



**Dating Violence and Suicidal Ideation in Ecuadorian Youth**  
**Violencia en el noviazgo e ideación suicida en jóvenes ecuatorianos**

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**ABSTRACT**

Dating violence constitutes a significant public health problem due to its serious repercussions on victims. This research aimed to analyze the relationship between dating violence and suicidal ideation among young people in Ecuador, as well as to identify whether there are differences in these variables based on gender. This research employed a quantitative, descriptive, and correlational approach, using a non-experimental, cross-sectional design. A non-probabilistic snowball sampling method was used, yielding a sample of 1 293 university students, who were administered the Dating Violence Questionnaire (DVQ) and the Paykel Suicide Ideation Scale (PSS). It was found that 40.6 % of the participants experienced dating violence. Furthermore, gender differences were identified in the levels of dating violence and suicidal ideation; Likewise, a significant relationship was found between both variables (dating violence and suicidal ideation). It was concluded that dating violence constitutes a significant problem associated with suicidal ideation, highlighting the need to develop comprehensive prevention and intervention programs.

**Keywords:** Violence, Mental Health, Death.



## RESUMEN

La violencia en el noviazgo constituye un importante problema de salud pública debido a sus graves repercusiones en las víctimas. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar la relación entre la violencia en el noviazgo y la ideación suicida en jóvenes ecuatorianos, así como también identificar si existen diferencias en estas variables en función del género. Para esta investigación se empleó un enfoque cuantitativo, descriptivo y correlacional, con un diseño no experimental y transversal. Se utilizó un muestro no probabilístico de tipo bola de nieve, mediante el cual se obtuvo una muestra de 1 293 estudiantes universitarios, a quienes se les aplicó el Cuestionario de Violencia en el Noviazgo (CUVINO) y la Escala de Ideación Suicida de Paykel (PSS). Se encontró que el 40,6 % de los participantes experimentó violencia en el noviazgo. Además, se identificaron diferencias de género en los niveles de violencia en las relaciones de noviazgo y en la ideación suicida; asimismo se evidenció una relación significativa entre ambas variables (violencia en el noviazgo e ideación suicida). Se concluye que la violencia en el noviazgo constituye una problemática relevante asociada a la ideación suicida, lo que resalta la necesidad de desarrollar programas integrales de prevención e intervención.

**Palabras clave:** violencia, salud mental, muerte.

## INTRODUCTION

Dating violence (DV) is a social problem that significantly affects adolescents and young adults, regardless of their social, cultural, and economic status.<sup>(1,2)</sup> It has a high prevalence worldwide,<sup>(3,4)</sup> with reports indicating that both men and women can be victims of this type of violence, predominantly psychological. In Ecuador, studies also reveal alarming data on the frequency of this type of violence in the population.<sup>(5,6)</sup> For example, one study<sup>(5)</sup> revealed that 90.4 % of young men and 88.1 % of young women have experienced violence in their dating relationships, showing a high frequency. However, another study<sup>(7)</sup> found that women are, to a greater extent, victims.

Violence against women (VAW) manifests through one or more acts of physical aggression—such as hair pulling, hitting, or pushing—sexual aggression—such as non-consensual touching or sexual abuse—and psychological aggression—such as teasing, insults, and manipulation.<sup>(8)</sup> VAW can also be reciprocal or bidirectional, as both partners can be victims or perpetrators of violence, which is a particular characteristic of this type of aggression.<sup>(4,9)</sup> Other characteristics include: 1) lack of formality in the relationship, such as the absence of a common-law marriage or marital bond; 2) absence of economic dependence or violence toward children; 3) short-term or non-extensive relationships; and 4) occurrence at early stages of life, when young people detach from their primary ties to establish early relationships.<sup>(10,11)</sup>

Violence in dating relationships causes serious physical and psychological effects. Physically, victims may experience anything from physical injuries to chronic illnesses resulting from constant stress and persistent



emotional distress.<sup>(12)</sup> Psychologically, the consequences tend to be more severe and complex. Constant exposure to violence can lead to mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, and other emotional disturbances that affect both overall well-being and quality of life.<sup>(13,14)</sup>

Suicidal ideation, understood as recurrent thoughts about taking one's own life,<sup>(15)</sup> is one of the problems associated with domestic violence.<sup>(16)</sup> For example, one study<sup>(17)</sup> found that adolescent girls who experienced domestic violence were more likely to plan suicide. In particular, those who suffered physical or sexual violence had a significantly higher risk of developing a suicide plan, with this risk being especially elevated among Latina adolescents compared to Caucasian adolescents. However, another study<sup>(18)</sup> showed that both men and women who were victims of psychological violence in dating relationships had a higher probability of subsequent suicidal ideation, with no significant differences by gender.

These findings highlight the significant relationship between domestic violence and suicidal ideation, especially psychological violence, which is associated with a higher risk of suicidal thoughts over time. In the Ecuadorian context, where social and cultural norms can perpetuate or minimize violence in intimate partner relationships, domestic violence could be an even more serious problem.<sup>(19)</sup> Suicidal ideation is one of the most frequent public health problems in Ecuador,<sup>(20,21)</sup> and understanding its relationship with domestic violence allows for a better interpretation of this phenomenon.

Furthermore, studies have focused on women experiencing intimate partner violence, whether marital or dating,<sup>(2,22,23)</sup> neglecting the analysis of young men. Therefore, comprehensive information on this issue is needed to design more effective and contextualized intervention programs for the Ecuadorian population. The objective of this research was to analyze the relationship between dating violence and suicidal ideation in young Ecuadorians, as well as to identify whether there are differences in these variables based on gender.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive and explanatory scope. It described the study variables at a specific point in time. It applied statistical analyses to determine the relationship between dating violence and suicidal ideation, as well as their potential causal association, using a non-experimental, cross-sectional design. Furthermore, it was a field study, as psychological tests were administered to the participants.

### Participants

The study population consisted of 12 012 467 individuals from various provinces of Ecuador. The final sample comprised 1 293 university students, selected via nonprobability snowball sampling. This sampling method was chosen due to its ease of access to the target population. To minimize potential selection bias,



dissemination channels were diversified (academic and social networks), and clear inclusion criteria were established (university students who provided informed consent and participated voluntarily). Participants completed the questionnaires online and anonymously. Of the participants, 502 were male, and 671 were female; the mean age was 22.35 years ( $SD = 4.76$ ).

### Collecting Data

The Dating Violence Questionnaire (CUVINO) is a tool that measures the victimization of young people in their dating relationships; it has been validated in a young Hispanic American population.<sup>(24)</sup> It is an instrument consisting of 42 Likert-type items with five response options (0 = "never" and 4 = "very frequently"). The 42 items are grouped into four types of violence: psychological, physical, sexual, and instrumental, which can be categorized as absent, mild, moderate, and severe. To identify psychological violence, one of the questions is: Does he/she humiliate you in public?; for physical violence: Has he/she hit you?; for sexual violence: Does he/she insist on touching that is unpleasant and that you do not want?; and for instrumental violence: Has he/she put you in debt? The reliability of the overall questionnaire was high ( $\alpha = 0.98$ ) as well as in the dimensions of psychological violence ( $\alpha = 0.97$ ), physical violence ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ), sexual violence ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ), and instrumental violence ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

The Paykel Suicide Scale (PSS) is an instrument that assesses the presence and severity of suicidal thoughts or "suicidal ideation"<sup>(25)</sup> through five questions that range from thoughts to planning or attempting suicide. For example: "Have you reached the point where you would consider taking your own life or made plans about how you would do it?" The questions are "yes"/"no" type, and affirmative responses are coded as "1" and negative responses as "0" for statistical analysis. Theoretically, higher scores indicated greater severity. The PSS could be used as an assessment instrument or as a screening tool for suicidal behavior in various assessment settings (e.g., educational, healthcare, social). The scale demonstrates good internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

### Data processing

The data were processed, cleaned, and coded before analysis. Missing and outlier values were checked, and the variables were correctly assigned. Scores were calculated for the dimensions of dating violence and suicidal ideation. The assumption of data normality was verified using skewness and kurtosis indexes, with values within acceptable ranges ( $\pm 1$ ), allowing the use of parametric tests. The sample size ( $N = 1\,293$ ) was considered adequate to ensure the stability of the results.

### Statistical analysis

The sample size was deemed adequate for correlational and comparative-group analyses, providing sufficient statistical power to detect small and moderate effects. Various statistical tests were applied: the Student's



t-test was used to compare differences by gender; Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to analyze the association between variables; and a factorial ANOVA was applied to examine the effect of dating violence levels and gender on suicidal ideation.

### Ethical aspects

This research was conducted in accordance with the institutional ethical principles of UISEK and the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines, ensuring respect for participants' dignity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The UISEK Ethics Committee approved the project entitled "Psychological Factors as Predictors of Mental Health in the Ecuadorian Population Over 18 Years of Age: A Time-Scale Study from March to May 2024," with the code CEISH-UISEK-EXEO-2024-002, thus enabling the execution of this research.

### RESULTS

Regarding overall dating violence, 40.6 % of participants reported experiencing violence, while 59.4 % indicated they had not. Statistically significant differences were also observed between men and women regarding the types of dating violence (DV). For psychological, instrumental, and total violence, men had higher mean scores compared to women. In contrast, women showed slightly higher mean scores for physical and sexual violence.

Regarding suicidal ideation, statistically significant differences were also observed, with women showing higher mean scores compared to men. This information is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Gender differences according to types of dating violence and suicidal ideation

	Gender	n	Average	SD	Student's t
Psychological Violence	Man	502	43.94	17.09	4.63**
	Women	671	39.54	15.36	
Physical Violence	Man	502	5.91	2.87	4.56**
	Women	671	6.38	2.60	
Sexual Violence	Man	502	8.61	3.98	2.94**
	Women	671	9.10	3.85	
Instrumental Violence	Man	502	5.89	2.67	3.23**
	Women	671	5.41	2.45	
Total violence	Man	502	65.32	25.56	4.09**
	Women	671	59.46	23.21	
Suicidal ideation	Man	502	2.33	1.68	-4.22**
	Women	671			

Note. SD = standard deviation.  $p < 0.01^{**}$





Low-magnitude, significant positive correlations were found between suicidal ideation and all types of dating violence ( $r = 0.242-0.250$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The results show that greater intensity of dating violence is associated with greater suicidal ideation in the study sample, as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Relationship between types of dating violence and suicidal ideation

Dating Violence	Suicidal ideation	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Psychological Violence	0.247	< 0.001
Physical Violence	0.243	< 0.001
Sexual Violence	0.244	< 0.001
Instrumental Violence	0.242	< 0.001
Global Violence	0.250	< 0.001

Note.  $r$  = Pearson correlation coefficient;  $p$  = level of statistical significance.

A factorial ANOVA revealed a significant effect of the level of dating violence on suicidal ideation,  $F(2, 1150) = 41.29$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , indicating that higher levels of violence are associated with higher scores for suicidal ideation. However, the interaction between the level of dating violence and gender was not statistically significant,  $F(2, 1150) = 1.16$ ,  $p = 0.314$ , indicating that the relationship between dating violence and suicidal ideation is similar for both genders (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Factorial ANOVA: levels of dating violence and gender on suicidal ideation

Factor	F	p
Dating violence	41.29	< 0.001
Gender	14.56	< 0.001
Interaction of violence and gender	1.16	0.314

Note. Dependent variable: suicidal ideation. Model: factorial ANOVA. F = Fisher-Snedecor F-statistic;  $p$  = significance level;  $R^2$  = coefficient of determination; adjusted  $R^2$  = adjusted coefficient of determination.  $R^2 = .085$  (adjusted  $R^2 = .081$ ). Total N = 1293. So there you go, doc, I hope that makes sense.

## DISCUSSION

Dating violence (DV) is a significant problem in the Ecuadorian population, occurring with considerable frequency in both men and women. In this study, men presented slightly higher scores on overall violence,



which aligns with recent research<sup>(5,6,9)</sup> indicating the presence of bidirectional dynamics in adolescent and young adult dating relationships, where both members can play the roles of victims and perpetrators. These results suggest that, unlike other types of violence—such as spousal and domestic violence, characterized by power imbalances—DV can present more reciprocal roles.<sup>(26)</sup>

Regarding the types of violence, men showed higher levels of psychological and instrumental violence, which could be related to emotional manipulation, control, or devaluation within the relationship. This information coincides with the study by Castillo et al.<sup>(5)</sup>, who showed that Ecuadorian university students were more likely to be victims of mild psychological violence. However, in that same study, they identified that severe psychological violence was more prevalent among women, highlighting the complexity of these dynamics and the need for deeper analysis according to levels of severity. In contrast, women scored higher in sexual and physical violence. This finding is consistent with other research,<sup>(2,27–29)</sup> which showed greater female vulnerability in these forms of violence, possibly linked to physical differences and bodily vulnerability, gender norms, sociocultural factors, and relational power dynamics.

Therefore, gender emerges as an important variable in the analysis of dating violence, as the dynamics of violence differ depending on this modality. The results of this study agree that women tend to experience more severe forms of violence, especially physical and sexual violence.<sup>(5)</sup> This shows that, while bidirectional patterns of violence against women may exist, structural and contextual inequalities persist, placing women in a vulnerable position. As the WHO estimates, approximately 30% of women worldwide have experienced these types of violence from their partners,<sup>(1,2)</sup> which had serious consequences for their physical and mental health.

Regarding suicidal ideation, female participants scored higher; this result is consistent with other studies<sup>(30,31)</sup> that report a higher prevalence of suicidal thoughts in women. This result may be due to emotional, social, and biological factors, including a greater tendency to internalize psychological distress, greater interpersonal sensitivity, and exposure to relational stressors.<sup>(32)</sup>

Furthermore, a relationship was found between NIV and suicidal ideation, which supports previous findings that show that victims of intimate partner violence can have serious mental health problems, mainly linked to internalizing disorders such as anxiety and depression.<sup>(14,33–35)</sup> Young victims of NIV may experience thoughts related to death, which, in some cases, continue with suicidal planning and even behavior.<sup>(32)</sup>

Regarding gender, it was not shown to be a determining factor between domestic violence and suicidal ideation, suggesting that both men and women who experience violence can have suicidal thoughts.<sup>(36)</sup> That is, the emotional impact of intimate partner violence transcends gender differences; therefore, prevention and intervention programs on violence must be comprehensive and not focus on a specific gender.



This study has some limitations. First, social desirability bias may have led several participants to not fully express their experiences for fear of criticism or rejection, resulting in more acceptable responses. Second, the study used non-probability sampling, so generalizations cannot be made. Third, the study used a quantitative, cross-sectional approach. It was recommended that a qualitative or mixed-methods approach be used to enrich the investigation with more detailed information and to delve deeper into these phenomena. Fourth, the study sample was mostly female, although the difference was not considerable; this distribution could be due to the higher number of women in higher education institutions.<sup>(37)</sup>

Despite these limitations, this research provides relevant information on intimate partner violence and suicidal ideation, very common problems in Ecuador, offering data on this relationship and the role of gender. These results suggest the importance of developing comprehensive prevention strategies and interventions that are sensitive to the dynamics of victimization, regardless of gender, and not focused exclusively on one gender, coinciding with previous studies that highlight the importance of addressing violence from an integrative approach, considering the complexity and bidirectionality of its manifestations.<sup>(5)</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

This study showed that bullying affects both men and women, although with different dynamics. While suicidal ideation was more prevalent in women, the relationship between bullying and suicidal ideation was present in both genders. Therefore, gender did not act as a determining factor in the psychological impact, highlighting the need to create comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies for all young people, regardless of their gender.

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**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** Datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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