Understanding Reasons for Dating Violence Among Adolescents: A Mixed-Methods Approach

Silvia Espinoza Barreiro , Diana Narvaez Bastidas , Alhena Alfaro-Urquiola , Venus Medina-Maldonado *

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Article

Understanding Reasons for Dating Violence Among Adolescents: A Mixed-Methods Approach

Silvia Espinoza Barreiro [1,2], Diana Narvaez [1,2,3], Alhena Alfaro-Urquiola [4] and Venus Medina-Maldonado [1,2,5,*]

[1] Gender-Based Violence Prevention Research Group (E-previo), Faculty of Health and Wellbeing, Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito 170143, Ecuador
[2] Specialization's Program in Family and Community Health Nursing, Faculty of Health and Wellbeing, Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito 170143, Ecuador
[3] Department of Nursing, Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Manabí 130801, Ecuador
[4] Department of Psychology, Oviedo University, 33009 Oviedo, Spain
[5] Center for Health Research in Latin America (CISeAL), Faculty of Health and Wellbeing, Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador, Quito 170143, Ecuador
* Correspondence: vemedinam@puce.edu.ec

Abstract

Teen dating violence is a serious issue that affects the physical, psychological, and emotional well-being of adolescents. The purpose of this study was to determine the reasons for perpetrating dating violence by analyzing the quantitative and qualitative results. Methods: A concurrent mixed-methods design with equal weighting was applied to a sample of 703 participants in the quantitative phase, who completed the Dating Violence Motives Scale, and 103 participants in the qualitative phase. The mixed-phase analysis included data triangulation, creation of new analytical categories, and interpretation to generate meta-inferences. Results: Both phases identified jealousy as the most frequent trigger for dating violence. Conclusions: The findings indicate that sociocultural gender constructions influence the motives for dating violence and support the need for preventive interventions tailored to adolescent developmental contexts.

Keywords: adolescence; dating violence; mixed study

1. Introduction

Teen dating violence (TDV) represents a serious public health concern that compromises the physical, psychological, and emotional well-being of those who experience it. This phenomenon manifests through behaviors that include physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence in non-marital romantic relationships (Salazar et al., 2007). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately one in three women and one in five men experience some form of intimate partner violence, underscoring its classification as a public health problem with deep cultural and social roots (WHO, 2024).

Analyzing this phenomenon requires a multicausal approach that considers both the nature and the dynamic process of violent behavior, aiming to achieve a comprehensive understanding of its adverse outcomes, namely, diminished well-being and increased revictimization (Salazar et al., 2007). Adolescence represents a critical period for the development of relational patterns that often persist in adulthood, making research and early prevention particularly relevant.

Accordingly, this study is grounded in the WHO's ecological model, which posits that the determinants of intimate partner violence operate in an interrelated manner across individual, relational, community, and societal levels. This framework facilitates an understanding of why certain groups face greater risk than others (Tarzia, 2020). It also draws on the theory of coercive control, which holds that violence does not always manifest physically but may emerge as a

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systematic pattern of domination through partner-imposed isolation and surveillance, progressively restricting the victim's autonomy (Kassing & Collins, 2025; Stark, 2007). Such control is grounded in constant threat and emotional manipulation, potentially escalating into more severe forms of violence (Mitchell & Raghavan, 2019) without the victim's awareness, as multiple risk factors operate simultaneously across different levels (Claussen et al., 2022).

International research has identified diverse underlying reasons contributing to TDV. For the purposes of this study, these have been classified into attitudinal factors, such as the tolerance and normalization of violence and the tendency to blame the victim (Arrojo et al., 2024), and exposure-related factors, including early experiences of intrafamilial violence and adherence to traditional gender norms (Hidalgo-Rasmussen et al., 2024). Adverse childhood experiences also play a significant role (Ramírez et al., 2025). Other contributing factors to TDV perpetration and victimization include alcohol and substance use (Campo-Tena et al., 2024), mental health and personality (Lawrence & Wojciechowski, 2024), social and peer influences, such as the adoption of inappropriate behaviors including harassment, coercive control, and violence (Chugh & Guggisberg, 2020), and relationship dynamics (Jaureguizar et al., 2024; Paradis et al., 2024).

In Latin America, TDV exhibits characteristics shaped by the region's sociocultural context. Bott et al. (2021) documented alarming rates of physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by intimate partners, with prevalence estimates ranging from 14 to 17% in countries such as Brazil, Panama, and Uruguay to over 58% in Bolivia (Bott et al., 2019). These figures highlight the magnitude of the problem in a region marked by pronounced gender inequalities and a deeply entrenched culture of *machismo*. Structural factors such as poverty, social inequality, limited access to comprehensive sex education, and the weakness of victim protection systems exacerbate the issue. The intersection of gender-based violence, ethnic discrimination, and socioeconomic inequality creates heightened vulnerability for certain population groups.

In Ecuador, TDV constitutes a pressing concern that reflects both commonalities with the broader Latin American context and specific national features. A recent study identified links between self-esteem, coping strategies, and dating violence among Ecuadorian adolescents, illustrating how individual factors interact with sociocultural conditions particular to the country (Ortiz Vivar & Morales Quizhpi, 2024). Furthermore, research has identified social and cultural barriers that hinder help-seeking and coping processes in TDV situations among adolescents (Pastor-Bravo et al., 2023), including strong adherence to traditional gender norms, limited conflict resolution skills, and a lack of early identification of abusive behaviors, all of which impair emotional development (Medina-Maldonado et al., 2021).

Despite the growing body of literature on TDV, a knowledge gap remains. To the best of our knowledge, recent studies have not examined the specific situations that motivate violence in adolescent romantic relationships by integrating both objective data and subjective perceptions through a mixed-methods approach. Most existing research has focused on prevalence, violence typologies, or general risk factors, without systematically identifying the concrete reasons or comparing the reasons by sex.

The aim of this study was to identify the predominant motivations for perpetrating dating violence among adolescents by integrating quantitative findings from a measurement instrument with qualitative insights that captured additional motivations not reflected in the survey but considered by participants to be representative of their lived experiences.

2. Materials and Methods

This was a concurrent mixed-methods study, as both methods (QUAN + QUAL) were applied simultaneously with equal weighting throughout the research process (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The study was conducted between September 2024 and January 2025 in seven different provinces of Ecuador. The target population consisted of adolescents, who represented 17.9 million people, equivalent to 33% of the total population according to the national census conducted in

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Ecuador in 2024 (INEC, 2024). Recruitment was carried out through the Adolescent Health Program in various primary care centers and school settings.

The eligibility criteria included adolescents between 14 and 19 years old who were currently in a dating relationship; willingness to participate; for minors, prior written informed consent from parents or legal guardians; and the adolescent's signed assent. Participants who reported cohabitation with their partner were excluded from the study.

2.1. Quantitative Phase

A non-probabilistic purposive sampling method was used due to the difficulty of randomizing cases given the inclusion criteria requirements. We initially obtained agreement to participate from 732 adolescents. Cases were excluded for lack of age representativeness among 12-year-olds (3 cases) and for incomplete questionnaire responses (26 cases). The final response rate was 96.0%, resulting in a total of 703 adolescents included in the study analyses. This article presents results from the research project "Adolescent and University Student Dating Violence: A Dyadic Study", funded by the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador.

The sample included 356 male adolescents (50.6%) and 347 female adolescents (49.4%), providing balanced representation of both sexes. Regarding age, 54.9% were in early adolescence (14–16 years), while 45.1% were in late adolescence (17–19 years). Most participants in both sexes self-identified as Mestizo. With respect to the family economic level, the responses were predominantly concentrated in the middle-class category, followed by the high-income category (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study participants (n = 703).

Variables	Total	Early Adolescence	Late Adolescence
Gender	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)
Male	356 (50.6)	195 (27.7)	161 (22.9)
Female	347 (49,4)	191 (27.2)	156 (22.2)
Economic level			
Low	106 (15.1)	58 (8.3)	48 (6.8)
Medium	456 (64.9)	251 (35.7)	205 (29.2)
High	141 (20.1)	77 (11.0)	64 (9.1)
Ethnicity			
Mestizo	627 (89.2)	344 (48.9)	283 (40.3)
Afro-descendant	30 (4.3)	17 (2.4)	13 (1.9)
Indigenous	30 (4.3)	17 (2.4)	13 (1.9)

Source: Data obtained from the survey.

The primary variable of this study was the set of motives triggering episodes of dating violence. These were measured using a 13-item scale assessing the following: expression of anger, communication problems, demonstration of superiority, partner control, response to previous violence, self-defense, response to emotional harm, rage, punishment, proof of affection, sexual arousal, attention seeking, and jealousy (Kelley et al., 2015). Each motive was rated on a five-point Likert scale (Never, Sometimes, Frequently, Usually, Almost always).

Trained researchers conducted the data collection to ensure consistent engagement with the participating institutions. Following institutional approval, the study was presented to adolescents, and those interested received informed consent forms for parental or legal guardian signature. On confirmation of parental consent, the adolescents signed informed assent forms, after which the instruments were administered. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout.

The quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics to summarize the participant demographics and to report the frequency and percentage of each motive. Ordinal logistic regression was used to calculate the odds ratios (OR) with 95% confidence intervals (CI) to assess the associations between each motive and sex, using females as the reference category.

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2.2. Qualitative Phase

The qualitative component comprised written open-ended responses aimed at exploring adolescents' perceptions and experiences, as well as identifying additional motives not included in the scale. This method was selected for its ability to generate rich textual data free from interviewer bias, while preserving anonymity and encouraging reflection. The open-ended question allowed unrestricted responses without suggesting content. As noted by Pilcher and Cortazzi (2024), the qualitative strength of this approach lies in interpreting the meanings participants assign to their reported motives. In total, 103 out of 703 participants provided qualitative responses.

Data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, theme searching, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report production. An inductive logic guided theme development, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and categories.

2.3. Mixed Phase

After analyzing each dataset according to the principles of its respective methodological paradigm, the findings were integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The validation strategy involved data triangulation, the creation of new analytical categories, and interpretative synthesis. This process facilitated the development of meta-inferences, representing the final interpretation of the results, and ensured the rigor and quality of the theorization process. The analyses were guided by the WHO ecological model (Claussen et al., 2022; Tarzia, 2020) and the theory of coercive control (Kassing & Collins, 2025; Mitchell & Raghavan, 2019; Stark, 2007).

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Participants were fully informed about the aims of the study, with emphasis on its voluntary nature and the guarantee of confidentiality. For minors, written informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians. All procedures strictly adhered to the ethical principles set forth in the Declaration of Helsinki, which serves as a framework for ethical standards in research involving human participants (Del Percio, 2020). This research project received formal approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, under registration code PV-14-2022.

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative Phase

Table 2 summarizes the analysis of the reasons for adolescent dating violence by sex in a sample of 703 Ecuadorian participants (50.6% male; 49.4% female). Significant gender differences were observed. For females, the most frequent reasons were showing anger (7.1% vs. 5.3% "Almost always"), without words (6.5% vs. 5.7%), and demonstrate superiority (2.7% vs. 2.1%). For males, the leading reasons were because he/she hit me first (2.3% vs. 0.7%), to protect myself (3.4% vs. 2.8%), and to prove that he/she loved me (2.6% vs. 2.0%). The motive sexually arousing showed the most notable gender gap ("Sometimes": 6.3% vs. 2.4%), suggesting differences in the eroticization of violent behaviors. Jealousy was the most prevalent motive for both sexes, but with greater intensity in males (7.1% vs. 4.8% "Almost always"). Additional differences emerged for punish my partner (2.7% in females vs. 1.6% in males) and call/attract his/her attention (3.4% in males vs. 2.1% in females). These findings confirm meaningful sex-based differences in the reasons underlying dating violence.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on the reasons for violence by sex.

	Gender

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Reasons	Behavior Frequency	Male *f* (%)	Female *f* (%)	Total	Range
Show anger	Never	197 (28)	161(22.9)	358	1-3
	Sometimes	122 (17.4)	136 (19.3)	258	1-3
	Almost always	37 (5.3)	**50 (7.1)**	87	1-3
Without words	Never	202 (28.7)	188 (26.7)	390	1-3
	Sometimes	114 (16.2)	113 (16.1)	227	1-3
	Almost always	40 (5.7)	**46 (6.5)**	86	1-3
Demonstrate superiority	Never	274 (39.0)	270 (38.4)	544	1-3
	Sometimes	67 (9.5)	58 (8.3)	125	1-3
	Almost always	15 (2.1)	19 (2.7)	34	1-3
Control my partner	Never	261 (37.1)	270 (38.4)	531	1-3
	Sometimes	74 (10.5)	55 (7.8)	129	1-3
	Almost always	21 (3.0)	22 (3.1)	43	1-3
Because he/she hit me first	Never	303 (43.1)	302 (43.0)	605	1-3
	Sometimes	37 (5.3)	40 (5.7)	77	1-3
	Almost always	**16 (2.3)**	5 (0.7)	21	1-3
To protect myself	Never	287 (40.8)	282 (40.1)	569	1-3
	Sometimes	45 (6.4)	45 (6.4)	90	1-3
	Almost always	**24 (3.4)**	20 (2.8)	44	1-3
Response to emotional harm	Never	274 (39.0)	262 (37.3)	536	1-3
	Sometimes	57 (8.1)	56 (8.0)	113	1-3
	Almost always	25 (3.6)	**29 (4.1)**	54	1-3
Out of anger	Never	272 (38.7)	249 (35.4)	521	1-3
	Sometimes	65 (9.2)	79 (11.2)	144	1-3
	Almost always	19 (2.7)	19 (2.7)	38	1-3
Punish my partner	Never	302 (43.0)	283 (40.3)	585	1-3
	Sometimes	43 (6.1)	45 (6.4)	88	1-3
	Almost always	11 (1.6)	19 (2.7)	30	1-3
To prove that he/she loved me	Never	263 (37.4)	271 (38.5)	534	1-3
	Sometimes	75 (10.7)	62 (8.8)	137	1-3
	Almost always	**18 (2.6)**	14 (2.0)	32	1-3
Sexually arousing	Never	305 (43.4)	322 (45.8)	627	1-3
	Sometimes	44 (6.3)	17 (2.4)	61	1-3
	Almost always	7 (1.0)	8 (1.1)	15	1-3
To call/attract his/her attention	Never	261 (37.1)	269 (38.3)	530	1-3
	Sometimes	71 (10.1)	63 (9.0)	134	1-3
	Almost always	24 (3.4)	15 (2.1)	39	1-3
Out of jealousy	Never	211 (30.0)	215 (30.6)	426	1-3
	Sometimes	95 (13.5)	98 (13.9)	193	1-3
	Almost always	**50 (7.1)**	34 (4.8)	84	1-3

Source: Data obtained from the survey.

Table 3 presents the data related to motivations. Only one motive showed a statistically significant association with sex: the item sexually arousing ($p = 0.004$), in which women were less likely than men to report this motive (OR = 0.474). Another behavior that draws attention, although it was not statistically significant, is the motive in which women report "because he hit me first" (OR = 1.20) compared with men. In the case of jealousy, women were less likely to report this behavior. In contrast, the motive without words was more likely to be reported by women. However, these differences were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

Table 3. Ordinal logistic regression for each motive by sex.

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Motivation	OR (Women vs. Men)	IC95% Lower	IC95% Upper	p-Value
Show anger	0.888	0.666	1.18	0.417
Without words	0.901	0.669	1.21	0.494
Demonstrate superiority	0.971	0.683	1.38	0.871
Control my partner	0.802	0.570	1.13	0.208
Because he/she hit me first	**1.20**	0.789	1.85	0.383
To protect myself	0.950	0.653	1.38	0.789
Response to emotional harm	0.913	0.647	1.29	0.607
Out of anger	0.796	0.569	1.11	0.184
Punish my partner	0.777	0.523	1.15	0.212
To prove that he/she loved me	0.793	0.561	1.12	0.188
Sexually arousing	0.474	0.287	0.784	***0.004**
To call/attract his/her attention	0.784	0.557	1.10	0.163
Out of jealousy	0.852	0.634	1.14	0.286

Note: OR > 1 indicates a higher likelihood for women; OR < 1 indicates a lower likelihood for women. Prevalence ratio refers to the frequency with which the motive occurs.

3.2. Qualitative Phase

This section presents the open-ended responses obtained from the qualitative component, which facilitated the exploration of adolescents' own perceptions, meanings, and experiences.

3.2.1. Self-Related Factors

Within this theme, participants described characteristics that influence how individuals behave and shape the interpersonal dynamics that give rise to violent conduct. This category ranges from personal insecurities and jealousy to perceptions of infidelity, disrespect, and the need for recognition, reflecting the emotional turbulence, characteristic of adolescence, and its impact on romantic relationships.

PVNM-014A: "For flirting with other girls" (female);
VNAC0001B: "For ignoring me about things he forbids me to do" (female);
PVNQC-014A: "Comparisons with other partners" (female);
PVNQC-004A: "For telling lies" (female);
PVNQC-003B: "For avoiding me" (male).

3.2.2. Lack of Communication Skills

The second identified theme concerns problems related to the inability to express emotions and resolve conflicts constructively. Adolescents noted that misunderstandings and inadequate communication generate conflicts that can quickly escalate into violent behaviors, especially when there is difficulty in clearly conveying ideas and feelings. Differences in ways of thinking and the inability to accept and manage these differences of opinion were mentioned as factors that may generate conflict within the relationship. Participants also identified the use of inappropriate jokes or remarks as a form of covert humiliation that undermines the relationship. The lack of emotional presence from one partner creates dissatisfaction that can lead to aggressive behaviors aimed at gaining attention, while unmet expectations regarding the relationship, such as a lack of punctuality or limited shared time, were cited as triggers for frustration that sparked conflict between partners.

PVNQC-003B: "Not answering me when I was calling her" (male);
PVNP-049B: "Because she replied dryly in the chat" (male);
PVNEC-025A: "Due to lack of communication" (female);

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PVNEC-014A: "For lack of dedication or time to spend together" (female).

3.2.3. Family and Control

This final category reflects the powerful influence of the family environment in shaping adolescent dating relationships. Participants identified family interference as a factor that generated significant tensions, such as disapproval of the relationship or excessive attempts at control by family members. Imposed prohibitions, particularly those perceived as unfair or arbitrary, were cited as adding pressure to the relationship and potentially leading to reactive violent behaviors. Adolescents also highlighted how family conflicts experienced at home tend to be reproduced in their own relationships, making evident the principle of the intergenerational transmission of dysfunctional relational patterns. This category underscores how the family context not only sets models for interaction that adolescents replicate but can also directly intervene in the couple's dynamic, creating additional conflicts.

PVNP-035B: "Because I don't like it when she controls me" (male);
VNT0110A: "Because relatives interfere in the relationship" (female);
PVNP-007A: "Because of gossip from friends and especially family" (female).

3.2.4. Circumstantial Problems

This category encompasses external factors that significantly influence relationship dynamics and can precipitate violent episodes. Adolescents reported that academic or work-related pressures create stress that often spills over into the relationship, fostering an environment conducive to conflict. Economic difficulties and financial problems were identified as major sources of tension that, if not managed effectively, can lead to violent confrontations. Although these factors are external to the relationship itself, they were recognized as increasing the couple's vulnerability to violent dynamics by raising general stress levels and reducing the capacity to constructively manage disagreements.

VNL0106B: "For lack of money" (male);
PVNP-007A: "For having some financial problems" (female);
PVNEC-024A: "Because I have had problems at work" (female).

3.3. Integration of the Results

Table 4 presents a matrix comparing the relevant results obtained in both the quantitative and qualitative phases. An analysis of the convergences yielded the first meta-inference: jealousy is the most frequent trigger of violence in adolescent dating relationships. This was identified both in the quantitative variables and in the narratives from the qualitative phase.

The second meta-inference, also emerging from the similarities reported in both phases of the study, referred to gender-differentiated motivations. In males, this motive was mainly linked to controlling behaviors toward the partner, whereas in females it was expressed as an emotional response to situations perceived as threatening to the relationship, a finding consistent with previous studies on sex-specific patterns.

The third meta-inference identified internal individual factors present in both study phases and related to deficits in the communication and emotional management skills necessary for negotiation processes aimed at healthy relationships. These limitations may be accentuated by the developmental stage of participants, characterized by emotional immaturity and the incomplete development of communication competencies. The inability to express emotions and resolve conflicts verbally may foster the use of violent behaviors as an alternative form of communication, suggesting the need to incorporate the development of socioemotional and communication skills as an essential component in preventive programs.

Exclusively in the qualitative phase, meta-inferences emerged related to relational factors, referring to family influence (interference, prohibitions, or conflicts), and external sociocultural

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factors, such as work, academic, and financial problems, as well as conflicts with the immediate social environment. These elements, not included in the quantitative instrument, enrich the understanding of the phenomenon by incorporating specific contextual and cultural dimensions.

The integration of these findings indicates that adolescent dating violence results from the interaction between individual, relational, and contextual dimensions, reinforcing the relevance of designing preventive approaches with a multicausal focus. Moreover, the qualitative responses revealed cultural nuances and specificities not fully addressed in the questionnaire, suggesting the potential for developing culturally adapted assessment tools that more accurately reflect the dynamics and challenges specific to Ecuadorian adolescents regarding the reasons for dating violence.

Table 4. Data matrix comparing the main quantitative, qualitative, and meta-inference results.

Quantitative Phase	Theme	Predominant Reasons Qualitative Phase	Meta-inferences
Jealousy ↑ (20.60%)  Showing anger ↑ (26.4%) 	Self-related factors	Personal insecurities Jealousy Infidelity (real or perceived) Disrespect Lies Emotional manipulation Comparisons Lack of interest in the relationship Lack of emotional support Need for recognition	**Jealousy is the main motive for violence:** This reason appears in both the quantitative and qualitative data. **Gender-differentiated reasons:** Men's reasons are related to control, whereas women's reasons are emotional responses.
Without words ↑ (22.6%) 	Lack of communication skills	Misunderstandings Poor communication Different ways of thinking Inappropriate jokes or remarks Lack of presence in the relationship Lack of time/punctuality Unmet expectations	**Internal factor** (individual)
Not reported in instrument	Family and control	Family interference Family-imposed restrictions Family and/or friendship conflicts	**Relational factor** (family)
Not reported in instrument	Circumstantial problems	Work-related problems Academic problems Financial/money problems	**External factor** (sociocultural)

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4. Discussion

The main objective of this research was to integrate the results of the quantitative scale with the qualitative textual narratives to broaden the understanding of the different reasons underlying adolescent dating violence. As in other mixed-methods studies (Medina-Maldonado et al., 2021), the incorporation of a theoretical foundation facilitated the creation of meta-inferences. In our case, the ecological model and coercive control theory enriched the comparative analysis during triangulation, enhancing the examination of behaviors that contribute to the perpetration of abusive acts.

The integrated results of the quantitative and qualitative phases show that jealousy is the most frequent cross-cutting motive for adolescent dating violence in Ecuador, with greater intensity reported by males. We also identified gender-differentiated patterns: in males, reasons associated with control and domination predominated, whereas in females, emotional responses to perceived threats to the relationship were more frequent. Other relevant reasons included a lack of communication skills, family factors, and circumstantial problems.

Our findings are consistent with the previous research, highlighting that traditional values about romantic love, particularly those that idealize jealousy as a sign of love, significantly predict both the perpetration and victimization of violence (Guisado Álvarez & Cala, 2021). In our study, this motive appeared with greater intensity among males, consistent with the research showing that 68.4% of adolescents consider jealousy to be proof of love, with this belief more frequent in men (72.3%) than in women (64.5%) (Reyes Álvarez et al., 2024). Likewise, the literature indicates that in boys, jealousy is mainly linked to the normalization of violence (Esparza-Martínez et al., 2019) and exposure to domestic violence, whereas in girls, it is more associated with low emotional regulation (Molina Martínez & Muñoz Griffith, 2021). Another study has also identified jealousy as a trigger for violent behavior, with cycles of aggression often beginning with arguments in the context of interactions through social networks (Rojas-Solís & Romero-Méndez, 2023). Taken together, these findings frame this type of emotion as a sign of love, reinforcing its manifestation, normalization, and the reproduction of violent behaviors in adolescents' romantic relationships, regardless of the cultural context.

Another relevant finding was the gender differences observed in this study, which are in line with prior research showing that males tend to display attitudes supportive of violence and controlling behaviors, whereas low emotional regulation is more common in females (Esparza-Martínez et al., 2019; Rey-Anacona et al., 2021; Reyes Álvarez et al., 2024). In this regard, one study reported higher perpetration rates among men (84.6% versus 15.4% in women) and higher victimization rates among women (87.6% versus 12.4% in men) (Dosil et al., 2020). Another study found that emotional control and manipulation constitute the first link in the escalation of violence in adolescent relationships (Sanmartín-Andújar et al., 2023). The consistency of these patterns across different cultural contexts suggests the existence of a cross-cultural pattern in the differentiated manifestations of violence by sex. This finding reflects deeply rooted sociocultural constructions of gender in different societies, even when the reasons for perpetrating dating violence are not directly explored.

Regarding the identification of deficits in communication skills, a study by Pastor et al. (2023) corroborated the importance of this factor, noting that the ability to express emotions and negotiate conflicts assertively significantly reduces the likelihood of resorting to violent behavior. In our study, the convergence between quantitative data, where without words was identified as a significant reason (6.5% in women and 5.7% in men), and the thematic unit "Lack of communication skills" validates this dimension as a cross-cutting factor in the generation of violence (Stark, 2007).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be interpreted in light of the WHO ecological model (Tarzia, 2020). Within this framework, individual factors include insecurity, jealousy, and lack of communication skills; relational factors encompass family conflicts and controlling behaviors toward adolescents; and sociocultural factors include the academic and work realities of adolescence, as well as the economic difficulties present in these societies. All these elements reflect the multicausal nature of potential triggers of violence, which should be addressed equitably in prevention programs.

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No single factor is more important than another, as all contribute to shaping the dynamics that facilitate the emergence of violence in adolescent romantic relationships. In this regard, coercive control theory provides a framework for interpreting male reasons, while the gender perspective (Zulic-Agramunt et al., 2025) explains differences in meanings and expressions according to sex.

4.1. Practical Implications

This study is particularly relevant to the health and education sectors. In the field of community health, our approach enabled the integration of observable behaviors with the experiences and meanings that adolescents themselves attribute to their actions and relational dynamics, thereby generating evidence to inform the design of culturally adapted interventions tailored to local realities. Within the framework of SDG 3 on Health and Well-being, intersectoral collaboration is a key strategy, opening the possibility of implementing school-based programs that address these issues in line with the principles of promoting equality and comprehensive health, as advocated by the WHO and the 2030 Agenda, to strengthen the well-being of adolescents as a vulnerable group (WHO, 2023).

Regarding intimacy and sexual scripts, the findings reveal a notable pattern in the motivations underlying adolescent dating violence, particularly in relation to gender differences. It is significant that the motive described as "sexually arousing" was reported by boys, which highlights the need to address cognitive distortions about consent and intimacy, as well as dysfunctional associations between sexual violence, intimacy, and aggressive sexual scripts in psychotherapeutic interventions with adolescent males. From a forensic perspective, this can also be considered a specific risk factor associated with the profile of male aggressors, which should be taken into account in dangerousness assessments and in judicial proceedings, where motivational patterns are examined (Brem et al., 2021; Gilbert & Daffern, 2017; Muñoz Villanueva, 2024).

Conversely, the absence of significant differences in other reasons, such as control, emotional response, or punishment, suggests a relative gender symmetry in the stated reasons for perpetrating violence. This challenges certain stereotypes and underscores the importance of context-sensitive clinical approaches that are not exclusively focused on gender. Similarly, the presence of reasons such as "to prove that he loved me," "to get his attention," or "without words," although not statistically significant, underscores the need to address dysfunctional affective patterns, insecure attachment styles, and myths of romantic love that are associated with violent behavior (Ballina Soberanis et al., 2023; Morales-Sanhueza et al., 2024).

These results call for a rethinking of preventive interventions, incorporating a more nuanced understanding of motivation, attention-seeking, jealousy, and emotional impulsivity, regardless of the aggressor's sex. This requires implementing affective education, cognitive restructuring, and emotional regulation strategies from early stages of development. As for future research, it is essential to validate culturally adapted instruments for measuring the motivations for violence in adolescents and to develop studies involving adolescent couples, enabling the evaluation of how both the perpetrator and their partner contribute to the dynamics of the relationship.

4.2. Limitations

The cross-sectional design prevented the establishment of causal relationships. The non-probabilistic sampling and reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases, which are factors that limit the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, the large sample size, data collection across multiple provinces of the country, and the mixed-methods design strengthen the relevance of the results. Additionally, the instrument was originally developed for a university population and to identify reasons for the perpetration of physical violence. This, together with potential cultural differences, may also affect the generalizability of the findings.

5. Conclusions

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This concurrent mixed-methods study on the reasons for adolescent dating violence in Ecuador reveals that psychological violence is the predominant form of aggression, with motivational differences observed by sex and stage of adolescence. Jealousy emerged as the most prevalent cross-cutting motive in both sexes, being more pronounced among males, reflecting the persistence of distorted beliefs about romantic love in the Ecuadorian context.

Women tended to engage in violence for expressive–emotional reasons, whereas men did so for reactive or control-oriented reasons. A lack of communication skills was identified as a critical factor in both the quantitative and qualitative phases, underscoring the need to develop competencies for assertive expression and peaceful conflict resolution. The influence of familial and sociocultural factors was evident in the qualitative phase, illustrating how dysfunctional relational patterns are transferred across contexts. These findings underscore the need for culturally adapted preventive interventions from all institutions involved in adolescent development, whether in health or education, employing a differentiated approach based on sex and stage of adolescence. Such interventions should prioritize the denormalization of jealousy as an expression of love, the development of communication skills, and the transformation of cultural beliefs about emotional relationships, thereby contributing to the creation of healthy, equitable, and violence-free bonds among Ecuadorian adolescents.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

TDV	Teen Dating Violence
WHO	World Health Organization
INEC	National Institute of Statistics of Ecuador

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