Profiles and Risk Factors for Teen Dating Violence in Spain

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Abstract

Teen dating violence (TDV) refers to a wide range of partner-directed harmful behaviors among adolescents. Since it was first documented in the 1980s, there is a growing interest in TDV due to its potentially devastating mid- and long-term consequences. Aiming at the early detection of TDV onset with prevention purposes, research has focused on the detection of typologies of perpetrators and/or victims as well as on identifying risk and protective factors for its occurrence. Research with Spanish adolescents, however, is very limited. To fill this gap, we recruited a total of 2,319 adolescents from different regions in Spain, out of which, 1,079 reported having had a romantic partner during the last year. These filled out measures of TDV (perpetration and victimization), school aggression, hostile and benevolent sexism, empathy, assertiveness, psychological inflexibility (general measures), and psychological inflexibility with prejudice thoughts. A cluster analysis revealed that adolescents could be divided into two clusters as a function of their TDV profile: Cluster 1, including close to 76% of the sample (boys and girls), presented low TDV perpetration and victimization; Cluster 2, including 24% of the sample (boys and girls), presented higher TDV perpetration and victimization. Regression analyses

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revealed that, as compared to those in Cluster 1, adolescents in Cluster 2 were more likely to be older boys who scored high in benevolent sexism, overt and relational school aggression, and personal distress, and low in behavior regulation skills, perspective taking, and practical personal ability. We discuss the implications of these findings for the design of evidence-based TDV prevention campaigns.

Keywords

Teen dating violence (TDV) has been documented since the 80s when empirical studies warned about the scope and consequences of the phenomenon (Exner-Cortens et al., 2016). TDV refers to a wide range of partner-directed harmful behaviors among adolescents, and can be psychological (e.g., emotional manipulation), physical (e.g., shoving, slapping, kicking), sexual (e.g., forced sexual activity), and relational, being the latter particularly frequent in teenage love relationships (Dosil et al., 2020). Relational aggression refers to behaviors directed to exert social control or to harm the relationships between the perpetrator and the victim (Wolfe et al., 2001).

The prevalence of TDV is growing to the point that nowadays it is considered a serious public health problem due to its short- and long-term consequences for the adolescent's integral development (Wincentak et al., 2017). Despite data on prevalence rates being very variable (for a review, see Dosil et al., 2020), TDV has been associated with high levels of anxiety and depression, more difficulties in self-regulation, and a high risk to participate in unhealthy and antisocial behaviors (for a review, see Dosil et al., 2020). The evidence also suggests that frequent perpetrators and victims show less life satisfaction, more depressive symptoms, worse self-esteem, and worse communication with their parents than occasional perpetrators and victims, and with these consequences being worse in females as compared to males (Carrascosa et al., 2018).

Aiming at the early detection of TDV onset, research has focused on the detection of typologies of perpetrators and/or victims. A cluster analysis conducted with US adolescent perpetrators suggested the presence of multiform aggressors, emotional aggressors, and non-aggressors in both genders (Reidy et al., 2016). Interestingly, boys and girls in the most severe cluster (i.e., multiform aggressors) also reported the highest frequency of TDV

victimization, which suggests that TDV may be bidirectional. Studies conducted in other countries or with different cultural backgrounds have shown similar typologies, with large clusters of noninvolved adolescents and the smallest clusters including adolescents involved in more severe or frequent forms of violence (e.g., Euler et al., 2017; McNaughton et al., 2019; Théorêt et al., 2021). With Spanish samples, Diaz-Aguado and Martínez (2015) identified four groups of male adolescents (14–18 years old) based on their self-reported violence against girls in their dating relationships: non-violent adolescent boys, boys who isolate and control their partners, boys who exert medium-level emotional abuse, and boys who frequently engage in all types of violence. Compared with the non-violent adolescents, the other groups showed lower self-esteem and displayed a greater justification of violence against women and in conflict resolution. (for similar data, see Sánchez-Jiménez and Muñoz-Fernández, 2021).

In addition to the detection of typologies of TDV, research has also focused its attention on identifying its risk and protective factors. According to Capaldi et al. (2012), these can be grouped into demographic (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic status), contextual (e.g., neighborhood, community, school), familiar (e.g., abuse), peer-related (e.g., social support), psychological and behavioral (e.g., anger, hostility, personality disorders), and cognitive (attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes). In trying to simplify, Rubio-Garay et al. (2015) cut down to two sets of factors, namely, (inter)personal (biological, behavioral, psychological, and relational) and situational (historical, familiar, economic, social, and community) factors. In the present study, we focus our attention on the interpersonal factors because of their capacity, in some cases, to override risky situational factors (e.g., Jouriles et al., 2012). Such is the case of regulatory skills, which have been posed as a malleable variable that prevents partner violence perpetration (e.g., Finkel et al. 2009; Gratz et al., 2009; Herts et al., 2012; Siegel, 2013).

Interestingly, self-regulation has never been incorporated in TDV profiling studies and the present study aims to fill this gap. Apart from this variable, other interpersonal variables such as sexist attitudes, school violence, assertiveness, and empathy will be incorporated as interpersonal variables that involve some kind of self-regulation (Eisenberg et al., 2000; Valdivia-Salas, Martin-Albo, et al., 2021). Lastly, gender and age will help define the demographic profiles of adolescents immersed in TDV.

Gender

There is evidence that TDV is often mutual, with both male and female adolescents perpetrating and being victimized by their partner (Cava et al., 2015;

Cuenca et al., 2015; Exner-Cortens et al., 2016; Foshee et al., 2011; Messinger et al., 2014; Reidy et al., 2016; Renner & Whitney, 2010). Still, the literature has reported some, although inconclusive, gender differences. For instance, Dosil et al. (2020) has recently informed that data in Spain point to a higher percentage of male perpetrators, with percentages of perpetration ranging from 7.5% to 37.8%, as compared to 7.1% to 14.9% for females. Other authors, however, have found a higher percentage for overall female perpetration in Spain, specifically for verbal-emotional and physical violence (Esparza-Martínez et al., 2019), and for both occasional and frequent TDV (Valdivia-Salas, Jiménez et al., 2021). This finding extends to international samples as well. As reported by Capaldi et al. (2012), a systematic review of the literature on gender differences in dating/intimate partner violence, including adult and adolescent samples, yields consistent results: women are slightly more likely than men to use one or more acts of physical aggression and to use them more frequently (see also Jennings et al., 2017). There is more consensus when it comes to victimization, which has been more frequently reported in females (Dosil et al., 2020).

Age

It is believed that TDV may evolve with age. Miller et al. (2013) examined longitudinal profiles of different typologies of engagement in TDV, bullying, and sexual harassment and found that typology membership was relatively stable over time. However, when a transition from one typology to another occurred, it was from a more severe to a less severe class. Other research aligns with this finding and points to a reduction in aggressive behavior throughout an individuals' life cycle, being more frequent in younger adolescent ages and decreasing after reaching 25 years of age (Capaldi et al., 2012; Cava et al., 2015; Palmetto et al., 2013). This has been attributed to the mystification of romance, the lack of experience in dating relationships, and the exaggeration of gender-specific roles (males' control and females' submission), that typically characterize adolescent dating relationships (Dosil et al., 2020).

Sexist Attitudes

Gender-specific roles and, particularly, sexist attitudes are frequent in Spanish adolescents (Ferragut et al., 2017; Ramiro-Sánchez et al., 2018; Rey-Anacona et al., 2017) and include a stereotyped hostile and/or benevolent view of women. As described by Glick and Fiske (1996), hostile sexism refers to a negative affective view of women whereas benevolent sexism has a positive

affective tone and refers to the need to protect women. Remarkably, both forms of sexism are related with the justification and perpetation of different types of violence such as peer, domestic, and toward minorities (for a review, see Carrascosa et al., 2018), and generally speaking, with poorer dating quality, more positive attitudes toward intimate partner violence, more frequent sexual risk behaviors, greater acceptability of the love-abuse link, and greater emotional dependence (Ramiro-Sánchez et al., 2018).

The relationship between sexism and TDV has received little attention. Still, studies have found that traditional gender roles are associated with TDV perpetration (Reidy et al., 2016) and victimization (Foshee et al., 2004), especially among adolescents who show accepting attitudes toward the use of violence in dating relationships (Smith-Darden et al., 2017; for a review, see Jennings et al., 2017).

In Spain, the evidence of the role of sexism on TDV is non-conclusive. In adults and college students, the link is weak and favors the risk exerted by hostile sexism (for the latest evidence and review, see Martínez-Pecino & Durán 2019). In adolescents, Pazos et al., (2014) showed that sexism, without differentiating between types, is associated with TDV perpetration. Differentiating between types of sexism, there is evidence that hostile sexism relates to different types of aggression in TDV, including cyber-aggression, while benevolent sexism would only correlate with myths of romantic love (Carrascosa et al, 2018; Dosil et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Dominguez et al., 2018).

Psychological Flexibility and Psychological Inflexibility

Previous findings suggest that emotion dysregulation may serve as a risk factor for aggression (O'Connor et al., 2019). There is evidence, for instance, that, as compared to non-agressors, dating violence perpetrators show poor emotion regulation skills and poor anger management skills (Dosil et al., 2020). The psychological flexibility (Psyflex) model of emotion and behavior regulation argues that cognitions (e.g., sexist attitudes or stereotypes) and the behavioral reactions to such cognitions are two different repertoires and that the connection between them is learned. Psyflex refers to the ability to choose the current course of action based on what is important in the mid and long run, whereas psychological inflexibility (PsyInflex) is the tendency to be carried by thoughts and feelings despite the mid and long term consequences. PsyInflex is regarded as the combination of cognitive fusion (CF) and experiential avoidance (EA; Valdivia-Salas et al., 2017). CF is the process by which thoughts about an event become merged with the actual event so that they are taken literally and the person is dominated by or entangled

with them. On the other hand, EA is the tendency to fight against unwanted thoughts and feelings, resulting in deliberate efforts to change their content or frequency (Gillanders et al., 2014).

There is evidence that PsyInflex is a transdiagnostic process present in a myriad of externalizing and internalizing problems (Monestès et al., 2018), and relates with physical aggression and dating violence among college students (Shorey et al., 2014), but research with adolescent samples is very limited. With Spanish adolescents, preliminary data confirmed the relation of PsyInflex with overt and relational TDV (Villanueva et al., 2018), and recent studies showed that PsyInflex with prejudice thoughts predicts personal distress (Valdivia-Salas, Martin-Albo, et al., 2021), which, in turn, relates to both physical and relational TDV (Valdivia-Salas, Jiménez, et al., 2021).

School Violence

Several studies have found consistent relationships between TDV and peer violence at school (Carrascosa et al., 2018; Cava et al., 2015; Foshee et al., 2014; Zych et al., 2021). For instance, there is evidence that victimization at school can be extended to intimate relationships (Carrascosa et al., 2018) and that both types of violence perpetration tend to be present in the same group of adolescents (Diaz-Aguado & Martinez, 2015). In line with this, adolescents who bully their peers are more in agreement than others with beliefs that justify violence in different types of relationships (Carrera-Fernández et al., 2013).

Empathy and Assertiveness

In a systematic review of risk and protective factors for TDV, Vagi et al (2013) found that empathy was a protective factor for violence perpetration, although only one study included in such review supported this conclusion. When it comes to violence in general, the evidence is larger but still inconclusive (Deschamps et al., 2018; Vachon et al., 2013). In an attempt to refine these mixed findings, some authors have adopted the multidimensional model of empathy by Davis (1983), which differentiates between cognitive empathy, or the ability to understand how others feel, and affective empathy, or the vicarious experience of others' feelings. In the only study to date that explores the relationship between empathy as defined by Davis (1983) and TDV, Valdivia-Salas, Jiménez, et al. (2021) showed a positive relationship between high personal distress, that is, one of the components of affective empathy, and both physical and relational TDV.

Setting boundaries and assertiveness skills training is a frequent component of school prevention programs targeted to reduce violence. A recent review by Joseph and Kuperminc (2020) reports that this component is present in 6 out of 8 TDV prevention programs, and in 6 out of 14 bullying prevention programs well known in the USA. According to the cognitive model of assertiveness (Vagos & Pereira, 2010), this construct encompasses four interpersonal schemas or core beliefs about the capacity of individuals to express themselves and to respond adequately in different contexts and to different social demands: outer emotional support, or the representation of others as providers of secure affection; interpersonal management, or the representation of relationships as sources of gratification; and practical and affective personal abilities, or positive representations of the self as being capable and lovable, respectively.

Although it is included as a core component in violence prevention programs, the evidence on the role of assertiveness on TDV is very limited. Reidy et al. (2016) observed that poor conflict resolution skills did not differentiate among adolescents who were identified as either multiform aggressors, emotional aggressors, or non-aggressors in their dating relationships.

Despite the evidence of the unique contribution of these variables on TDV, there is no evidence of their relative contribution when analyzed together and in a sample of Spanish dating adolescents. Furthermore, there is no study to date that classifies TDV perpetrators and victims as a function of their regulatory skills. The purpose of the present investigation was twofold. First, to classify Spanish adolescents into distinct groups as a function of their involvement in TDV perpetration and victimization. Second, to explore whether demographic (age and gender) and interpersonal (sexism, PsyFlex/Inflex, assertiveness, empathy, and school violence) variables predict the belonging to these groups.

Method

Participants

A total of 2,319 students from 11 secondary schools were recruited during the academic year 2018/2019. This study is part of a bigger research project with additional goals. For the present study, we only analyzed the data provided by those adolescents who responded Yes to the question: "Have you had an intimate partner any time during the last year?" included in the battery. A total of 1,079 students responded Yes (see flow diagram in Figure 1): 512 boys (47.5%), 534 girls (49.5%), and 33 unknown (3.1%). The students' mean age was 14.1 years (range = 11–17, SD = 1.35). Students were distributed in first,
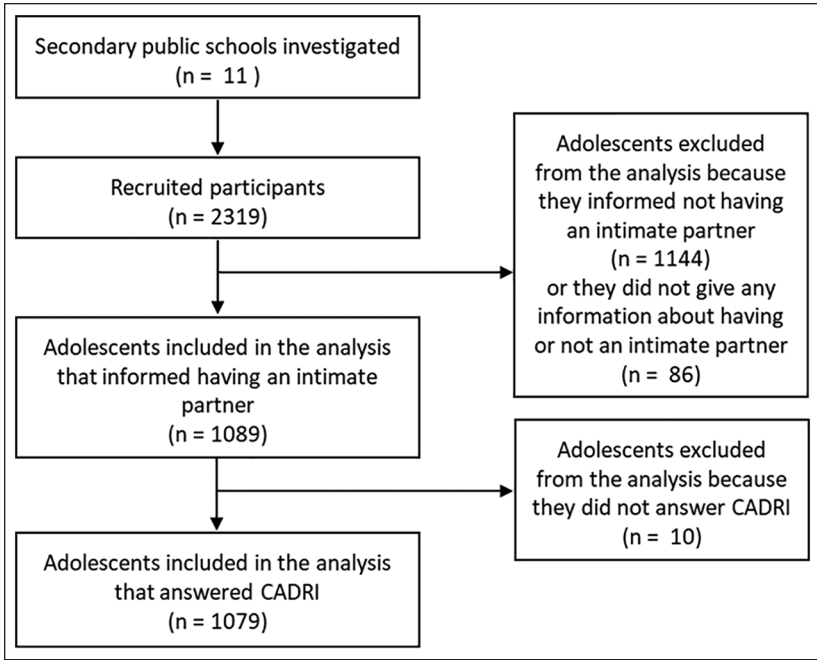
Figure 1. Diagram flow of the selection of the participants included in the analysis.

second, third, and fourth grade of secondary school classes (which correspond to grades 7 and 8 of middle school and 9 and 10 of high school in the North American system) according to the following percentages: 18.1%, 28.3%, 26.5%, and 27.2%, respectively. The proportion of students attending public school versus private schools was 2/3, and this is quite representative of the education situation in Spain, in which 68% of adolescents attend public secondary schools (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2019).

Variables and Measures

Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory. We used the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI, Wolfe et al., 2001), adapted to Spanish by Fernández-Fuertes et al. (2006). It contains 25 items assessing conflictive actions (physical, relational, verbal-emotional, sexual aggression, and threats) among adolescent dating partners that either abuse or are victimized. In the present research we only assessed physical aggression

(e.g., I threw something at my partner; my partner threw something at me); relational aggression (e.g., I spread rumors about my partner; my partner spread rumors about me); and verbal-emotional aggression (e.g., I said things just to make my partner angry; my partner said things just to make me angry). Respondents rate how often they experienced arguments or conflicts with their partners over the last 12 months, on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often). Cronbach's alpha in previous studies with Spanish adolescents ranged between .84 and .86 for abuse and .84 for victimization (Fernández-Fuertes et al., 2006). Cronbach's alpha in our sample was .84 for perpetration and .90 for victimization.

Adolescent Sexism Detection Scale. We employed the Adolescent Sexism Detection Scale (Recio et al., 2007). It contains 26 items assessing Hostile Sexism (16 items; e.g., "Women are weaker than men in all respects") and Benevolent Sexism (10 items; e.g., "Women by nature are more patient and tolerant than men"). Respondents rate each item on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (I totally disagree) to 6 (I totally agree). Cronbach's alpha in previous studies with Spanish adolescents ranged between .80 and .86 for Benevolent Sexism and between .92 and .94 for Hostile Sexism (Ramiro-Sánchez, et al., 2018; Recio, et al., 2007). Cronbach's alpha in our sample was .93 for Hostile Sexism and .89 for Benevolent Sexism.

School violence toward peers. We used the Aggression Scale (Little et al., 2003), adapted to Spanish by Cava et al. (2006). It contains 25 items assessing Overt Aggression (13 items; e.g., "I'm the type of person who hits, kicks, or punches others") and Relational Aggression (12 items; e.g., "If others hurt me, I often try to keep them from being in my group of friends"). Respondents rate how often they have engaged in aggressive behavior toward their peers at school over the last 12 months, on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always). Cronbach's alpha in previous studies with Spanish adolescent samples ranged between .72 and .87 (Jiménez & Estévez, 2017). Cronbach's alpha in our sample was .86 for Overt Aggression, and .78 for Relational Aggression.

Avoidance and Fusion Questionnaire for Youth. We employed the Spanish validation (Valdivia-Salas et al., 2017) of the Avoidance and Fusion Questionnaire for Youth (AFQ-Y, Greco et al., 2008). It contains 17 items assessing CF (8 items; e.g., "My life won't be good until I feel happy.") and EA (9 items; e.g., "I must get rid of my worries and fears so I can have a good life."). Respondents rate their agreement with each statement on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true). Cronbach's alpha in

previous studies with Spanish samples was .81 for CF, .76 for EA, and .88 for the total score (Valdivia-Salas et al., 2017). Cronbach's alpha in our sample was .75 for CF and .76 for EA.

Psychological flexibility with stigmatizing thoughts. We employed the Spanish validation (Valdivia-Salas, Martin-Albo, et al., 2021) of the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-Stigma (AAQ-S; Levin et al., 2014). It contains 21 items assessing PsyFlex (11 items; e.g., "I feel that I am aware of my own biases") and PsyInflex (10 items; e.g., "I stop doing things that are important to me when it involves someone I don't like"). Responders rate how true each statement is for them on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (never true) to 7 (always true). Cronbach's alpha was .80 for PsyFlex and .77 for PsyInflex in a sample of adolescents (Valdivia-Salas, Martin-Albo, et al., 2021). Cronbach's alpha in our sample was .78 for PsyFlex and .75 for PsyInflex.

Assertive Interpersonal Schema Questionnaire. We used the Assertive Interpersonal Schema Questionnaire (Vagos & Pereira, 2010), designed to assess a set of core beliefs about the self, others, and social events or interactions. It contains 21 items assessing Outer Emotional Support (5 items; e.g., "I have always had someone to talk to and who really cares about what happens to me."), Practical Personal Ability (4 items; e.g., "I am capable of performing tasks at school as well as most people."), Interpersonal Management (8 items; e.g., "When someone I like pulls away from me, I try to understand why and solve the situation."), and Affective Personal Ability (4 items; e.g., "A boy/girl I like may like me, even with my faults and weaknesses."). Respondents rate if the statements describe them well, on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (completely false to me) to 5 (completely true to me). Cronbach's alpha in previous studies with Portuguese samples ranged between .75 and .83 for the subscales (Vagos & Pereira, 2010). Cronbach's alpha in our sample was .86 for Outer Emotional Support, .87 for Practical Personal Ability, .76 for Interpersonal Management, and .72 for Affective Personal Ability.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index. We administered the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983), adapted to Spanish by Mestre et al. (2004). It contains 28 items assessing cognitive and emotional dimensions of empathy including Perspective Taking (7 items; e.g., "I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective"), Fantasy (7 items; e.g., "I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel"), Empathic Concern (7 items; e.g., "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me"), and Personal Distress (7 items;

e.g., "Being in a tense emotional situation scares me"). Respondents rate how well each statement describes themselves on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (does not describe me well) to 5 (describes me very well). Cronbach's alpha in previous studies with Spanish adolescent samples ranged between .56 and .76 for the four subscales (Mestre et al., 2004). After removing the two reversed items of the Personal Distress subscale because of reliability problems (Józsa & Morgan, 2017), Cronbach alpha in our sample was .75 for Perspective Taking, .77 for Fantasy, .75 for Empathic Concern, and .71 for Personal Distress.

Procedure

The present data were collected as part of a larger study on dating violence in adolescents. After obtaining the approval of the Ethics in Research Aragon Committee, protocol #PI20-122, to conduct the study, a total of 15 secondary schools in four regions in Spain were contacted through the Department of Education of each region and invited to participate. The invitation consisted of a written letter that included a summary of the research project, its goals, and the terms of their participation. A total of 11 agreed to participate. We then requested parents' and guardians' active and written consent for their children to participate (only 1.8% did not consent). The paper and pencil questionnaires were self-administered in a group format during regular school hours. Students with consent were escorted by their teachers to a conference room (bigger than a regular class) to ensure privacy while filling the questionnaires. During administration, at least one qualified researcher (with a PhD) was present to provide students with the necessary support, and their teachers left the room. Once students were seated and ready, the researcher explained the goals of the study and highlighted that participation was voluntary and confidential. Only participants who assented to participate, completed the battery. Measures were collected in all classrooms within 2 weeks.

The research was conducted in compliance with ethical values required for research on human beings, respecting the basic principles included in the Helsinki Declaration and the code of good practice in research of the host university.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with PASW Statistics (SPSS) version 23.0.0.0 for Windows. For all analyses, the significance level was set at .05. A two-step

cluster analysis was performed to identify groups with similar characteristics on TDV perpetration and victimization. This procedure determines the number of clusters automatically by running pre-clustering followed by hierarchical methods. Prior to conducting the cluster analysis, all the variables were Z-transformed so that they could share the same metric and hence contribute equally to the formation of the clusters. The distance measure employed was the Log-likelihood. The number of clusters was automatically determined among a maximum of 15 clusters. The cluster features tree tuning criteria were set to have eight child nodes and three levels maximum. Schwarz's Bayesian information criterion (BIC) and the silhouette coefficient were used to compare cluster solutions. Silhouette measures of less than 0.2 were classified as poor; between 0.2 and 0.5 as fair; and greater than 0.5 as good solution quality, with fair and higher considered acceptable clustering (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Medians of CADRI subscales for the whole sample and for each cluster were calculated. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were then performed to compare these medians.

The Pearson correlation between overall TDV perpetration and overall victimization was calculated using the bootstrap method ($n=5,000$ resamples) with a 95% confidence interval. Its magnitude was interpreted according to guidelines offered by Cohen (1992). Two independent sample t-tests, using the bootstrap method ($n=5,000$ resamples) with a 95% confidence interval, were performed to compare the average values of TDV perpetration and victimization in each cluster.

Finally, we run a series of multivariate binomial logistic regression analyses to predict cluster allocation as a function of the variables assessed. First of all, we conducted a multilevel null model (i.e., a model without any predictors), using the Generalized Linear Mixed Models procedure (see Heck et al., 2013) to determine whether or not the assumption of independence of observations necessary to conduct traditional regression analysis was violated. Results revealed that the variability of the outcome among schools was 0.163 and not statistically significant, $Z=1.69$, $p>.05$, indicating that the intercept variance did not vary across schools. Additionally, the ICC was .008 (a value close to 0), suggesting that about 0.8% of the variability of the outcome was due to the variance between schools. Consequently, one-level logistic regressions were warranted. Next, a logistic regression was carried out for each instrument, using the enter method selection, in which the subscales of each instrument were introduced simultaneously. Second, two logistic regressions were performed, based on conditional parameter estimates, including all the subscales of all instruments. One employed the forward selection procedure and the other the backward elimination.

Table 1. Medians of CADRI Subscales in All Sample and per Cluster (Upper Section), and Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Medians Comparisons (Bottom Section).

	Median of perpetration			Median of victimization		
	Rel.	Ver.	Phys.	Rel.	Ver.	Phys.
All	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.0
Cluster 1	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.0
Cluster 2	1.0	1.7	1.2	1.3	1.8	1.0

	Diff. between perpetration types			Diff. between victimization types		
	Rel.-Ver.	Ver.-Phys.	Rel.-Phys.	Rel.-Ver.	Ver.-Phys.	Rel.-Phys.
All						
Z	18.14	17.83	1.69	14.23	18.45	5.75
p	.000	.000	.092	.000	.000	.000
Cluster 1						
Z	13.95	14.39	0.34	10.85	14.98	5.46
p	.000	.000	.737	.000	.000	.000
Cluster 2						
Z	11.98	10.93	2.38	9.35	11.54	3.33
p	.000	.000	.017	.000	.000	.001

Note. CADRI = Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory; Rel. = relational; Ver. = verbal-emotional; Phys. = physical; Diff. = difference.

Results

A total of 1.5% of the dataset (323 of 21,257 datapoints) was missing values. The two-step cluster analysis divided participants into two clusters. Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 included 75.6% and 24.4% of adolescents, respectively. The two-cluster solution gave the highest value for the ratio of distance measure (3.65), the highest BIC change (−753.956), and the highest BIC rate change (1.000), being the BIC value 768.791. The silhouette coefficient was 0.7, which is considered a good solution. The importance of the main predictors in decreasing order was: TDV perpetration 1.00 and TDV victimization 0.88.

As Table 1 shows (upper section), the rates of physical, relational, and verbal-emotional violence perpetration and victimization were pretty low and similar in the whole sample and in Cluster 1. As for Cluster 2, verbal-emotional perpetration and victimization rates were slightly higher than the other types of violence. Regardless of the small differences in the rates of

endorsement by types of TDV, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed that, within groups (whole sample, Cluster 1 and Cluster 2), the differences between types of perpetration and types of victimization were all significant except for the difference between relational and physical perpetration in the whole sample and in Cluster 1 (see Table 1, bottom).

The Pearson correlation between overall TDV perpetration and overall TDV victimization was positive, significant and strong (rxy = .69, $p < .001$). Independent sample t-tests revealed that TDV perpetration and TDV victimization average scores were significantly lower in Cluster 1 than that in Cluster 2, being the estimated mean difference 0.50 [0.46, 0.55] and 0.62 [0.56, 0.68] for perpetration and victimization, respectively. Consequently, Cluster 1 included adolescents that present lower levels of TDV perpetration ($M = 1.10$, $SE = 0.11$) and victimization ($M = 1.10$, $SE = 0.12$); whereas Cluster 2 included adolescents that exert higher levels of TDV perpetration ($M = 1.60$, $SE = 0.35$) and, at the same time, are more victimized by their intimate partners ($M = 1.72$, $SE = 0.49$).

The results of the logistic regressions are presented in Table 2. Concerning demographic variables, both gender and age were significantly related to the cluster variable. Concretely, boys and older adolescents were more likely to be in Cluster 2.

Concerning sexist attitudes, benevolent but not hostile sexism, statistically predicted the belonging to the clusters so that adolescents with higher benevolent sexism were more likely to be in Cluster 2.

Both types of school aggression, namely overt and relational, were significantly associated with the cluster variable. Specifically, more aggression (either overt or relational) was related to a higher probability to be in Cluster 2. Indeed, both overt and relational aggression were the best predictors of cluster allocation, since they showed the highest odds ratio values and their confidence intervals did not overlap with most of the remaining components.

With regard to psychological inflexibility, out of the four components assessed, only two predicted cluster allocation, namely, CF (from the AFQ-Y) and PsyInflex (from the AAQ-S). For both components, the relation was positive, meaning that adolescents with higher CF and higher PsyInflex with prejudice thoughts were more likely to belong to Cluster 2.

Similarly, out of the four components of assertiveness, only practical personal ability reached statistical reliability and was negatively related to the cluster variable. That is, adolescents with low levels of practical personal ability were more likely to be in Cluster 2.

Finally, out of the four components of empathy, only two were significantly related to the cluster variable, namely, perspective taking and personal

Table 2. Multivariate Binomial Logistic Regressions.

Predictor variable	B (SE)	Wald	Odd ratio [95% CI]
Logistic regression for each instrument entering their subscales simultaneously			
Demographics			
Age*	0.13 (0.06)	5.88	1.14 [1.03, 1.27]
Gender**	0.41 (0.15)	7.55	1.50 [1.24, 2.01]
Detection of sexism in adolescents			
Hostile sexism	0.13 (0.11)	1.24	1.13 [0.91, 1.42]
Benevolent sexism**	0.28 (0.09)	8.56	1.32 [1.10, 1.59]
School aggression			
Overt aggression***	1.10 (0.23)	23.49	2.99 [1.92, 4.66]
Relational aggression***	1.03 (0.24)	19.12	2.81 [1.77, 4.47]
Avoidance and Fusion Questionnaire for Youth			
Cognitive fusion***	0.56 (0.12)	20.90	1.76 [1.38, 2.24]
Experiential avoidance	0.06 (0.12)	0.26	1.06 [0.84, 1.36]
Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-Stigma			
Psychological flexibility	−0.05 (0.11)	0.19	0.95 [0.76, 1.19]
Psychological inflexibility***	0.74 (0.13)	30.43	2.09 [1.61, 2.72]
Assertive Interpersonal Schema Questionnaire			
Outer emotional support	−0.17 (0.12)	2.22	0.84 [0.67, 1.06]
Practical personal ability***	−0.42 (0.10)	15.86	0.66 [0.54, 0.81]
Interpersonal management	0.02 (0.17)	0.02	1.02 [0.74, 1.42]
Affective personal ability	0.15 (0.14)	1.08	1.16 [0.87, 1.54]
Interpersonal Reactivity Index			
Perspective Taking**	−0.33 (0.11)	8.10	0.72 [0.58, 0.90]
Fantasy	−0.06 (0.09)	0.40	0.94 [0.79, 1.13]
Empathic Concern	0.12 (0.13)	0.80	1.12 [0.87, 1.44]
Personal Distress***	0.59 (0.11)	31.26	1.81 [1.47, 2.23]
Logistic regression including all the subscales of all instruments simultaneously			
Age**	0.18 (0.06)	8.55	1.20 [1.06, 1.35]
Gender**	0.50 (0.17)	8.17	1.65 [1.17, 2.33]
Benevolent sexism**	0.26 (0.08)	11.43	1.29 [1.11, 1.50]
Overt aggression***	1.05 (0.25)	17.17	2.87 [1.74, 4.73]
Relational aggression**	0.77 (0.27)	8.26	2.16 [1.28, 3.66]
Practical personal ability**	−0.26 (0.08)	9.96	0.77 [0.65, 0.91]
Personal distress**	0.29 (0.10)	7.88	1.33 [1.09, 1.63]

Note. For gender, girls were coded as the reference category; intercepts of the logistic regressions were omitted. B = coefficient B; SE = standard error of B; Wald = Wald statistic; odd ratio = estimated odds ratio; 95% CI = 95% confidence interval for odd ratio.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

distress. Whereas perspective taking was negatively related to the cluster variable, personal distress was positively related. Therefore, low levels of perspective taking and high levels of personal distress were related to a higher probability to be in Cluster 2.

When all the subscales were entered simultaneously in the same model (Table 2, bottom), CF, PsyInflex with prejudice thoughts, and perspective taking lose their significant link to cluster allocation. Consistently with the previous analysis, age, gender, benevolent sexism, overt and relational aggression, and personal distress were positively related to cluster allocation, whereas practical personal ability was negatively related. Logistic regressions conducted with forward selection and backward elimination of the components yielded the same results.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the profiles and risk factors for TDV in Spanish adolescents. First of all, our cluster analysis yielded two discrete clusters as a function of adolescents' involvement in TDV perpetration and victimization. The largest group, with approximately 75% of the adolescents, was characterized by low levels of both perpetration and victimization (regarded as Cluster 1). The smallest group, with approximately 25% of the adolescents, included adolescents that reported higher levels of aggression toward their partners and higher levels of victimization by their partners (regarded as Cluster 2).

Within clusters, the rates of different types of aggression were very similar, with verbal-emotional perpetration and victimization being the most reported (for similar results, see, e.g., Fernandez-Fuertes et al., 2019). Results also revealed that the association between TDV perpetration and victimization was very strong. These findings go in line with previous evidence on the prevalence of TDV in Spain and are in accordance with the idea that TDV is often bidirectional, with both members acting as both perpetrators and victims (Cava et al., 2015; Reidy et al., 2016; Renner & Whitney, 2010).

Logistic regressions revealed that school violence toward peers was the variable that best predicted cluster allocation. Adolescents who scored high in school violence toward their peers were more likely to belong to the group of higher TDV perpetration and victimization, which is in accordance with the trans-contextual usage of violence in significative relationships (peers and partners) during adolescence (Zych et al., 2021). Out of the two types of school violence assessed, overt violence was a better predictor than relational aggression. Similar results were reported by Cava et al., (2015), who found that TDV correlated with overt more strongly than with relational aggression.

Overall, this observed association points to the same direction as a recent meta-analysis which reveals that school violence and TDV might be two behavioral manifestations of the same underlying pattern of antisocial behavior in specific groups of adolescents (Zych et al., 2021).

Demographic variables such as age and gender also proved their significant role in cluster allocation. Boys were more likely to be in Cluster 2, which adds to the non-conclusive literature on TDV prevalence as a function of gender. Discrepancies between studies could be attributed to conceptual or methodological differences such as the typologies of violence evaluated, the instruments employed during the assessments, the informants interviewed, or the likelihood that girls tended to minimize victimization and maximize perpetration, whereas boys tended to minimize perpetration and maximize victimization, as gender-role discrepant behaviors (Esparza-Martinez et al., 2019; Reidy et al., 2015). Regardless of the prevalence, it is also well known that while female perpetration may be more frequent, male perpetration may be more injuring and fear-evoking (Smith-Darden et al., 2017). Hence, studies point to the importance of supporting both genders in learning skills for healthy relationships and beginning such programs as early as possible, and no later than middle school, when intimate relationships transition from mixed-sex peer activities to exclusive dyadic activities (Cava et al., 2015).

The age range in our sample was 11–17 years old, which encompasses early and middle adolescence. Logistic regressions in our study yielded a higher probability of Cluster 2 allocation for older adolescents. This finding is in agreement with previous evidence of a peak of aggression-victimization in middle adolescence and goes parallel with the changes in significant relations during this evolutive period: from peers to romantic relationships (for a review of relevant literature, see Dosil et al., 2020). From a socio-developmental point of view, the peak of TDV in middle adolescence is coherent with the peak observed in the prevalence of other risk and antisocial behaviors typically observed in adolescents, which also decline rapidly thereafter. According to Agnew (2003), such a peak stems from factors that are inherent to adolescence in industrialized societies, such as a reduction in supervision, an increase in social and academic demands, and a greater desire for adult privileges, to name a few. These factors co-occur with the distress that results from the first romantic relationships, distress associated with the lack of experience in dating relationships, the mystification of romance, and the exaggeration of gender-specific roles (Dosil et al., 2020). Other studies that have explored the longitudinal profiles of youth who engage in various forms of aggression (including frequency and severity of aggression) argue that cluster membership is relatively stable over time, but when adolescents transition from one cluster to another, they usually move from a more severe to a

less severe one (Miller et al., 2013; Reidy et al., 2016). Future studies are necessary to confirm this stability with Spanish adolescents, and the individual factors that favor the transition toward less severe forms of aggression or its elimination.

Benevolent, but not hostile sexism predicted cluster allocation. Specifically, higher scores in benevolent sexism increased the likelihood of Cluster 2 allocation. This adds to the scarce evidence of the role of sexist attitudes on TDV and extends previous findings in Spain. Generally speaking, our results go in line with previous evidence that adhering to traditional gender roles relates to violence exerted in various contexts, including intimate relationships (e.g., Pazos et al., 2014). However, contrary to previous studies that warn about hostile sexism as the most salient predictor of TDV, our results point to the risk associated with benevolent sexism. The fact that only benevolent but not hostile sexism proved related to TDV is probably the result of benevolent sexism not being recognized as sexism at all, but as a caring attitude toward females. In fact, benevolent sexism is related to a lower tendency to perceive the abusive behavior of others as abusive (Dosil et al., 2020), which might facilitate TDV perpetration in the name of protection, and TDV victimization in the name of care and love. These findings reveal the need to tackle benevolent sexism as strongly as hostile sexism.

Regarding empathy, only two of their components differentiated between clusters, namely, perspective taking and personal distress. More specifically, adolescents who scored low in perspective taking and high in personal distress were more likely to belong to Cluster 2. Perspective taking is one of the two components of cognitive empathy, while personal distress is one of the two components of affective empathy. These findings go in line with previous research on the relationship between cognitive/affective empathy and violence in contexts other than dating relationships (e.g., Gantiva et al., 2021) and with the only study to date that proved the links between personal distress and TDV in Spanish dating adolescents (Valdivia-Salas, Jiménez et al., 2021).

As for assertiveness, out of its four components, only practical personal ability predicted cluster allocation, with those scoring low being more likely to belong to Cluster 2. This component refers to a positive representation of the self as possessing the abilities needed to manage daily life (Vagos & Pereira, 2010). In this sense, our finding goes in line with previous evidence on the relation of TDV with low self-esteem but not with poor conflict resolution skills (Diaz-Aguado & Martinez, 2015; Jennings et al., 2017; Reidy et al., 2016).

Components of behavior regulation were among the strongest predictors of cluster allocation. Scoring high in PsyInflex with prejudice thoughts, and scoring high in CF predicted Cluster 2 allocation. These findings go in line

with previous evidence suggesting the role of behavior regulation on aggression in general, and TDV in particular. CF, as defined in the Introduction, is the general tendency to identify with self-statements and emotions as they come through our mind, e.g., statements regarding our personal distress in a particular moment, or our lack of abilities to manage a particular situation, or about what my girlfriend or boyfriend should be doing now. In the absence of perspective-taking skills from our own self-statements, CF may lead to impulsive and not planned behavior, including aggression. Both CF and EA are well integrated into the PsyInflex component of the AAQ-S, which assesses behavior regulation specifically in response to stereotypes and prejudice thoughts. Our findings suggest that having or not the ability to notice and be aware of own stereotypes (PsyFlex, as measured with, e.g., "I feel that I am aware of my own biases") does not make teens more or less prone to TDV. Alternatively, letting actions be carried out by such stereotypes (PsyInflex, as measured with, e.g., "When I am having negative thoughts about others, I withdraw from people") is related to a higher probability of using and being a victim of TDV. Hence, beyond the necessary identification and reduction of prejudices (including sexist attitudes), dating violence prevention campaigns ought to consider the training of healthier behavior regulation strategies, especially during adolescence, when regulatory skills are not yet fully consolidated.

Interestingly and contrarily to expectations, when logistic regressions were performed including all the subscales of all instruments, results were the same except for CF, PsyInflex with prejudice thoughts, and perspective taking, which lost their significant link to cluster allocation. This probably means that age, gender, benevolent sexism, overt and relational aggression, and practical personal ability contributed to the prediction of TDV by providing information that was not redundant among them. On the contrary, although CF, PsyInflex with prejudice thoughts, and perspective taking were also predictors of TDV when considered separately, they did not add to the other variables when analyzed altogether. It is reasonable to believe that sexism, overt and relational aggression, and low practical personal ability may imply some degree of PsyInflex, CF, or low perspective taking (for related evidence, see Levin et al., 2014; Valdivia-Salas, Martin-Albo, et al., 2021). Further research will clarify whether or not these processes actually function as mechanisms of action in the relation of sexism, school aggression, and assertiveness with TDV. Indeed, recent studies show that PsyInflex predicts personal distress, a component of empathy linked to aggressive behavior (Valdivia-Salas, Martín-Albo et al., 2021), and that mediates the relationship between school violence and TDV (Valdivia-Salas, Jiménez et al., 2021). These findings, along with the evidence of PsyInflex as a mediator

and moderator between adverse circumstances and diverse psychological wellbeing and adjustment indicators, warrant its incorporation as a relevant variable in the study of TDV and its modification.

The present study is not without its limitations, chief among them, the use of self-report measures to assess sensitive information such as sexist attitudes and the use of violence in dating relationships. Future studies might benefit from incorporating measures of social desirability and/or implicit cognition tasks, as well as the evaluation of additional variables typically explored in TDV (e.g., self-esteem, attitudes condoning violence, self-defense, anger/hostility). Future explorations with more varied samples (including adolescents showing at-risk rates of TDV) and rigorous longitudinal designs will confirm the stability of the clustering observed in the present study and the role exerted by the variables assessed on TDV perpetration and victimization. Future studies might also consider incorporating issues relating to gender identity and sexual orientation, which have not been assessed in our sample, to increase the generalizability of our findings to diverse populations in Spain.

All in all, we have identified two different patterns of violence in adolescent intimate relationships in a nonprobabilistic sample of adolescents from four regions in Spain. The most frequent pattern involves low perpetration and victimization whereas the least frequent pattern involves higher perpetration and victimization. This last pattern is more likely observed in older boys who score high in benevolent sexism, overt and relational aggression, and personal distress, and low in behavior regulation skills, perspective taking, and practical personal ability. We hope these findings add to the design of evidence-based TDV prevention and treatment interventions.

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