support has been particularly studied in female victims of intimate violence. Research suggests that it potentially lowers the likelihood of entering into a violent relationship while also mitigating the psychological and quality-of-life repercussions of intimate partner violence, which could inadvertently lead women to remain in abusive relationships (Katerndahl et al., 2013).

Concerning family support, Cleveland et al. (2003) found that the type of bonding daughters had with their mothers could reduce the risk of being a victim of DV. Other researchers have demonstrated the importance of parental attachments in reducing the perpetration of DV both in girls and boys (Chapple & Hope, 2003).

Building a safe climate at school is also considered a protective factor against DV (Hayes & Unwin, 2016) due to feeling acknowledged, loved and bonded with a group (Jain et al., 2018). As shown in the research, school support protects from both physical and verbal adolescent DV victimisation (Parker et al., 2016). Furthermore, school belonging helps to prevent teenagers with adverse childhood experiences from becoming DV perpetrators (Davis et al., 2019). Likewise, Jankowiak et al. (2020) found that greater attachment to school and perceptions of relational security and self-importance in that environment were significantly associated with a lower likelihood of adolescent relationship abuse.

Self-esteem can be generally described as an individual's entire evaluation and judgment of themselves, and this evaluation may be positive or negative as a whole. When a positive evaluation predominates, self-esteem is usually high, and people are more likely to have feelings of self-worth and competence, which is beneficial for personal development. Self-esteem is an important psychological resource during adolescence and youth, and is higher in adolescent males than females (Bachman et al., 2011) and support from social relationships plays a vital role in its development (Harter, 1993). Some authors consider that social support promotes self-esteem by conveying messages of being cared about, loved and valued by others, and fostering feelings of belonging (Kim & Nesselroade, 2003; Turner et al., 2014). In contrast, if there is a lack of support from social relations, individuals feel devalued and rejected (Leary, 1999), leading to negative self-evaluations, which result in low self-esteem.

Recent literature and research have documented the relationship between social support and self-esteem (Du et al., 2015; Marshall et al., 2014). Interestingly, these two factors have also been related in cross-cultural studies conducted both in individualist and collectivist cultures (Goodwin & Plaza, 2000). Some authors have examined the importance of social support in adolescence and young adulthood, trying to identify the most relevant type at this stage. For example, Arslan (2009) pointed out as a result of his study that relationships and support from family and peers in adolescence helped teenagers to develop their self-esteem. Moreover, Tam

et al. (2011) discovered a positive correlation between perceived social support and self-esteem, with perceived peer support as the highest form of perceived social support in adolescents. Compared to boys, adolescent girls report higher levels of support from their peers (Gardner & Webb, 2019). Theoretical explanations suggest that girls are socialised to be more responsive to interpersonal support than their male counterparts (Pace et al., 2016). In contrast, other studies have found that the family is perceived as the best social support provider among young people (Tajbakhsh & Rousta, 2012).

Self-esteem has been considered a key contributor to adolescent resilience (Chen & Foshee, 2015) and should be recognised for treatment and intervention purposes (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001). Although self-esteem is a relevant variable in DV, there is little scientific evidence to support it. Previous studies have found that lower self-esteem is related to offline and online DV victimisation (Smith et al., 2018; Van Ouytsel et al., 2017), although the cross-sectional nature of these studies makes it difficult to conclude whether low self-esteem is a result or a cause of victimisation (Callahan et al., 2003). Both hypotheses seem plausible: experiencing DV victimisation, such as threats, is related to lower self-esteem in adolescents, causing them to internalise feelings of inferiority and incompetence (Hancock et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2018). Low self-esteem may also be a risk factor for DV, as perpetrators may consider individuals with low self-esteem to be vulnerable or an 'easy target' (Egan & Perry, 1998). This last viewpoint is based on the self-verification theory, which states that people tend to seek information that confirms what they already believe to be true about themselves. Thus, individuals with low self-esteem would seek partners who abuse them, thereby confirming their negative self-beliefs. Millet (2020) defends this theory in her longitudinal study of cyber DV, warning that adolescents may perpetuate their low self-esteem by constantly seeking abusive relationships, escalating from online to offline abuse.

In contrast, the results on the relationship between self-esteem and perpetration are more ambiguous. Some studies report an association between DV perpetration and low self-esteem (Díaz-Aguado & Martínez, 2015). For example, Reidy et al. (2015) concluded that boys who experienced stress about being perceived as "sub-masculine" might be more likely to engage in sexual violence as a means of demonstrating their masculinity to themselves or to others. Lewis and Fremouw (2001) explain that individuals with negative self-esteem may also lack problem-solving skills in conflicts, which hinders setting limits and resolving conflicts and, in turn, could make them susceptible to perpetrating aggressive behaviour. In contrast, Smith et al. (2018) found that, contrary to expectations, cyberperpetration was associated with higher self-esteem, although no clear interpretations were provided, suggesting that more research is needed to understand the underlying principles of this ambiguous association. Victimisation of dating-cyberviolence has been found to be negatively correlated to self-esteem, with no sex differences (Hancock et al., 2017).

Barefoot and Lipkus (1994) describe hostility as a complex concept that encompasses emotional responses, expressive behaviours, and unfavourable opinions about others. This concept integrates cognitive elements like cynicism—reflecting a

viewpoint that people are motivated by self-interest—; distrust—which involves an overgeneralised belief in the malevolent and deliberately antagonistic nature of others—; and denigration—which entails a negative appraisal of others, viewing them as dishonest, disagreeable, wretched, and unsociable.

It appears that hostility is moderately associated with DV (Norlander & Eckhardt, 2005). Several theoretical models describing the aetiology of DV indicate that hostility may be a risk factor for the perpetration of DV (Finkel, 2007; O'Leary, 1988). The results of one review suggested that elevated hostility is a hallmark of DV perpetrators (Norlander & Eckhardt, 2005), and a recent meta-analysis indicated that DV is moderately associated with hostility (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015).

In terms of sex differences, some studies show that hostility is associated with the perpetration of DV by adolescent boys (Lavoie et al., 2002) and, more marginally, by girls (Schnurr and Lohman, 2008). Another study has also shown that hostility is associated with DV victimisation in adolescent girls (Tourigny et al., 2006).

Regarding the relationship that self-esteem may have with hostility, some researchers propose that low self-esteem may be a possible trigger for hostility (Garofalo et al., 2016).

Some authors have argued that threats to self-esteem are very disturbing to violent individuals and often provoke overwhelming feelings of shame. When emotion-regulation strategies fail, these individuals may resort to aggressive acts in an attempt to restore their feelings of self-worth (Bateman et al., 2013). However, other authors have proposed that hostility is associated with high self-esteem (Salmivalli, 2001). According to Baumeister (1997), some groups are known to have higher self-esteem and to show higher hostility than other groups. Thus, there are different theories relating hostility to low or high self-esteem, but neither view has been uniformly supported by clear empirical evidence (Salmivalli, 2001).

Previous research has alluded to a link between social support and self-esteem and hostility with DV, and also a link between social support and self-esteem. Therefore, the aim of this research will be, on the one hand, to analyse the direct relationship between social support and DV and, on the other hand, the indirect relationship between social support and DV. For this purpose, the interlinked relationships of social support with self-esteem, and of self-esteem with hostility, and, consequently, with DV, will be analysed. The hypotheses concerning the direct and indirect effects between social support and DV are the following: 1) Low social support will be directly related to DV, and 2) Low social support will correlate with low self-esteem. This, in turn, will be related to high hostility. Finally, high hostility will show a correlation with DV.

Method

Participants

This study was carried out with a total sample of 478 students of Education Degree at the University of the Basque Country, Spain. Of these, 77.2% (*n*= 369)

were female (mean age= 19.18, *SD*= 3.41), 22.8% (*n*= 109) were male (mean age= 18.73, *SD*= 1.35), and 99% of them had Spanish nationality. Of these participants, 34.2% had a partner, and 57.8% had previously had one. Regarding family composition, 79% of the participants had married parents, 12.9% had parents who were separated or divorced, 4% lived with a widowed parent, and the rest experienced other family situations. The participants were from different degree courses and voluntarily participated in the study. Only questionnaires that the participants did not complete were excluded from the survey.

Instruments

a) *Ad hoc questionnaire for socio-demographic data*. This questionnaire was used to collect the following data: sex, age and whether (or not) they currently had a partner.
b) *Cyber-Violence Scale in Adolescent Couples* (Cib-VPA; Cava & Buelga, 2018). This scale evaluates partner violence suffered and perpetrated through social networks and cell phones. The scale is composed of 20 items, of which 10 measure victimisation experiences (α= .77) and, the rest, violent behaviours performed against the partner (α= .66). The items are answered on a Likert-type scale from 1 (never) to 4 (always),
so that the higher the score, the greater the violence or victimisation.
c) *Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory* (CADRI; Wolfe et al., 2001), Spanish adaptation by Carrascosa et al. (2018). The questionnaire consists of 17 items that analyse the different types of perpetration of DV: Perpetration of Relational Violence (e.g., "I tried to separate my partner from his/her group of friends"), Perpetration of Verbal-Emotional Violence (e.g., "I told my partner something just to make him/her angry"), and Perpetration of Physical Violence (e.g., "I slapped my partner or pulled his/her hair"). Also, 17 items measure DV victimisation: Relational Victimisation (e.g., "My partner said things to my friends about me to turn them against me"), Verbal-Emotional Victimisation (e.g., "My partner accused me of flirting with someone else"), and Physical Victimisation (e.g., "My partner pushed me or shook me"). Adolescents are asked to identify how often they have experienced these situations in their dating relationships: never (this has not happened in our relationship), rarely (1 or 2 times), sometimes (between 3 and 5 times), or frequently (6 or more times). Therefore, the higher the score, the higher the level of violence perpetrated or suffered. In the present study, the reliability (Cronbach´s alpha) of the Victimisation subscale was .83, and for the Perpetration subscale, it was .79.
d) *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (Zimet et al., 1988), Spanish version by Landeta and Calvete (2002). This scale assesses perceived support from family members, peers and other relevant people. It consists of 12 items that are answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree). The higher the score obtained, the higher the level of perceived social support in each of the subscales (family, peers and significant others). The results indicate good

psychometric properties, with high internal consistency values (Cronbach´s α) in all three factors: the level of Perceived Social Support received from Family (α= .90), Friends (α= .93) and Significant Others (α= .84).

e) *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965), validated for the Spanish population (Atienza et al., 2000). This scale measures self-esteem through 10 items, 5 of which are negatively drafted (indicating low self-esteem) and 5, positively (indicating high self-esteem). Once the negative items have been inverted, a sum of all items is obtained, so that the higher the score, the higher the level of overall self-esteem. In this study, adequate internal consistency was found with a Cronbach's alpha of .80.

f) *Symptom Checklist-90-Revised* (SCL-90-R; Derogatis, 1977), Spanish version by González de Rivera et al*.* (2002). The SCL-90-R assesses a wide range of psychopathological symptoms (Somatisations, Obsessions and compulsions, Interpersonal sensitivity, Depression, Anxiety, Hostility, Phobic anxiety, Paranoid ideation, Psychoticism). The Hostility subscale was used in this study. The Hostility dimension refers to thoughts, feelings, and actions that are characteristic of the presence of negative feelings of anger (5 items). Participants should answer each item according to the discomfort experienced during the previous week, including the day the questionnaire is completed, on a 5-point Likert scale (0= not at all, and 4= very much or extremely). In order to interpret the results, it should be noted that the higher the score, the higher the level of hostility. The scale obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .77 in the present study.

Procedure

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee for Research on Human Subjects (CEISH) of the University of the Basque Country (M10/2018/158). Contact with the students was made through the teaching staff of the Education Degree, and responses were collected using an online questionnaire with a prior request for consent for the subjects' participation. The questionnaire explained both the objectives of the study and the procedure to be followed. In addition, for data collection, all the requirements established by the Organic Law 15/99 on Data Protection were followed.

For this study, only the sample that had a current partner was used. Hence, a total of 111 students were excluded from the initial sample, so the final sample was 478.

Data analysis

A cross-sectional correlational design was used to test the hypothesis. The sample was considered a whole, and the variables were measured once. Correlational designs do not permit extracting causal-effect conclusions but only associative ones.

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, V. 26.0. First, frequencies and percentages of sociodemographic variables, and sex differences in all

the variables were calculated. Effect sizes were interpreted with Cohen’s *d*. Subsequently, the relationships between all the variables differentiating by sex and age were analysed using Spearman´s rho correlation coefficient (*r*).

Next, based on the above results, a multiple mediation model through path analysis was conducted to analyse the mediation effect of self-esteem and hostility in the relationship between social support and both offline and online violence. Sex was set as a covariate of both self-esteem and offline violence; online victimisation was set as a covariate of online violence; and offline victimisation was set as a covariate of offline violence. This analysis used EQS 6.1 software (Bentler, 2005) with the robust maximum likelihood method for estimating parameters.

First, multivariate normality was assessed through Mardia’s coefficient, with values lower than 7 indicating multivariate normality (Cohen et al., 2002). Then, the results were interpreted through a global fit of the model, considering four fit indices: the quotient between χ^2 Satorra-Bentler and the degrees of freedom (*df*) of the model, which should be lower than 3 to be considered a good fit for the model (Carmines & McIver, 1981); the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which should be lower than .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Steiger, 1990); and the comparative fit index (CFI) with values above .90 indicating a good fit (Bentler & Bonnet, 1980). Furthermore, the significance of the path coefficients (direct effects) was considered, and mediation effects were assessed through the significance of the indirect effects (Hayes, 2013).

Results

First, sex differences were explored throughout all the variables. The results are detailed in Table 1. As it can be observed, significant differences appeared in offline violence, with females scoring above males, self-esteem showing higher results in males than in females, and females reporting higher social support from friends and significant others than males.

Table 1
Sex differences in the studied variables

Variables	Male (*n*= 109)		Female (*n*= 369)		*t*	*d*
	M	*DT*	*M*	*DT*		
1. Online violence	10.90	1.25	11.13	1.75	-1.11	-0.14
2. Offline violence	19.53	2.70	20.97	3.93	-3.06**	-0.39
3. Online victimisation	11.85	2.71	11.38	2.44	1.48	0.19
4. Offline victimisation	20.99	4.97	20.71	4.32	0.48	0.06
5. Self-esteem	31.95	4.90	29.75	5.34	3.81***	0.42
6. Hostility	11.05	4.23	10.72	3.78	0.77	0.09
7. SS friends	24.48	3.60	25.48	3.78	-2.43*	-0.27
8. SS family	23.27	4.56	24.07	4.82	-1.51	-0.17
9. SS significant	24.22	4.00	25.48	3.40	-3.22**	-0.35

Notes: SS= Social support. **p*< .05; ***p*< .01; ****p*< .001.

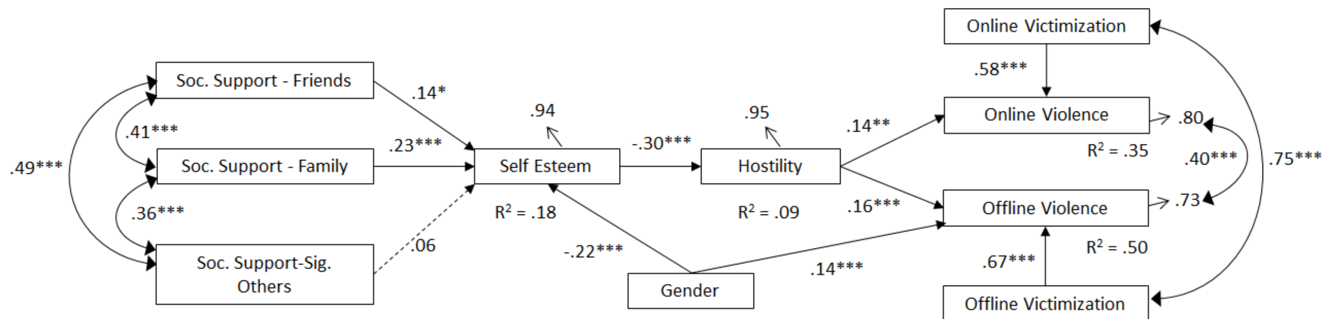
Table 2

Mean and standard deviation of the study variables, and bivariate correlation coefficients (Spearman´s rho)

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Online violence	11.07	1.64	--	.39***	.54***	.42***	-.26***	.33***	-.19**	-.17**	-.03
2. Offline violence	20.62	3.72	.46***	--	.43***	.75***	-.13*	.39***	-.16*	-.12	-.12*
3. Online victimisation	11.49	2.51	.47***	.48***	--	.59***	-.16*	.26***	-.14*	-.19**	-.16**
4. Offline victimisation	20.77	4.47	.35**	.79***	.65***	--	-.19**	.34***	-.24***	-.14*	-.25***
5. Self-Esteem	30.31	5.35	-.12	.04	.12	.04	--	.35***	.23***	.25***	.17***
6. Hostility	10.80	3.87	.24*	.16	.07	.10	-.18	--	-.15**	-.21***	-.11*
7. SS Friends	25.26	3.76	-.34**	-.16	-.08	-.08	.45***	-.14	--	.37***	.42***
8. SS Family	23.89	4.76	-.13	.02	.03	.01	.36***	-.12	.31**	--	.34***
9. SS significant	25.21	3.58	-.29**	-.04	-.26*	-.17	.22*	-.24*	.57***	.32***	--
10. Age	19.08	3.06	.09	-.02	.03	.08	-.12	-.11	-.03	-.02	-.04

Notas: SS= Social support. Coefficients in the lower-left triangle are for males, and correlations in the upper-right triangle are for females. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Figure 1
Multiple mediation model with the serial mediation effect of self-esteem and hostility in the relationship between social support and both online and offline violence



Notes: The dotted line represents a non-significant effect. *$p < .01$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Subsequently, as can be seen in Table 2, concerning the relationships of all the variables differentiating by sex, almost all of them were significantly related to each other, especially in the case of females, due to the sample size, and in the expected direction. Online violence showed more significant relationships than offline violence. On the other hand, self-esteem, hostility and social support were also significantly related to each other.

In the path analysis, the results showed multivariate nonnormality (Mardia= 107.90), and a satisfactory fit was achieved according to the indices: χ^2 Satorra-Bentler/df= 2.62, RMSEA= .072, 90% CI [.052, .091], CFI= .89. In the case of the CFI, the value was slightly under the cutoff. The results are detailed in Figure 1. As can be observed, all of the coefficients were significant except for the relationship between social support from significant others and self-esteem. The direction of the relationships was also as expected.

Regarding effects of mediation, the results showed that self-esteem and hostility significantly mediated the relationship between family social support and both online violence (total effect: B= -0.01, SEB= 0.02, *p*= .653; indirect effect, B= -0.01, SEB< 0.01, *p*= .024) and offline violence (total effect: B= -0.01, SEB= 0.03, *p*= .912; indirect effect, B= -0.01, SEB< 0.01, *p*= .011). Conversely, no significant mediation effect was attained in the case of friends' social support, either with online violence (total effect: B= -0.02, SEB= 0.02, *p*= .348; indirect effect, B= -0.01, SEB< 0.01, *p*= .078) or offline violence (total effect: B= 0.70, SEB= 0.08, *p*= .810; indirect effect, B= 0.09, SEB= 0.03, *p*= .057). In the case of significant others' social support, no significant mediation effect was found either in online violence (total effect: B= 0.05, SEB= 0.03, *p*= .042; indirect effect, B= -0.01, SEB< 0.01, *p*= .380) or offline violence (total effect: B= 0.16, SEB= 0.05, *p*= .002; indirect effect, B= 0.01, SEB< 0.01, *p*= .380).

These results suggest that, whereas family social support is indirectly related both to online and offline violence (explaining this relationship through self-esteem and hostility), the relationship of friends' and significant others' social support with online DV is direct, so neither self-esteem nor hostility explain these relationships.

Discussion

DV in its various forms is appearing at increasingly early ages and has direct consequences for adolescents and young adults. In fact, The World Health Organization (2021) warns about the high prevalence of this phenomenon among very young people (24 % of adolescents aged 15 - 19 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their partner at least once), and studies in Europe report a prevalence of DV victimisation of 43.1 % in girls and 26.7 % in boys aged 13 - 16 (Vives-Cases et al., 2021). The results of the present study found no differences between boys and girls in online violence perpetration and victimisation, nor in offline victimisation, although girls exerted more offline violence than boys. Previous studies reported that women are more likely to report having exerted DV than men (Capaldi, et al., 2012), although Corral (2009) warns that this data should be taken with caution as women may minimise violence received and maximise violence perpetrated.

DV is associated with a range of negative consequences that affect adolescents´ health, such as substance use, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, poorer academic results, physical and psychological problems (Chiodo et al., 2012; Greenman & Matsuda, 2016; Sunday et al., 2011; Taquette & Monteiro, 2019). Although this phenomenon has attracted a great deal of interest due to its particular characteristics at this stage, there is still much research to be done. The role of social support from family, friends and relevant others has been identified as an important factor in mitigating this type of violence (Richards & Branch, 2012). However, little is known about the variables or mechanisms that may play a mediating role in this relationship. Therefore, this study sought to further investigate the role of self-esteem and hostility in the relationship between social support and different types of DV.

As expected, zero-order correlations showed that all types of social support (family, friends and relevant others) positively correlated with self-esteem, both in girls and boys. This aligns with some studies (Du et al., 2015; Marshall et al., 2014) that highlight that social support increases individuals' perception of their own value and self-worth. Furthermore, self-esteem inversely correlated with hostility levels (just in girls), and the latter was positively related to online and offline perpetrated violence in girls and only to online violence in boys. Therefore, these results are consistent with studies suggesting that DV is associated with hostility (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015; Norlander & Eckhardt, 2005), although further research is needed to explain sex differences. Finally, all types of social support were inversely related to almost all types of violence in girls, and especially friends' and others' support, and with online violence and victimisation in boys. This is consistent with several studies showing that social support is a protective factor both for victimisation and perpetration of DV (Richards & Branch, 2012). In the specific case of victimisation, it appears that social support from family, friends and people from academic institutions serves to buffer the impact of victimisation. In fact, these individuals may be important resources for victims, for example, by moderating the impact of prior victimisation on subsequent risk for violence within intimate college relationships (Kaukinen, 2014).

However, this study goes one step further and offers an explanatory model of the perpetration of DV (both online and offline), controlling for the effect of sex and dating victimisation, both variables that previous studies have found to affect DV perpetration (Bennet et al., 2011; Renner & Whitney, 2012). Analyses supported the hypothesis that lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of hostility mediated the relationship between family social support and online and offline DV. In other words, the results of this study suggest that family social support is related to DV through low levels of self-esteem and high levels of hostility. However, friends' and significant others' social support showed a direct effect only on online DV.

The fact that family support had an indirect effect on violence may be because, at this stage of life, there is increasing independence from the family, and new networks and friends become more relevant (Marshall et al., 2014). However, the influence of the family does not disappear. Through its relationship with self-esteem, family support remains a relevant factor for intervention and prevention. Many previous studies have documented the positive relationship between family support

and high self-esteem (Tajbakhsh & Rousta, 2012; Way & Robinson, 2003), a relationship confirmed in the present study. The social support the family transmits from childhood is related to children's self-esteem and subsequently to adolescents' and young people's self-esteem. It may serve as an inhibiting factor of hostility and, in turn, of violent behaviours such as DV.

On the contrary, friends' and significant other's support shows a direct effect on online DV, which could be explained by the relevant influence of friends at this stage of life. Positive and caring friendships may act as a protective factor, as found in previous studies (Park & Kim, 2018). Thus, having strong social support from friends and significant others can be critical in preventing cyber-violence in couples by providing emotional support, external perspective and feedback (on what is and what is not right in couple relationships), fostering self-esteem and empathy, and promoting healthy relationships.

The present research should be considered in light of the study's limitations. First, the cross-sectional and correlational nature of the data precludes drawing causal conclusions. For example, although most research suggests that positive social support produces higher self-esteem and vice versa, it may also be that people with high self-esteem believe they are socially worthy and, consequently, engage in behaviours that build social support (Marshall et al., 2014). Therefore, future research should prospectively examine carefully whether or not these social support deficits influence DV. Secondly, the study relied only on self-report measures, possibly associated with reporting bias. Future research should combine them with interviews or observation measures. Third, the sample was composed of mainly female university students, which limits the generalisability of the results to male and non-university students. In this respect, future studies should include larger and more representative samples of young population as a whole.

Despite these limitations, the present study has important strengths and relevant implications for future research. The study provides a better understanding of the complex reality of DV, exploring not only offline DV but also online DV, two types of DV that are correlated and present among young people. Specifically, efforts have been made to shed more light on the factors that may explain the perpetration of online and offline DV, which is considered one of the strengths of the study: to differentiate between online and offline perpetration and victimisation. Another strength of the study is that it analyses different types of social support (family, friends and other relevant people) and, as confirmed, they play different roles in DV. Moreover, these results show the importance of social support, so prevention and intervention programs should promote adolescents' and young people's awareness of family, peers, and the community resources that they can use to solve conflicts in the best way possible, as well as the community's awareness of their responsibility for taking action in the event of witnessing DV. This is the case for programmes such as Friends Helping Friends (Amar et al., 2015), a bystander education program that helps participants to recognise that every student is responsible for the prevention of interpersonal violence, and where friends are educated so that they can respond adequately to disclosures of DV.

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