

## **Conflict within intimacy: a socio-demographic analysis of male involvement in intimate partner violence in Mexico**

In Mexico, research has found intimate partner violence perpetrated by men against women (IPV) to be a serious problem with high prevalence. However, there has been little systematic research in this setting. Most investigations have focused on women; however, at present, the need to investigate IPV from the male perspective is recognised.

This study analyses, from a socio-demographic perspective, the role of different factors associated with IPV, the pathways through which these factors operate, and the specific circumstances in which violence occurs. The study puts emphasis on understanding IPV from the male point of view. To be able to understand the conditions in which conflict does or does not result in violence, both violent and non-violent men are investigated. For the analysis, an eclectic and multifaceted framework is used which is based on the Ecological Model.

The study uses an integrated analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. First, a survey of reproductive health for the population covered by the Mexican Social Security Institute (1998) is used to examine the association between IPV and relevant socio-demographic and contextual characteristics. Next, data from a quantitative sample survey (N=500) conducted among male factory workers in an urban middle to low income setting in Mexico City is analysed to explore more specific quantitative information related to IPV. Finally, qualitative data gathered mainly through in-depth interviews with men selected from the sample survey are used to interpret and contextualize the patterns found from the quantitative analysis.

Quantitative findings showed that the life cycle of men is one of the most important characteristics related to IPV. The men who are at highest risk of being involved in IPV are those with the following demographic profile: they are under 25 years old, have one child under 12 years old living with them, and have been in their relationship for fewer

than 5 years. In 50% of cases, the first incident occurred less than 1 year into the relationship. The risk of being involved in IPV gets lower as age increases.

Both, quantitative and qualitative findings show two principle features of the dynamic of the relationship to be important: a) the relative fulfilment of gender roles within the household; and b) the need men feel to control the sexuality of their partners. Both violent and non-violent men are characterised by traditional gender attitudes, but that the former group adheres to them more rigidly than the latter. So, marital dissatisfaction is more frequent among violent men when roles are not fulfilled. It is important to note that this dissatisfaction is not only experienced by men - women also show disappointment or anger when men do not fulfil their role.

The most important role that a man has to fulfil is that of proficient economic provider for the household. A man's failure in this role can bring dissatisfaction to the woman and frustration in the man which may result in serious marital conflicts. However, nowadays society demands that men fulfil emotional roles as well. It was common to observe that they do not satisfy the emotional expectations of their partners.

About women's roles, it was observed that while some men also take part in the household duties, most of them (whether violent or not), consider women to have prime responsibility in this domain. The lack of fulfilment of this role can provoke anger in some men and result in conflicts. For men, the most important of the household duties was caring for children.

The most important transgression of traditional female roles related with IPV is that relating to sexuality. Quantitative findings showed that the variables concerning the control of women's sexuality are highly associated with IPV. For Mexican men the control of women's sexuality is a extremely important part of their male identity. Therefore, men show strong dissatisfaction when the sexual behaviour of their partners deviates from that which is expected.

Of all the reasons for partner violence jealousy is the one most commonly mentioned by individuals. The in-depth interviews revealed that jealousy on the part of men towards women is a regular source of conflict principally in the first stage of the relationship (and even during dating). For example, men mentioned that their partners should behave like respectful mothers and wives being serious, modest and reserved in front of other men. In practical terms, a woman's transgression of these roles could take the form of having a male friend, or even using make up, wearing short skirts or simply talking with a man in the street. The control of women's sexuality is particularly critical before marriage. Premarital sexual relations in women are condemned by traditional gender norms. The failure of this role is good reason to be involved in serious conflicts.

Also, data reveal that the common use of physical violence by men to resolve conflicts is an important structural element to explain IPV. In Mexico it is socially accepted the use of physical violence (mainly by men) to resolve conflicts. However, violent developed more tolerance to the use of physical violence than non-violent, basically because the level of severity of the violence experienced during the childhood. Also, a man develops more tolerance of the use of violence against women if he observed the participation of women in physically violent situations during his childhood. He learns that this phenomenon is not totally condemned and that it may be authorised in particular circumstances. In contrast, a common pattern found among non-violent men was that the father had taught his son that he must not under any circumstances hit a woman. Because the father is the ultimate authority, his beliefs, attitudes and behaviours are fundamental in the learning process of the child.

In general, violence against women is socially condemned. Findings suggest that the social unacceptability of violence against women is related to the idea of abuse. In other words, the norms dictate that, when a man attacks a woman it is abuse because he is physically stronger than she is. The fight is unbalanced, and the community know that in most cases he will win the battle. As was mentioned before, the idea of abuse is reprehensible. In practical terms, violence against a female partner is even more strongly condemned when she suffers injuries, when violence is not used as the "last resort", and

when there is no “serious” provocation. However, violence against women is not entirely condemned. There are two general situations in which violence against the female partner might be considered acceptable: a) as defence and b) for purposes of discipline.

The main policy implication arising from these results is that there is a need for appropriate and specific prevention programmes that primarily target young men. These programmes should encourage and offer support to men to reinterpret the social rules that are associated with violent behaviour.