



Young university students' intimate affective relationships: nursing students' narratives

Relações afetivas íntimas de jovens universitários: narrativas de estudantes de enfermagem

Relaciones afectivas íntimas de jóvenes estudiantes universitarios: relatos de estudiantes de enfermería

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: to examine the intimate affective relationships of young university students on the undergraduate nursing course at a public university, from a gender perspective. **Method:** this qualitative study was based on life narrative as its theoretical and methodological framework. From May to September 2017, 30 nursing students underwent individual unscripted interviews. The project was approved by the research ethics committee. **Results:** the young university students' affective relationships were characterized by control, jealousy, and male domination. The young nursing students were exposed to experiencing various different manifestations of violence in their intimate affective relationships. They considered gender issues to be the main influence in the occurrence of violence. **Conclusion:** considering the role of universities and their importance in changing social realities and in quality of life, as well as in health education, there is an urgent need to take preventive action and to develop measures to promote healthy relationships among young university students.

Descriptors: Nursing students; higher education; young adult; privacy.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar as relações afetivas íntimas de jovens universitários do Curso de Graduação em Enfermagem de uma universidade pública, considerando a perspectiva de gênero. **Método:** pesquisa qualitativa baseada na narrativa de vida como referencial teórico-metodológico. Realizada entrevista individual aberta com 30 estudantes de enfermagem, no período de maio a setembro de 2017. O projeto foi aprovado por Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa. **Resultados:** os relacionamentos afetivos dos jovens universitários se caracterizaram pelo controle, ciúme e dominação masculina. Os jovens estudantes do curso de enfermagem se encontram expostos à vivência de distintas manifestações de violência nas relações afetivas íntimas. Eles têm nas questões de gênero a principal influência na ocorrência das violências. **Conclusão:** considerando o papel das universidades e sua importância na transformação da realidade social e na qualidade de vida, e ainda na formação em saúde, destaca-se a urgência do desenvolvimento de ações preventivas e de promoção de relacionamentos saudáveis entre jovens universitários.

Descritores: Estudantes de enfermagem; educação superior; jovens; privacidade.

RESUMEN

Objetivos: analizar las relaciones afectivas íntimas de jóvenes estudiantes universitarios del Curso de Pregrado en Enfermería de una universidad pública, considerando la perspectiva de género. **Método:** investigación cualitativa basada en la narración de vida como marco teórico-metodológico. Se realizó una entrevista individual abierta junto a 30 estudiantes de enfermería, en el periodo de mayo a septiembre 2017. El Comité de Ética en Investigación aprobó el proyecto. **Resultados:** las relaciones afectivas de los jóvenes estudiantes universitarios se caracterizaron por el control, los celos y la dominación masculina. Los jóvenes estudiantes del pregrado en enfermería se encuentran expuestos a la experiencia de diferentes manifestaciones de violencia en sus relaciones afectivas íntimas. Las cuestiones de género son la principal influencia para las violencias. **Conclusión:** considerando el papel de las universidades y su importancia en la transformación de la realidad social y en la calidad de vida, y también en la educación en salud, se destaca la urgencia de desarrollar acciones preventivas y promover relaciones saludables entre jóvenes estudiantes universitarios.

Descriptorios: Estudiantes de enfermería; educación superior; joven; privacidad.

INTRODUCTION

Youth is a phase of life that involves the elaboration of varied social, historical and cultural contexts. The young person needs to be perceived in relationships and different ways of experiencing experiences without disregarding him as a member of a peculiar generation that relates to different generations¹.

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Violence in intimate relationships among young university students is a serious problem of devastating proportions. It presents high prevalence, ranging from 20% to 30%, for physical and sexual aggression, and 70% to 90% for psychological aggression^{2,3}.

Knowing how the phenomenon would be present in the young person's life is of extreme urgency, and should be problematized among university students, because the academic space is also prominent for being a propeller of discussions that are based not only on technical-scientific subjects of a profession, but on the citizen education, which encompasses the relationship between public policies and social demands.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the intimate affective relationships of university students of the Nursing Course of a public university, considering the gender perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of socialization beyond the family begins during youth. It is a time for decisions, especially in education and work. The young person begins to prepare for the future professional career in search of socioeconomic stability. In this period, intimate affective relationships are also established, characterized by the intimate involvement between individuals, regardless of sexual orientation, in the context of learning and discovery sexuality^{4,5}.

Intimate affective relationships among young people interface with social and cultural patterns. Traditional patterns of gender, rooted in social and sexual inequalities, are often considered to be relevant to the manifestation of gender-based violence⁶.

Violence in intimate relationships is not a recent phenomenon and constitutes a violation of human rights. It covers a significant portion of the world's population, considered a devalued and misunderstood health problem. It impairs physical, psychological, reproductive, sexual, social and professional development, with implications, over time, on the health and well-being of the people involved, which can culminate in death^{7,8}.

In most cases, violence in intimate relationships begins in relationships with less involvement, such as dating. Perpetuating, with relative probability, in the stable marriage relationship^{9,10}. An aggravating factor in this type of violence is that certain acts of aggression, in the intimate affective relationship between young people, are not perceived as violence or are even banalized, besides coercive actions and jealousy being interpreted as demonstrating care, attention and love¹¹.

Violence in intimate affective relationships among young people is embedded in contexts of culturally elaborated relationships, influenced by hegemonic gender models, which permeate the reproduction of violence and the invisibility of the phenomenon^{11,12}.

Therefore, actions to prevent interpersonal violence among young people, intervention programs and health promotion, specifically in dating violence, are essential to encourage healthy and non-violent relationships¹³.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research based on the life narrative as a theoretical-methodological reference in the ethnosociological perspective proposed by Daniel Bertaux¹⁴.

The study scenario was a public university, located in a municipality in southwestern Bahia. Participants in the study included 30 undergraduate students from the Nursing Undergraduate Program. The course is composed mostly of women, evidencing the influence of gender issues in intimate affective relationships. In order to guarantee the anonymity of the participants, they were identified with the initials PF (female participant) and PM (male participant), accompanied by the numbers 1 to 30, according to the sequence of the interview, such as: PF1, PM2, and so on.

The following criteria were used to select the participants: students from the different periods of the Nursing Course, aged 18 to 29 years old, who had experienced an intimate affective relationship, independently of the relationship time. The exclusion criteria were university students who did not regularly attend the course, even though they were enrolled, and who presented some spatio-temporal orientation deficit.

The collection was developed between May and September 2017, after students accepted to participate freely in the research and signed the Free and Informed Consent Form (ICF). The survey complied with Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council.¹⁵ It is a research that composes a larger project entitled *Vulnerability of young university students to violence in intimate affective relationships under the nursing point of view*, approved by the Research Ethics

Committee of the Faculdade Independente do Nordeste (CEP/FAINOR), opinion 2.056.168 and CAAE 65091917.3.0000.8089.

The technique of collecting the narratives was an open individual interview, based on a guiding question: *Tell me about your intimate relationships*. It occurred in a place reserved at the university itself, recorded until reaching the point of saturation, which establishes itself as a phenomenon through which the researcher understands that no new object related to the object of study will be obtained after a certain number of interviews¹⁴.

From the exhaustive readings of the narratives and considering the individuality and specificity of each participant, there was the synthesis and grouping of the thematic units that gave rise to the category - characterization of the intimate affective relationships of university students.'

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 29 years old. Twenty-five were female and five were male, characterizing an eminently female course. Regarding color/ethnicity, seven participants declared themselves white, 18 brown and five blacks, which indicates most people of black ethnicity (23 participants). From the 30 participants, 24 were having an intimate relationship with someone, averaging time from 2 weeks to 8 years. Six participants said they were not currently having any relationship.

Characterizing the intimate affective relationships of young university students

Regarding the characteristics of intimate affective relationships, it was possible to show that the participants experienced abusive relationships with jealous and controlling partners, by prohibiting or determining the use of clothes and people with whom they could maintain friendship. In addition to the invasion of privacy, with the requirement of the mobile password or messaging applications.

[...] he was very jealous of clothes, compared to friends. I even walked away from some people, at the beginning, because of him. (FP 5)

I had no privacy. He had my cell phone password and I never had his password, he never allowed me to take his cell phone. (FP 3)

He controlled the time I went into WhatsApp. I could not get into WhatsApp after 10 PM, and I could not get in before 8 because he had the idea that if I was online at that time, talking to someone. (FP 8)

[...] he was unbearably controlling. (FP 28)

Among the various manifestations of control, the controlling behavior through social networks such as *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp*, in which partners constantly inspect and accompany the life of the other as if it were their *owner*. There is an invasion of privacy, motivated by mistrust and fear of being unfaithful, virtual or really¹⁶⁻¹⁸.

The desire to control the other would be associated with the feeling of insecurity and jealousy, which, sometimes, in Western culture, is valued by being reunified as synonymous with love and care¹⁹.

In the narratives, the influence of gender issues and male dominance on the way the participants' partners determined how and with whom they should relate, behave socially and what they should and should not wear, and treat them as objects. At the same time they were not allowed to be controlled by their partners.

They reveal the issues of gender inequality and violence and the existence of a current contemporary patriarchy, with changes in its configuration. But with the maintenance of the premises of traditional patriarchal thinking, which implies the perpetuation of the model of man-centered relationships of authority and power²⁰.

In contrast, young male university students they said they were not jealous. The female partners, yes, had controlling attitudes. These results corroborate the study carried out with adolescents, in which the boys emphasized that the girls did blackmail and psychological pressure, pressing them to stay in the relationship²¹.

[...] I did not care if she went out wearing such clothes. I did not touch her cell phone, although she got mine. [...] she had my password, I did not have her password, she saw my things, I did not see her things, I have no interest, I was never jealous. (PM 10)

[...] she started to control me, but I was never much of a controller [...] there was no aggression. I never assaulted her. I never did anything, quite the contrary, she always complained that I let her loose, because I too was loose, and I do not want to control her. But if she wanted something and I did not want to, it was much more complicated, I had to do it. [...] I felt trapped. (PM 15)

The narratives of the young men revealed that women are more jealous than men. However, in the discourses it is evident that men and women are jealous, without disregarding the gender inequalities established culturally for the said *romantic jealousy*, which associates the woman as emotionally dependent on the man.²²

Jealousy is indicated as one of the factors that precipitate the occurrence of violence between boyfriends, according to men and women^{2,23,24}. Violence is legitimized based on beliefs seized throughout life, from the process of socialization that excuses abusive behavior⁶.

It can be seen in the narratives of young nursing students that there are entrenched cultural elements that tend to favor the internalization of acts and controlling attitudes in the affective relationship between young people, naturalizing jealousy.

Another relevant aspect is that two university students cite jealousy as something healthy, seen as an act of protection or care, showing a distorted view of feeling.

He called at least two or three times a day to find out if I was home. [...] I thought I was taken care of. (FP 11)

It is a healthy jealousy, because a relationship that is not jealous is not a true relationship. It is a healthy jealousy, but when you go beyond the limits you notice and talk. (FP 29)

The understanding of jealousy as a positive feeling, which must be present in relationships, which absence would indicate that the relationship *was not fine*, relies on common sense and strong family influences. Only the excess of jealousy would indicate a warning signal.²⁵ However, it is difficult to delineate attitudes as healthy if there is often invisibility in the very identification of violence perpetrated and/or experienced by young people.¹²

In the same perspective of jealousy *versus* some young women pointed out that they did not see jealousy as a manifestation of violence or were slow to see it. But they succeeded in understanding after dialogues with friends and/or relatives who noted the existence of abuses in relationships. One of the university students said she could only realize that she was experiencing violence from her partner after participating in discussions in a research group on gender violence at the university where she studied.

After I started participating in the violence research group, I started to open and sometimes I talked to the teacher. She said: You are living [violence] every day, you are already raped, you are already oppressed [...]. Set yourself free, be yourself. Then I started to stop to think about who I was, who I was. (PF3)

The narrative reflects the importance of a network of support and support to help identify the abuses experienced in the affective relationships, overcome them and stimulate the establishment of new relationships that bring trust and joy. Generally, friends are the most sought-after people in the search for help when violence occurs within the love relationship. Next, relatives, health professionals, religious and, lastly, teachers¹³.

[...] If I am suffering anything, I'd rather not share it with her, because I know she might want to sort it out her way, mother is mother. (FP 12)

[...] I did not comment on anything with my parents because as it became a family relationship, I was afraid to comment, and then I would suffer for ending the relationship, and my father will not let me go back to him. (FP 30)

It is observed in the narratives of the last participants the difficulty in dialoguing with parents about relationships. There is usually excessive control of family members.¹³ Young people hide facts that involve violence in intimate relationships because of fear, shame or difficulty in dialogue. However, parents and family members would be important referrals and support for their children. Interpersonal family relationships should be established through open dialogue and trust.

CONCLUSION

Young undergraduate nursing students are exposed to different manifestations of violence in intimate relationships. Basically, social and gender issues directly influence the occurrence of violence.

The undergraduate course in Nursing and others in the health area must attend to the phenomenon of violence in the intimate affective relationships of undergraduates and graduates, with a view to preventing and coping with situations. And, as a proposal to raise awareness among young people about situations of violence present in society, which should be a future object of care for the population.

Considering the role of universities and their importance in the transformation of social reality and quality of life, as well as in health education, it is important to highlight the urgency of developing preventive actions and promoting healthy relationships among university students.

The present study was limited because it focused only on one university and one undergraduate course. However, the article reflects a local reality of great magnitude, with a view to contributing to the realization of new studies.

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