RECOGNIZING ABUSIVE CONTROL IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS: THE ROLE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS IN ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULT PERCEPTION

Dr. Elisa Berlin[1]
Full Prof. Dr. Chiara Rollero[1]
Dr. Ilaria Coppola[2]
Dr. Marta Tironi[2]
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nadia Rania[2]
[1] Department of Psychology, University of Turin, **Italy**
[2] Department of Educational Sciences, University of Genoa, **Italy**

ABSTRACT
Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a critical public health concern and a profound violation of human rights across the globe. It encompasses a wide spectrum of abusive behaviors, including physical and sexual violence, emotional manipulation, economic control, intimidation, and harassment. The impact of GBV extends beyond the individuals directly involved, influencing societal norms and institutional responses. Public perceptions and representations of GBV can contribute to the marginalization of victims, professional inaction, and the normalization of harmful behaviors among peers. While overt forms of violence such as physical assault and sexual abuse are widely acknowledged, more subtle manifestations—particularly psychological and controlling behaviors within intimate relationships—often go unrecognized. This study explores the psychosocial factors that affect the ability to identify such behaviors among two distinct populations: adolescents (N = 368, 61.3% male, aged 15–19) and young adults (N = 309, 65.4% female, mean age = 21.95, SD = 2.00). Findings reveal that the endorsement of sexist beliefs, acceptance of rape myths, and adherence to romantic love ideals significantly influence the recognition of psychological abuse and control. These variables also shape perceptions of severity and the tendency to blame victims in scenarios involving controlling behaviors. The implications of these results are discussed in relation to prevention strategies and educational interventions aimed at fostering critical awareness and healthy relationship norms among youth and young adults.

Keywords: adolescence, young adulthood, intimate relationships, violence.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence and emerging adulthood constitute critical developmental stages during which individuals typically initiate their first romantic relationships. These relationships significantly influence psychosocial trajectories, including the formation of sexual identity and the acquisition of conflict management skills. Concurrently, this life phase represents a period of heightened vulnerability to the onset of gender-based violence (GBV), a pervasive public health challenge and a fundamental violation of human rights. GBV encompasses a broad spectrum of abusive practices—physical, sexual, psychological, and economic—alongside intimidation and harassment, and is deeply rooted in structural gender inequalities, disproportionately affecting women and girls [1].

https://www.sciencelibrary.at