Justification of Sexism and Gender Violence Among Nursing Students at a University in Guayaquil

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Abstract

Gender-based violence is a significant global health concern, with epidemic proportions. It has been linked to a range of negative health effects (1). Gender-based violence and sexism are related because they are two forms of expression of gender violence that are experienced every day in different social and cultural environments and in different age groups. The overarching objective is to: The objective of this study is to identify the existence of justifications for sexism and gender violence among female university nursing students. The methodology employed in this study was as follows: This study employs a descriptive, quantitative, cross-sectional, and prospective design. The population consisted of 903 nursing students enrolled in the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) nursing program, who were sampled by simple random convenience sampling, obtaining a sample of 300 students. The results of the study are presented below. The majority of respondents identified as female (78%), while the remaining 22% identified as male. Conversely, the age group most prevalent among the sample was 20-25 years old, representing 59% of the total. The study population was divided into two groups: those with high self-esteem (51%) and those lacking self-esteem (49%). The female group exhibited the lowest levels of self-esteem, with 32% reporting low self-esteem compared to 20% of men. In relation to the justification of sexism and gender violence, the highest percentage was found in men. Conclusions: It was determined that a certain percentage of nursing students justify sexism and gender violence.

Keywords: *Violence, Gender, Sexism, Justification, Self-esteem*

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) encompasses a wide range of harmful acts directed at women and uses the term "gender-based" to emphasize that much of this violence has its origin in a social order that discriminates against women and devalues the feminine, constructing social inequalities between men and women (3). One of the problems that is strongly related to the differences in power between genders is the need for control and dominance, which is mostly found in groups of men over women. Sexist ideology acts as an important basis where unequal relationships are formed and maintained, which presents negative consequences manifested in the cases of violence that occur throughout the world.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is currently considered a global health problem of epidemic proportions, as it causes a series of negative impacts on social development and health, as reported in various studies (1). Sexism is one of the forms of expression of GBV that is imperceptibly experienced on a daily basis in different social and cultural settings and in different age groups (2).

These manifestations of sexism in couple relationships give rise to instances of violence. However, these situations do not originate in couple relationships. Various studies have indicated that they can have their roots

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in family settings. This is based on the observation of violence in these relationships and the subsequent identification of patterns of repetition in future relationships that commence at an early age and are sustained in subsequent juvenile stages.

With regard to age groups, numerous studies have indicated that university students in their youth are particularly prone to gender-based violence in their romantic relationships. This is often accompanied by a tendency to justify and trivialize such violence, which is indicative of underlying sexist attitudes. The objective of this study is to identify instances of sexism and gender-based violence among nursing students at a university in Guayaquil.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender-based violence (GBV) encompasses a wide range of harmful acts directed at women and uses the term "gender-based" to emphasize that much of this violence has its origin in a social order that discriminates against women and devalues the feminine, constructing social inequalities between men and women (3). One of the problems that is strongly related to the differences in power between genders is the need for control and dominance, which is mostly found in groups of men over women. Sexist ideology serves as a significant foundation for the formation and perpetuation of unequal relationships, which in turn gives rise to a range of negative consequences, including violence, that are observed globally.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is currently considered a global health problem of epidemic proportions, as it causes a series of negative impacts on social development and health, as reported in various studies. One of the forms of expression of GBV is sexism, which is experienced imperceptibly on a daily basis in different social and cultural settings and in different age groups (2).

These manifestations of sexism in couple relationships give rise to instances of violence. Nevertheless, these circumstances do not originate in couple relationships. A number of studies have indicated that these issues can have their roots in family settings. This is based on the observation of violence in these relationships and the subsequent identification of patterns of repetition in future relationships that commence at an early age and are sustained in subsequent juvenile stages.

With regard to age groups, numerous studies have indicated that university students in their youth are particularly prone to gender-based violence in their romantic relationships. Such behavior is frequently accompanied by a tendency to justify and trivialize the violence, which is indicative of underlying sexist attitudes. The objective of this study is to identify instances of sexism and gender-based violence among nursing students at a university in Guayaquil.

Objectives

General Objective

To identify the existence of the justification of sexism and gender violence in university students of nursing.

Specific objectives

To describe the sociodemographic characteristics of undergraduate nursing students.

To know the justifications of sexism and gender violence in university students of the Nursing career.

To determine the level of self-esteem in university nursing students.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

Type of study: Descriptive

Method: Quantitative

Design: Transversal

Time: Prospective

Population: 903 UCSG nursing students enrolled in semester B 2020.

Sample: 300 UCSG nursing students.

Inclusion criteria: Male and female nursing students over 18 years of age who authorize their participation through informed consent.

Procedure for data collection

For data collection, an online survey of UCSG nursing students was used, where authorization was requested through informed consent. Sociodemographic data sheets and validated questionnaires were used, such as the EA Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1985) and the Questionnaire on Justification of Sexism and Gender Violence by Diaz Aguado and Martínez Arias (2010).

Instruments

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale: The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is one of the most widely used methods for assessing self-esteem and aims to evaluate a person's satisfaction with himself/herself. It was originally developed by Rosenberg in 1965 and translated into Spanish by Echeburúa in 1995. The scale shows a high reliability index: the correlation of the new test ranges from 0.82 to 0.88 and Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.77 to 0.88. The scale includes ten items assessing the feeling of self-respect and self-acceptance. Half of the items are positive, and half are negative. These items were answered on a Likert scale for the interpretation of the results, the total score ranged from 10 to 40. A value lower than 25 is considered low self-esteem and a value higher than 30 is considered high self-esteem (33).

Questionnaire on justification of sexism and gender violence by Diaz Aguado and Martínez Arias (2010): The purpose of this questionnaire is to evaluate sexist beliefs. The questionnaire is composed of two factors, factor I is called: "Justification of gender violence", it consists of 7 items, its internal consistency index Cronbach's Alpha is 0.76 and the confidence index is 95%. And factor II, called: "reactive and sexist violence", consists of 6 items, the internal consistency index, Cronbach's Alpha is 0.75 and the confidence index is 95%. The responses were scored on a Likert scale, which indicates the degree of agreement or disagreement for each item (10).

Data processing and analysis techniques: The information was compiled in an Excel database which was analyzed with two programs, the first Microsoft Excel to perform the graphical and statistical part (frequencies, percentages, etc.). On the other hand, two types of statistics were also performed, a descriptive one in which R Studio was used to calculate the values of standard deviations and averages, and a bivariate statistic where comparative analysis of means and deviations by age and gender were performed and finally chi-square tests were performed to check independence.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

Socio-demographic Data

Percentage distribution of participants by gender in the study of the justification of sexism and gender violence in nursing students at a university in Guayaquil.
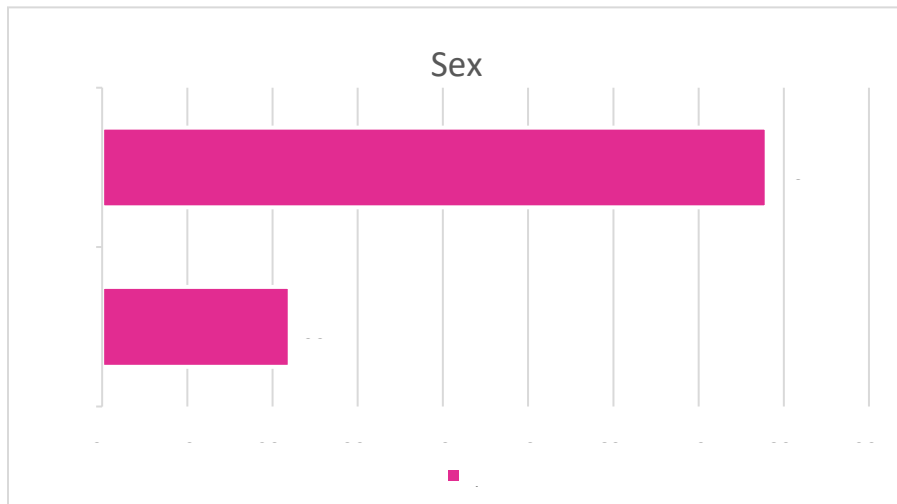
Figure 1: Sociodemographic Data: Sex

Within the tabulation of gender in the justification of sexism and gender violence, it is evident that through the graph there is no equality, due to the fact that women predominate. In addition, we can infer that the nursing career is still considered a female profession.

Percentage distribution of participants according to age in the study of the justification of sexism and gender-based violence in nursing students at a university in Guayaquil.
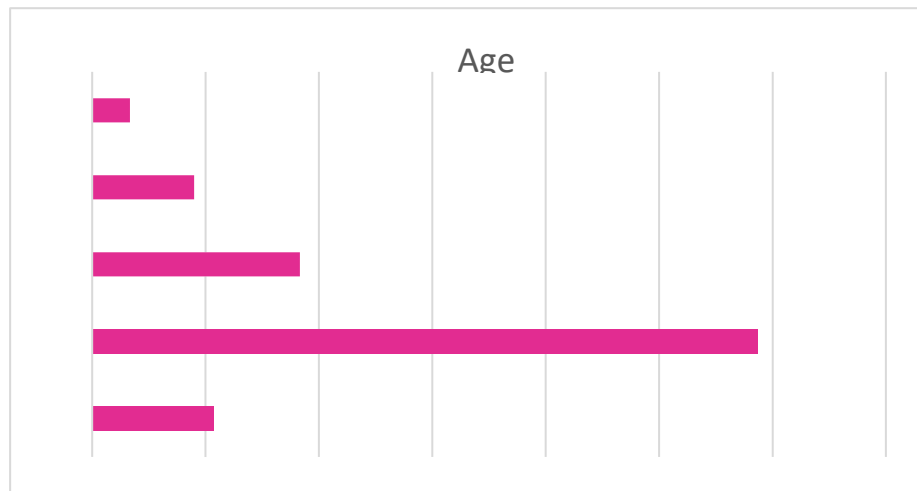

Figure 2: Sociodemographic Data: Age

In the following distribution it can be observed that the age range between 20 and 25 years prevails because at this stage there is a greater motivation and willingness to learn, acquire knowledge and skills to reach the goals proposed by young people. There is a significant result between the range of 32 to 46 years where it is evident that in these ages the desire to obtain the profession to feel personal satisfaction and help others is promoted.

Mean score and standard deviation, by gender and age on the sexism and gender-based violence justification scale

Figure 3 shows that the average score values of the male sex are higher than those of the female sex in all age ranges. It is evident that in the age range of 26-30 years there is a difference in scores that narrows and finds its lowest point in relation to the age range of 32-35 years, which expands and finds the highest difference.
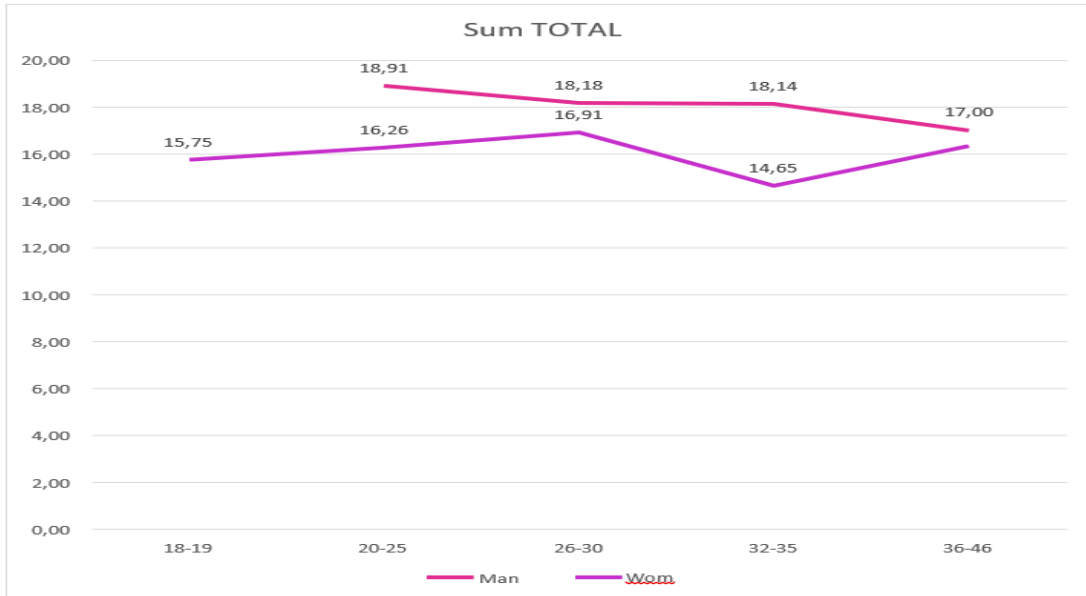
Sum TOTAL

15,75   16,26   16,91   14,65   17,00

18,91   18,18   18,14

Figure: 3 Mean Score and Standard Deviation, by Sex and Age

Mean Score and Standard Deviation by gender and age for Factor I Justification of gender-based violence

FACTOR I

8.44   8.88   9.16   7.85   8.78
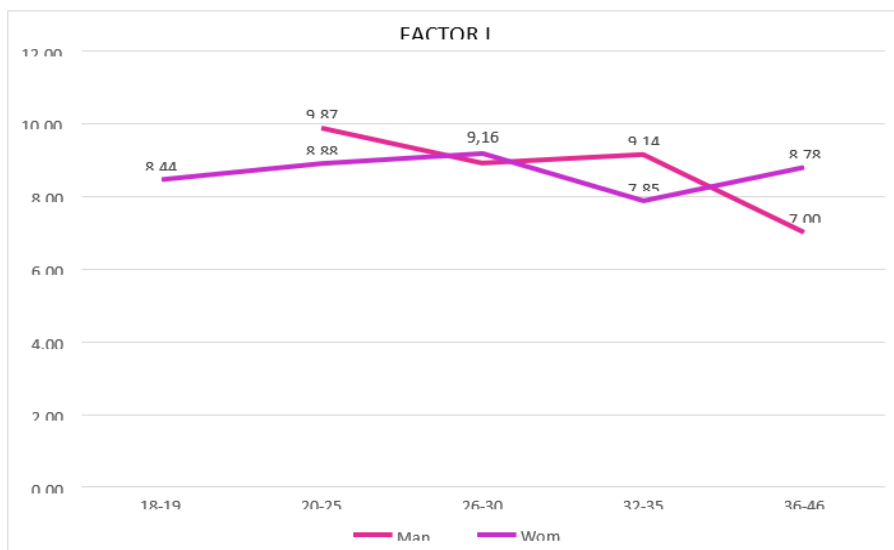
9.87   9.14   7.00

Figure 4: Mean Score and Standard Deviation by Sex and Age: Factor I

Figure 4 shows that the mean values for the male sex (9.59) are higher than those for the female sex (8.78), so their standard deviation is high. However, these measures fall creating more dispersion in the age of 36-46 years since the mean between both sexes is 8.96.

Mean score and standard deviation by gender and age in factor II: Justification of Reactive Violence and Sexism.
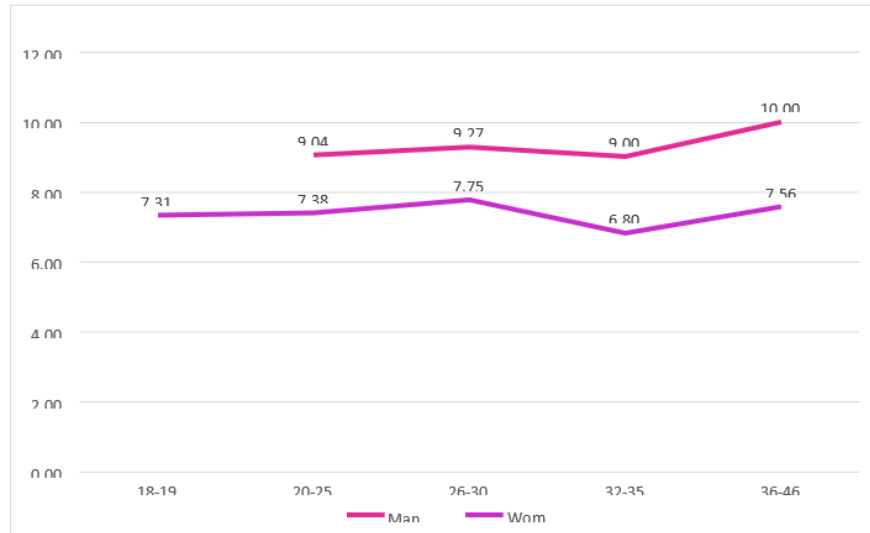

Figure 5: Mean Score and Standard Deviation by Sex and Age: Factor II

Figure 5 shows that the mean values for the male sex are higher than those for the female sex, so their standard deviation is high. In other words, the degree of dispersion in men is greater with respect to the mean. It should be noted that the male sex is more dispersed than the female sex in the age of 36-46 years, since the mean between the two sexes is 7.77.

Justification Of Sexism and Violence. Entire Group

It is evident that the way in which students perceive sexism and gender violence in the highest percentages are directed to the fact that they do not agree at all in both factors I and II, but there is a difference that indicates that a certain number of participants do justify them. For example, in factor I, the item that stands out is "If a woman is mistreated by her partner and does not leave him, it is because she does not completely dislike the situation" with 19%, and in factor II, there are three striking items that justify reactive and sexist violence: "Men should not cry", "A good father should let the rest of his family know who is in charge", "The violence that occurs within the home is a family matter and should not leave there" with 14% which leaves in evidence that a large percentage is predisposed to be a victim or victimizer of these actions.
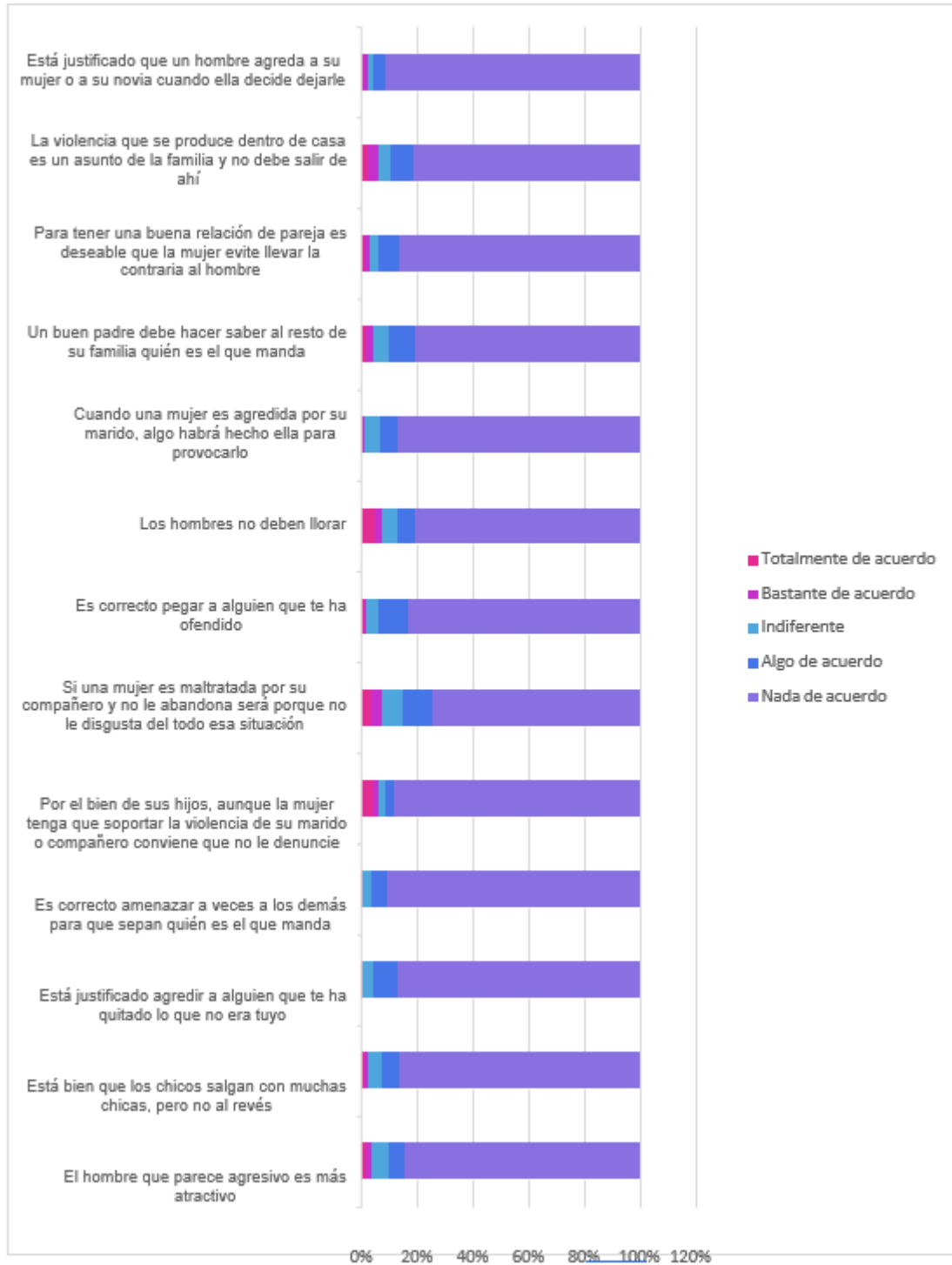
Figure 6. Sexism and Gender Violence Justification Questionnaire: Full Group

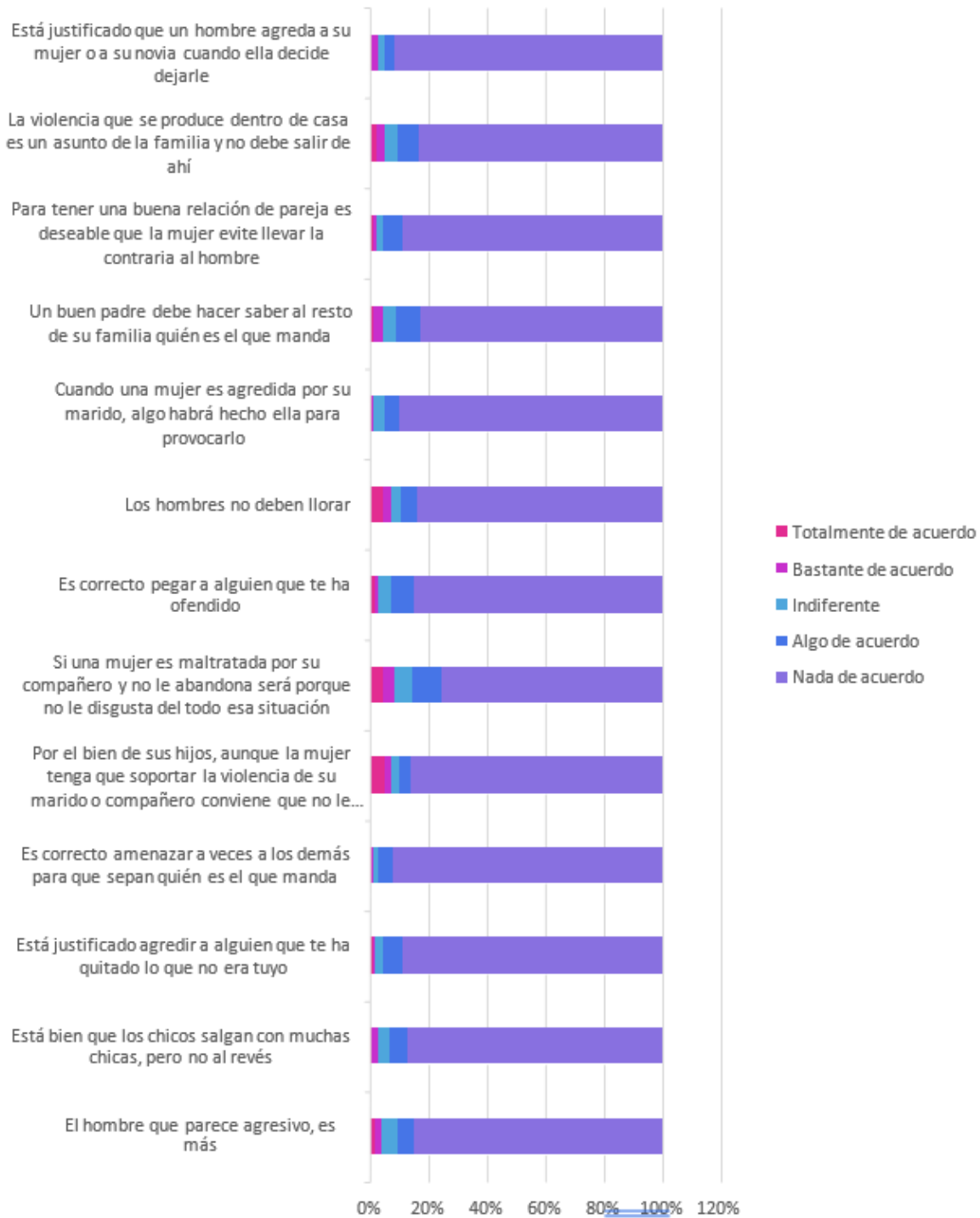## Justification of sexism and violence. Group of women

Figure 7: Sexism and Gender Violence Justification Questionnaire: Women's Group

Through Figure 7, it can be determined that the group of women in the highest percentage reject the justification of sexism and gender violence. However, one percent do not allow that in this group there is no total justification of it. In the case of Factor I, if a woman is mistreated by her partner and does not leave him,

it is because she does not completely dislike this situation, with 19%, it can be determined that a group of the female student population is vulnerable to suffering and/or justifying violence. Likewise, in Factor II: "Men should not cry", "A good father should let the rest of his family know who is in charge" shows that 13% of women allow and normalize these sexist attitudes, which makes them vulnerable to possible situations.

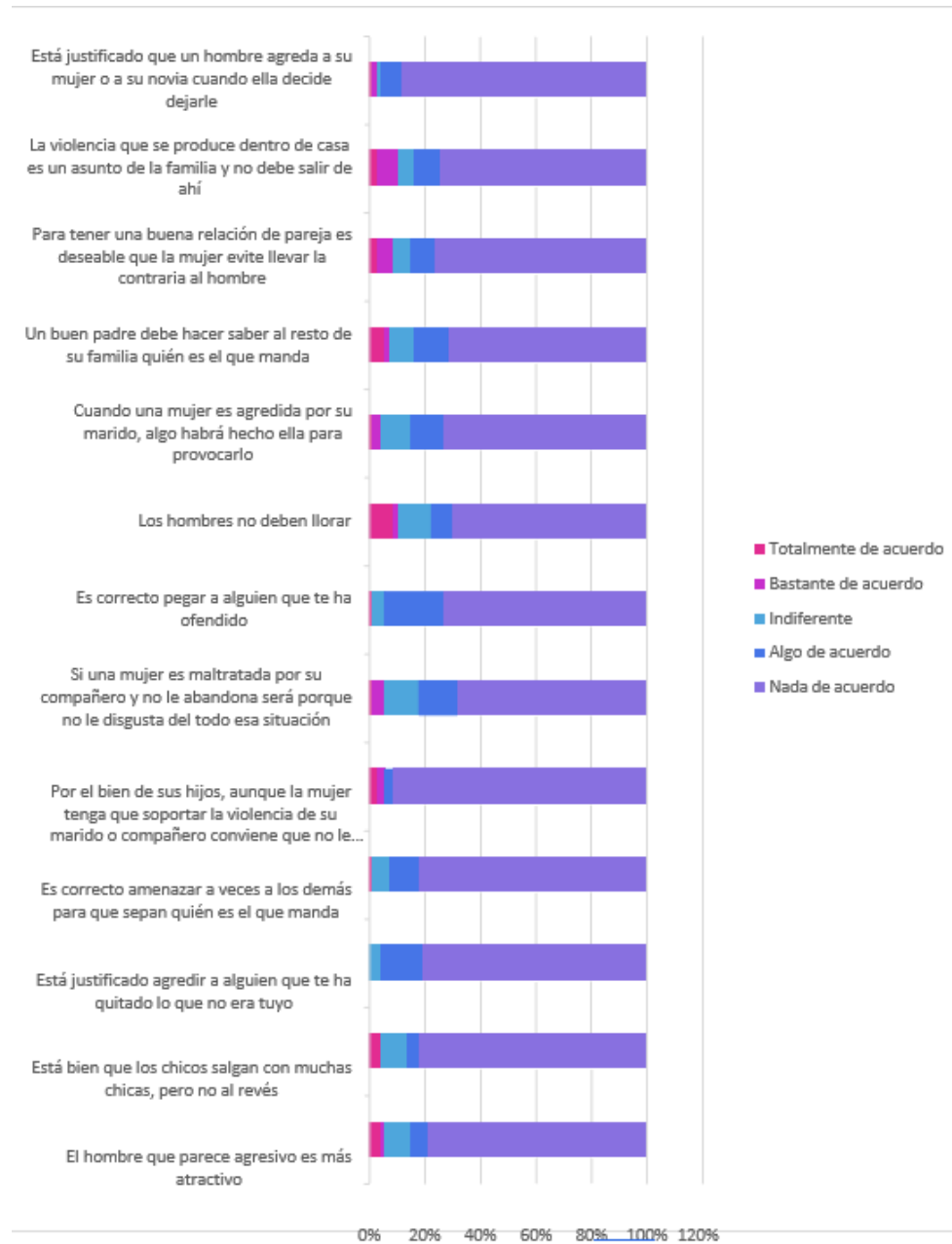**Justification of sexism and violence. Men's Group.**

Figure 8: Questionnaire on Justification of Sexism and Gender Violence. Group of Men

This statistic shows that the male gender, in spite of being scarce in this surveyed group, has a percentage that justifies sexist acts. In Factor I: "It is right to hit someone who has offended you" with 23% and "If a woman is mistreated by her partner and does not leave him, it is because she does not completely dislike the situation" with 21%; certifies that in these situations they would be predisposed to be the aggressors. Similarly, in Factor II: "A good father should let the rest of his family know who is in charge" and "The violence that takes place

at home is a family matter and should not leave the family", both with 20%, argue that they are the ones who most justify sexist acts and gender violence, this fact may be due to belonging to the oppressor group.

Mean scores and standard deviations in self-esteem by gender and age.

Figure 9: Mean Score and Standard Deviation in Self-Esteem by Gender and Age

The following statistics show that the Rossemberg Self-Esteem Scale does not vary independently in age and gender and maintains the range between 20-25 years with a standard deviation of 5.17 in men and 5.23 in women.

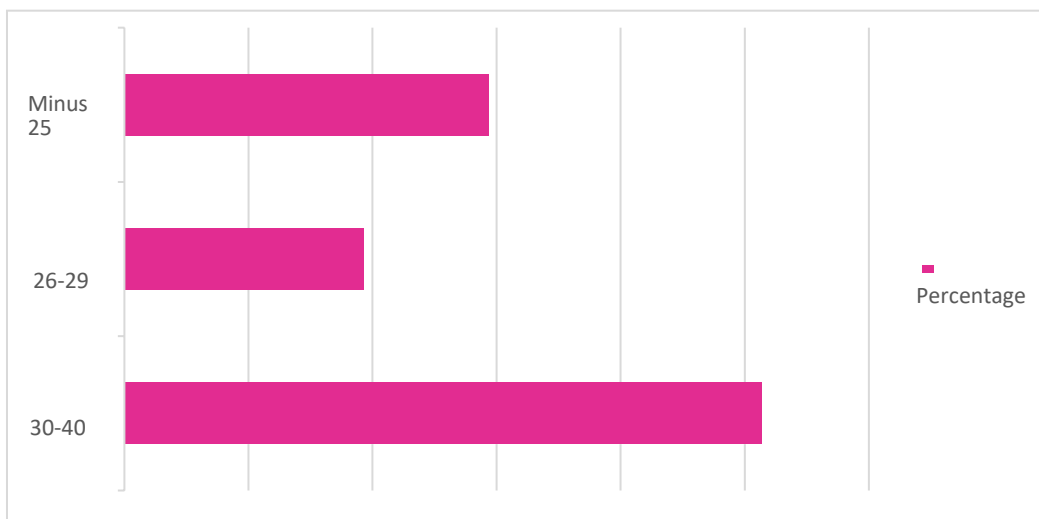## Level of Self-Esteem Entire Group

Figure 10: Self-Esteem Scale. Complete Group

The census gives evidence that the students surveyed have a "High Self-Esteem" with 51%, showing that they reject sexist attitudes; on the other hand, the group with "Medium Self-Esteem" is 19%, showing that they could be faced with a sexist situation and/or violence, however, they would reject its repetition. However, the group with "Low Self-Esteem" which is 29% would be vulnerable to suffer violence and justify it.

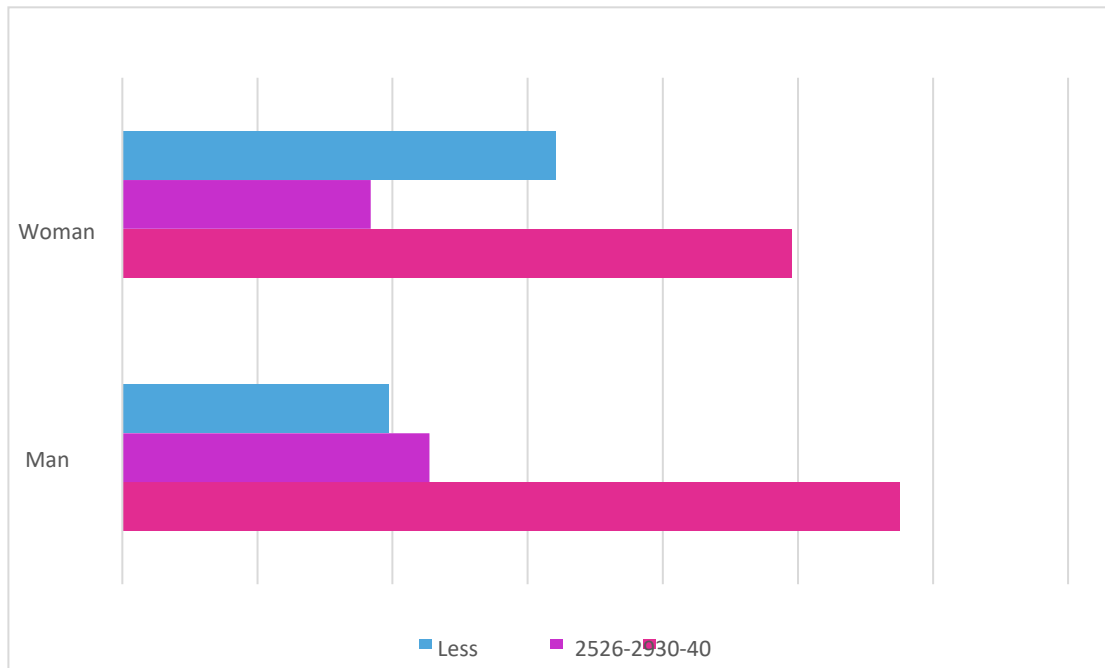**Level of self-esteem of women who justify sexism and those who do not.**

Figure 11: Level of self-esteem. Women's Group

This table shows that half of the group of female nursing students have high self-esteem, which refers to the percentages where they reject the justification of sexist acts and gender violence. Meanwhile, the other half is dispersed in Medium Self-esteem and Low Self-esteem, the latter being the one that predominates in their answers, and it is evident that this group is fragile in the face of these facts. Therefore, it can be determined that the higher the girls' self-esteem, the more they do not justify sexism and, on the contrary, the lower their self-esteem, the more they approve of it.

Level of self-esteem of men who justify sexism and those who do not.

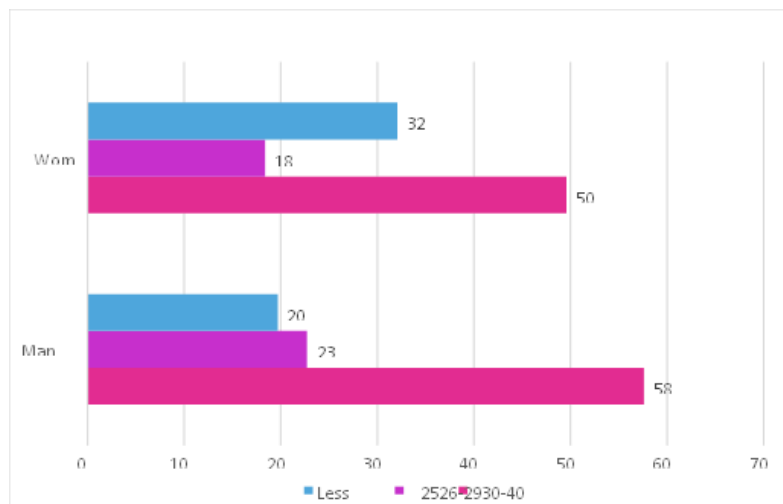**Figure 12:** Level of Self-Esteem. Group Of Men

Figure 12 results that, although the male population studied is small compared to the female population, this group has a higher proportion of high self-esteem and determines that the higher their self-esteem, the more they justify sexism and gender violence, this is because they belong to the oppressor group or because of the stereotypes established in society.

DISCUSSION

Sexism is a significant contributing factor to violence, as evidenced by the tendency to categorize individuals based on their sex. Our study aimed to identify the prevalence of justifications for sexism and gender-based violence among university students majoring in nursing.

In their article on sexist beliefs and attitudes towards gender violence among university students in the health sector in 2020, the authors Saldarriaga Genes and Guillermina Genes, et al., reported that the majority of participants in their study were women, with a percentage of 73.2%. This is similar to the findings of our study on the justification of sexism and gender violence in nursing students at a university in Guayaquil, where women participated in a higher percentage, with 78%. This demonstrates that the female sex is more prevalent in health careers (16). In contrast, the article "Sexist beliefs about couple relationships and their reflection in the use of social networks in university students" (Rosser Limiñana, et al., 2015) reports that the majority of the 222 students surveyed (aged 18 to 34) were between 21 and 26 years old. Six percent of the participants in our study exhibited a high degree of similarity to those in the aforementioned study, which consisted of 300 students aged between 18 and 46 years. The majority of the participants in our study were between 20 and 25 years old, with 59% of them indicating a high level of willingness to learn, acquire knowledge, and achieve their professional goals. This age range exhibited the highest level of motivation and engagement in the pursuit of professional development (17).

The term "sexism" is used to describe asymmetrical relations between the two genders based on an ideology and erroneous belief that one gender is superior to the other in a stereotypical manner. When studying the second objective, it was determined that the students reject sexism and gender violence in a higher percentage. However, there is a difference that indicates that a certain number of participants justify them. It was also possible to determine that there is a greater prevalence of sexism in men than in women. This indicates that men are more likely to be the oppressors. For example, 23% of men believe that it is acceptable to hit someone who has offended them, and 23% believe that a woman should not leave her partner if he mistreats her. In contrast, only 19% of women believe that it is acceptable to hit someone who has offended them, and only 19% believe that a woman should not leave her partner if he mistreats her. "If a woman is mistreated by her partner and does not leave him, it will be because she does not entirely dislike that situation," with 19% likewise in Factor II. "Men should not cry," and "A good father should let the rest of his family know who is in charge" are examples of evidence that 13% of women indicate that they normalize these actions by justifying them. The results obtained in our study align with those of the study on sexism, romantic love, and gender violence in adolescence (2016) by Merino Verdugo M. With regard to sexism, violence, and their justification, it can be concluded that the male sex continues to express these problems to a greater extent than women. It is important to note that the adolescent population as a whole is strongly opposed to sexism and violence. However, this progress is much slower among boys than among girls, as evidenced by certain indicators. For instance, only 2.8% of adolescent girls are in complete agreement with the statement: "When a woman is assaulted by her husband, she must have done something to provoke him," compared to 8.5% of men. With respect to two of the sexist stereotypes analyzed, "men should not cry," only 1.4% of women agree fairly or strongly agree, compared to 21% of men; and "it is okay for boys to date a lot of girls, but not the other way around," 3.1% of women agree fairly or strongly, compared to 16.2% of men (10). Similarly, the findings align with those of Saldarriaga, et al. Regarding the justification of sexism and gender violence, it was observed that the female population exhibited the highest frequency of rejection of sexist beliefs and attitudes. However, in certain statements, a percentage of agreement and others demonstrated indifference to these statements that perpetuate gender violence against women (30). Consequently, there is a striking similarity between our study and the aforementioned research, wherein the female population exhibited a near-unanimous opposition to justifying sexism and gender violence. However, a certain degree of inconsistency was also observed in certain items, where the female population demonstrated sexist attitudes and violence towards themselves.

Self-esteem is a crucial factor in the realization and perception of life and the actions performed in it. An inadequate conception of oneself, a low sense of worth, and an insufficient perception of personal resources could render a woman vulnerable to becoming a victim of violence. Upon examination of the third objective

as delineated by Rossemberg's Self-Esteem Scale in our study, it becomes evident that the nursing students exhibit a high degree of self-esteem, with 51% of the sample population falling within this category. This self-perception is closely aligned with the rejection of sexist attitudes. Nevertheless, the 29% of the sample identified as having "Low Self-Esteem" may be susceptible to experiencing violence and justifying it. In contrast, the study "Ambivalent Sexism in Adolescence and Its Relationship with Self-Esteem" (2017) by Santos Ruiz M, shares similarities with our aforementioned study. The author emphasizes that the study cannot determine the direction of causality, that is, whether an increase in sexism leads to a decline in self-esteem or if low self-esteem causes an increase in sexism. Additionally, he established that with regard to the correlation between self-esteem and sexism, the fact that a negative and significant correlation is identified in girls, but not in boys, is noteworthy. Therefore, the author concludes that there is a negative correlation between girls' self-esteem and sexism. Furthermore, although the correlation is not significant in boys, the direction is also negative (18). In contrast to the thesis of Pajares and Pozo, who found that 71% of students suffered from low self-esteem and linked it to 36% who had experienced violence, the present study determined that a lower level of self-esteem was associated with a higher rate of sexist and violent acts, and vice versa (19).

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that there is a prevalence of sexism and gender-based violence among nursing students at a university in Guayaquil, with a greater incidence observed among male students. It is therefore inaccurate to claim that sexism and gender violence have been entirely eradicated among nursing students. However, the lectures delivered in the first cycles and throughout the course of study do instill in future professionals the ability to engage in critical thinking and to identify what is right and wrong in the context of unequal acts. This enables them to fulfil their call to serve, care and care for others, meeting their needs and providing security at all times.

In terms of sociodemographic characteristics, the nursing student population is predominantly female, indicating that women are increasingly entering the labor market and challenging the stereotypes associated with sexist beliefs that persist in society. Conversely, the age group most prevalent in the study was between 20 and 30 years old. This finding suggests that within this age range, there is a heightened motivation and willingness to learn, acquire knowledge, and develop skills to achieve the self-defined goals.

The validated questionnaire of Diaz Aguado and Martínez Arias (2010) permitted the determination of the justifications of sexism and gender violence among students of the nursing career. The results indicated that the majority of students rejected these indicators, with a higher percentage rejecting them in both factor I and factor II. However, a notable number of participants did justify them. Nevertheless, the results are encouraging in the population under study, which has a significant impact on the personal and work environment. This will facilitate the early detection and prevention of probable cases of violence in individuals who seek care at health units.

The validated Rossemberg scale revealed that approximately half of the surveyed students exhibited high self-esteem, which was found to be related to the results that the majority of them rejected the justification of sexism and gender violence. Nevertheless, a proportion of the students exhibited low self-esteem, which may be linked to the occurrence of sexist acts and, consequently, predispose them to engage in such actions, either as victims or perpetrators.

Recommendations

Sexism and violence are significant societal issues that require immediate attention. It is imperative to implement coeducation from an early age by fostering gender equality and respect for others across all aspects of life.

Self-esteem represents a fundamental pillar that will assist us in making the appropriate decisions throughout our lives. It is of paramount importance to cultivate self-esteem from an early age, as it will influence our future behavior and thoughts, as well as our firmness and respect towards others who are less powerful or who are perceived to be inferior.

It is imperative to reinforce existing policies and legislation that safeguard women from violence, with the ultimate goal of eradicating violence and fostering values based on respect.

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