

Toxicity and violence among women: An exploratory study of abusive experiences in lesbian couples



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ABSTRACT

Abusive relationships are gaining more and more visibility due to their harmful impact on individuals and society. Despite this, certain segments remain invisible in relation to this theme, which is the case of the LGBTQIAPN+ population. The present study sought to analyze the experience profile of abusive relationships carried out by lesbian couples, as well as their consequences. A survey was carried out with 46 lesbian women using an electronic form.

The respondents were, on average, 26.5 years old ($sd=5.2$), mostly subjects with higher education or more (91.3%), and distributed throughout the country, but with emphasis on the Southeast regions (69.6 %). The results indicate three main dimensions for the characterization of abusive relationships between lesbians: Submission/isolation, with items that describe feelings and behaviors of vulnerability, submission and subordination on the part of the respondent when interacting with the partner(s); Lack of control and guilt, involving items associated with relationships with a dynamic of aggression, lack of control and remorse; and Manipulation, with items describing the interaction with a partner with manipulative, passive-aggressive behaviors and involving behaviors such as distortion and victimization. Although the dimension of manipulation is more prominent than the others, the data indicate that each of the dimensions has specific and specific relationships with types of violence. The data also suggest the presence of complex relationships in terms of toxicity in lesbian relationships. Finally, the need for further studies is emphasized, given the lack of research with this public.

Keywords: Abusive relationships, Lesbians.

1 INTRODUCTION

The general objective of this study is to analyze the profile of abusive relationships led by lesbian couples, as well as their consequences. Cezario et al (2015) point out that some authors have increasingly used the term intimate partner violence (IPV). This is, by definition, all emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse that occurs within a romantic relationship. He also points out that the number of studies on intimate partner violence is much higher when it comes to heteroaffectional relationships when compared to the number of studies conducted focusing on homosexual relationships, both in female and male relationships.



Another term that is very present in the literature is domestic violence. This can be characterized in several ways, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence. (Da Fonseca & Lucas, 2006). The definitions for abusive relationships, intimate partner violence, and domestic violence are quite similar, so in the present study we chose to use the terms abuse and abusive relationships/relationships.

Abusive relationship is an ancient phenomenon that has been going on for centuries. (Mika et al, 2021; Maia & Cascaes, 2017) This phenomenon is not infrequently associated with the gender issue, so that the culture of machismo, as well as the patriarchal format of society that persist even today, are pointed out as influencers in the maintenance of such relationships. In this sense:

In a sexist way of thinking there is a "hierarchical system" of genders, where the masculine is always in a superior position to the feminine. (Maia & Cascaes, 2017)

Gender identity is nothing more than a social construction, which is carried out from the biological aspect. In this socio-cultural construction, there are teachings and the segregation of what are considered feminine characteristics and masculine characteristics. In this way, from childhood, children are taught to behave, express themselves, act, play, think and even feel in a certain way, taking into account their gender. (Da Fonseca & Lucas, 2006)

Boys are taught to omit their "weaknesses," their sensitivity, as well as any and all emotions associated with the feminine. They are encouraged to express their anger, their courage, and their strength that are traits often associated with power. Following this logic, it is up to the boys to be interested in strategic, dynamic and/or territory games.

Girls, on the other hand, are allowed to demonstrate their "weaknesses" and "vulnerabilities", as well as their affection and docility, which are considered feminine characteristics. Thus, it is recommended that the expression of emotions/feelings such as anger, strength and courage be controlled and disguised, since it is understood as being characteristics of the male gender. Girls are expected to participate in games that develop their maternal side, such as playing house and dolls.

As a result of this practice, women have been reserved for domestic space, under the justification of their natural ability to be mothers. (Da Fonseca & Lucas, 2006)

The hierarchical relationship established between the sexes is one of the main factors that lead to situations of violence against women. The traits associated with the feminine contrast to those associated with the masculine and, for this reason, end up being less valued in society. (Da Fonseca & Lucas, 2006)

However, abusive relationships are not exclusive to heterosexual couples. Such patterns of behavior can also be observed in same-sex relationships, although these are less visible. According to Alencar, Ramos and Ramos (2018), abuse has numerous determining factors and several power



relationships established within romantic relationships. Also according to Alencar, Ramos and Ramos (2018), one aspect that contributed to the deficit observed in relation to the development of studies on abusive relationships in lesbian couples is the fact that in the 70s domestic violence gained greater visibility from the feminist movement, while studies on the subject focused on homosexual relationships began to be disseminated only 20 years later, in the 90s. Although domestic violence between same-sex couples occurs frequently, it is underreported.

Alencar, Ramos and Ramos (2018) point out that there is a certain resistance on the part of society in general, but also on the part of the homosexual movement, to talk about abusive relationships in homosexual couples, a fact that contributes to the invisibility of the theme. According to the authors, two factors that underlie such conduct are the fear of reinforcing negative stereotypes in relation to same-sex relationships and the choice not to question the idea that abuse in romantic relationships is caused by gender inequality.

The abusive relationship between women can generate even more severe damage than male violence, considering that the victims of this type of violence often do not have a functional support network, which makes it impossible for them to acquire external help. (Avena, 2010). Considering that the abusive relationship is a cycle, it is extremely important to have a third person capable of helping the woman in an abusive situation to break this cycle, since with each experience of aggression the victim becomes even more fragile, discredited and vulnerable. It is rare for the victim to be able to disengage from the abusing figure and the relationship without external help. (Albertim & Martins, 2018)

As previously mentioned, abusive relationships occur in a cyclical way, not being an isolated episode. This cycle consists of three phases. The first phase is the construction of tension, where there is the emergence of conflicts and the abusive figure will take control using aggressive strategies, establishing the feeling of imminent violence within the relationship. The second phase is characterized by the loss of control by the abusive figure and the materialization of violence, which can be psychological, physical and/or sexual. Finally, the third phase begins, which is known as the "honeymoon". At this stage, the person who committed the abuse will do whatever it takes not to lose their partner and regain closeness, in this way the gestures of affection and care begin, as well as the promises that the situation of abuse previously experienced will never happen again. (Alencar, Ramos&Ramos, 2018; D'Agostini et al, 2021; Albertim & Martins, 2018)

However, Mika et al (2021) cite four phases of the abusive relationship, the first being relational tension, the second, open violence, the third regret, and the fourth being the honeymoon. In this sense, the authors cited above understand repentance and the honeymoon as being a single phase. It is worth mentioning that because it is a cycle, after the honeymoon phase, the tension and conflicts that make up the first phase begin again.



An abusive relationship is understood as inappropriate treatment and/or mistreatment, the intent of which is to control, intimidate, humiliate, frighten, manipulate, blame and/or hurt someone. (Neal, 2018) This type of relationship is based on the exercise of power and domination over the other, and can manifest itself in different ways. (D'Agostini et al, 2021) According to Maia and Cascaes (2017), the excess of power over the partner is predominant in abusive relationships, associated with the desire for control and possession.

In abusive relationships, power is at the heart of the matter, it demonstrates the inequality between the forces of the abuser and the subject who suffers the abuse. Power is then a way by which physical or symbolic force will be applied in order to achieve a certain goal. (Barreto, 2018)

Contrary to what common sense tends to believe, abuse occurs regardless of socioeconomic origin, gender, ethnicity, religion and/or age group, and it is a very complex problem. (Da Fonseca & Lucas, 2006).

Violence affects not only the individual, but also the population in general, the health system, and the country. (Cezario et al, 2015) Domestic violence against women is considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be a public health issue, while there is an increase in health expenditures, since the victim may resort to health services several times, as their physical and emotional integrity is negatively affected, as well as their sense of security shaken. Abuse in romantic relationships, in addition to being a major public health problem, also constitutes a violation of human rights. (Mika et al, 2021; Da Fonseca & Lucas, 2006).

Abuse is directly linked to violence, so they can be considered synonymous. Abusive relationships are composed of different types of violence, the most common being sexual, physical and psychological violence. (Barreto, 2018)

Sexual violence is defined as any and all sexual practices carried out without the consent of the partner through blackmail, use of force, intimidation, manipulation and/or any attitude that ignores and/or disrespects the personal will of the other party. (Da Fonseca & Lucas, 2006; Alencar, Ramos & Ramos, 2018)

Physical violence tends to be more easily identified when compared to psychological violence, since in the latter the injuries can even be diagnosed. Physical violence is considered to be any act that endangers the physical integrity of the individual, and may present itself in the form of slaps, pushes, kicks, bites, punches, beatings, burns, hair pulling, among others. (Da Fonseca & Lucas, 2006; Alencar, Ramos & Ramos, 2018)

Psychological violence, although it does not leave physical evidence, such as bruises and scars, is no less important than other forms of violence, causing very significant damage to the emotional structure of the person who goes through such an experience. (Da Fonseca & Lucas, 2006; Alencar,



Ramos & Ramos, 2018). Psychological violence is understood as verbal and/or gestural aggression, as well as any and all attitudes that have the intention of terrorizing, frightening, punishing, manipulating, mistreating, coercing, isolating, silencing and/or controlling the victim. (Minayo, 2020)

Within this context, the abuser objectifies their partner, showing no empathy for her feelings or needs. In this way, the victim begins to lose her identity, since the abuser ignores her wishes and particularities. For the person who commits the abuse, this is a game, where all that matters is winning. Victory is directly associated with power and control over one's partner and relationship. In this sense, the person who is exercising the abuse will use any and all possible tactics to win, at this point we can mention manipulation. (Monteiro, 2012; Neal, 2018)

The mind games, the ability to twist things, the lack of accountability or transparency, the belittling, and the constant hit-and-blow tactics of an abuser leave most women confused, hurt, angry, embarrassed, and full of remorse. (Neal, 2018, p.18).

Victims of abusive relationships do not enter into this type of relationship consciously and/or planned, quite the opposite. The beginning of an abusive relationship is often characterized by overwhelming passion, where everything is magical and the moments with the partner are incredible. Abuse within love relationships occurs gradually. The abuser tends to be extremely charming and seductive at the beginning of the relationship, but as time goes by things change little by little. Often, the victim begins to feel bad within the relationship, but cannot identify the reason. Abuse begins with psychological violence and can evolve into physical and sexual violence. Thus, psychological violence often occurs in an extremely subtle way, allowing the victim to take a long time to realize that they are in a situation of abuse (Neal, 2018; Monteiro, 2012). It is in this sense that Neal (2018; p.21) points out "(...) the fact that many women don't recognize that they're being mistreated if they aren't called names or physically abused."

When the victim becomes aware of the situation of abuse in which she finds herself, the level of violence is already high and she ends up internalizing what the abuser says about her. In this way, she starts to consider the way in which she is treated by her partner natural and even fair. (Monteiro, 2012, p.11)

It is worth noting that the media contributes negatively when it comes to abusive relationships, since there is a romanticization of it by our culture. It is possible to observe the fostering of this type of relationship, seen as an overwhelming passion, in soap operas, movies, music, literature, among others. This romanticization turns out to be extremely dangerous, as it reinforces the idea that virtually all behavior is acceptable in the name of love. (D'Agostini et al, 2021; Mika et al, 2021)

The accomplishment of the present study is extremely important, since abusive relationships are a public health problem and consist of the violation of human rights, bringing several losses to the women who experience it. (Da Fonseca & Lucas, 2006; Mika et al, 2021) This is sometimes not



identified by lesbian women, either due to the normization coming from culture or due to the limited association with the gender issue, which is often misinterpreted as a way of disregarding the existence of violence within lesbian relationships. Avena (2010) points out that many lesbian women, in addition to having to deal with the damage inherent to the violence suffered in the relationship, when they seek help at women's police stations end up being exposed to a second form of violence resulting from homophobia. In addition, sometimes their molesters understand themselves as feminists and end up benefiting from the movement of the same name.

Research on abusive relationships presents significant challenges, such as mapping people's perception and experience of abuse, as well as the difficulty in developing an adequate research agenda, aiming at supporting public health policies and designing interventions. Turning our gaze to lesbian couples, studies on the subject are even more urgent, since there is a significant deficit of scientific research on the subject. (Ferraroli et al, in press)

2 METHOD

A quantitative, cross-sectional study with exploratory characteristics was conducted. The instrument used was composed of a scale of abusive experiences in the relationship, as well as questions about the experience of aggression and sociodemographic characterization of the sample. The respondents' perceptions about their experiences in lesbian relationships, identified by them as abusive, were assessed based on a measure divided into three dimensions: a) **Submission/isolation** (11 items, with $\alpha=0.90$), with items that describe feelings and behaviors of vulnerability, submission and subordination on the part of the respondent when interacting with the partner(s); b) **Lack of control and guilt** (6 items, with $\alpha=0.83$), involving items associated with relationships with a dynamic of aggression, lack of control and remorse; c) **Manipulation** (8 items, with $\alpha=0.88$), with items describing the interaction with a partner with manipulative, passive-aggressive behaviors and involving behaviors such as distortion and victimization. Data were collected through an electronic form without the identification of the subjects, distributed on social networks through a link. The data were collected without any questions that would allow the identification of the respondents individually, in line with what is presented in CONEP Resolution No. 510/2016. All respondents had access to the Free and Informed Consent Form, so that they were aware of the general purpose of the study and their rights, if they decided to participate in it. Once the data were collected, they were tabulated and analyzed using SPSS.20.0.



3 RESULTS

The sample consisted of 46 lesbian women, aged between 20 and 40 years ($x=26.5$; $SD=5.2$), predominantly subjects with a high level of education (only 8.7% had high school education or less, while 54.3% had at least completed graduation).

In terms of regions, there was a large predominance of the southeast region, both in terms of the region of origin (Table 01) and in terms of the region where they live (Table 02), with the northeast region being the second most represented.

Table 01 – State and region of origin

Region	<i>f</i>	%	State	<i>f</i>	%
Northeast	9	19,6	BA	4	8,7
			PB	1	2,2
			ON	4	8,7
Southeast	32	69,6	MG	4	8,7
			RJ	6	13,0
			SP	22	47,8
Midwest	1	2,2	DF	1	2,2
On	4	8,7	PR	2	4,3
			RS	2	4,3
Total	46	100,0	Total	46	100,0

Source: Field research

Table 02 – State and region where they live

Region	<i>f</i>	%	State	<i>f</i>	%
Northeast	7	15,2	BA	3	6,5
			ON	4	8,7
North	1	2,2	AM	1	2,2
Southeast	32	69,6	MG	3	6,5
			RJ	3	6,5
			SP	26	56,5
Midwest	2	4,3	DF	1	2,2
			GO	1	2,2
On	4	8,7	PR	2	4,3
			RS	2	4,3
Total	46	100,0	Total	46	100,0

Source: Field research

It is worth noting that the respondents informed not only the state and region where they were born and where they lived, but also the city. Analyzing the interaction of these data, it was possible to observe a significant rate of migration. In fact, 47.83% of their sample does not live in the city of origin, 19.57% does not live in the state of origin, and 10.87% does not live in the region of origin. The high rate of migration raises the importance of evaluating this type of flow with the LGBTQIAPN+ population to verify whether the issue reflects a larger pattern. In this case, the hypothesis is that migration may be associated with the rupture of ties and networks, as well as a greater sense of detachment and helplessness. There remains, however, the need to investigate the question of causality further.



As previously mentioned, the measure used evaluated abusive experiences based on three general dimensions: the **Submission/isolation dimension** was characterized by the loss of social ties and the presence of feelings and behaviors of vulnerability, submission and subordination on the part of the respondent when interacting with the partner; b) **Lack of control and guilt**, involving items associated with relationships with a dynamic of aggression, lack of control, and remorse; **Manipulation**, with items describing the interaction with a partner with manipulative, passive-aggressive behaviors and involving behaviors such as distortion and victimization. The results of these dimensions are summarized in Table 03 below.

Table 03 – Abusive experiences in lesbian relationships

	Average	Standard deviation	E.P.M.	95% IC	
				Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Submission/Isolation	2,228	0,63	0,092	2,042	2,414
Aggression-Lack of Control-Guilt	2,271	0,57	0,084	2,102	2,440
Handling	2,548	0,77	0,114	2,319	2,777

Source: Field research

To compare the indicators, we used a repeated-measures ANOVA, with Bonferroni's correction. After the application of the technique, it was observed that, although the dimensions of submission/isolation and aggression-lack of control-guilt did not present significant differences between them, the manipulation dimension showed a difference both in relation to submission/isolation ($p < 0.001$) and in relation to aggression-lack of control-guilt ($p < 0.01$). These results indicate that, in general, abusive experiences in lesbian couples tend to be more marked by models of manipulation than by other forms of aggression. This result may be associated with the gender role models socially imposed on women, with certain forms of aggression often naturalized and others easier to identify and sometimes repudiated.

Table 04 – Correlations between dimensions of abusive relationship and experiences

	Submission/Isolation	Aggression-Lack of Control-Guilt	Handling
Submission/Isolation			
Aggression-Lack of Control-Guilt	0,555**		
Handling	0,702**	0,602**	
Been in an abusive relationship	0,493**	0,616**	0,655**
She suffered psychological aggression	0,608**	0,504**	0,729**
Suffered sexual assault	0,349*	0,243	0,118
Suffered physical aggression	0,230	0,409**	0,261
Meet women who have been in abusive LESBIAN relationships	0,392**	0,207	0,429**
Age	0,093	0,132	0,103
Schooling	0,077	-0,052	0,019

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

In terms of the experience of abusive relationships in general and their consequences, it is important to highlight the large number of women who report some type of violence, with 20%



reporting having suffered sexual assault by their partner, 31% reporting physical aggression, and 77.1% reporting having suffered psychological violence. The correlation of these experiences with the dimensions of abusive relationship was analyzed, as seen in table 04. A set of data that deserves to be highlighted refers to the experience of abusive relationships. In this sense, significant correlations were identified in relation to the three dimensions: manipulation ($r=0.655$, with $p<0.001$); aggression/lack of control/guilt ($r=0.616$, $p<0.001$); and submission/isolation ($r=0.493$, $p<0.001$). *These results make it possible to think that the experiences of abusive relationships are complex by nature, with different facets associated with them. As these abusive relationships gain more specific contours, we can think of specific antecedents and models with their own characteristics.*

As seen earlier, in abusive relationships what is in focus is power over the other. Almeida and Lourenço (2011) argue that in romantic relationships, the parties involved feel the need to control each other, and may justify jealousy to exercise such control. Also according to the authors, once the subject understands that he has lost control over his partner, his interpretation may be that the relationship is over. From this, there may be attitudes with the intention of controlling the partner's freedom, which will be attributed to jealousy that is socially accepted and even interpreted as a manifestation of affection and care.

When it comes to the experience of physical aggression, no significant correlations are observed regarding the dimensions of manipulation and submission/isolation, although there is a significant correlation with respect to the dimension of lack of control/guilt. This result may be associated with a relational dynamic marked by violent behaviors on both sides, triggering more extreme aggressions, such as physical aggression. This context would also include "open" verbal aggression, as well as explosive behaviors in general.

The experience of psychological aggression has a strong positive correlation in relation to the three dimensions (Cohen, 1988, 1992). In this case, manipulation appears first ($r=0.729$, with $p<0.01$), followed by submission/isolation ($r=0.608$, with $p<0.01$) and finally lack of control and guilt ($r=0.504$, with $p<0.01$). *It is worth mentioning that psychological violence is present in every abusive relationship, since it is the primary form of aggression, preceding all others that may or may not occur.*

Given that all violence potentially ends up implying some type of psychological violence, and the wide visibility of physical violence, the association between these two categories tends to be more expressive (Da Silva, 2012). However, psychological violence as an independent category is still neglected, as it has specific characteristics (WHO, 2002). Abuse within a relationship tends to happen gradually. Initially, psychological violence presents itself in a more subtle way, eventually replicating elements of the cultural structure itself, gradually depriving the partner's freedom, which can lead to humiliation, embarrassment and, finally, physical and/or sexual aggression.



It is in this context that we can identify aspects of a structural component of violence, which is internalized by culture and demands coping strategies at different levels. This element is so widely present and naturalized that it can be identified in the production of mass culture, in music and movies, for example. In this type of production, one can observe a romanticization of the "overwhelming passions", full of conflicts and instabilities. It turns out that these are often precisely what we mean by toxic/abusive relationships.

The experience of sexual assault, on the other hand, presents a significant correlation only with the dimension of submission/isolation ($r=0.349$, with $p<0.05$). *One possible cause for this pattern may be that more "passive" behaviors and the loss of support networks tend to facilitate the occurrence of this type of aggression. The absence of support instances and defense strategies can lead the abuser figure to understand that there will be no significant consequences after the act, such as a complaint or retaliatory behavior.*

Neal (2018) states that what will define whether a woman in an abusive situation identifies the possibility of getting rid of it is the existence of a support network. Thus, it can be said that from the moment the abuser induces the isolation of the partner, the chances of breaking the abusive cycle decrease, since a third person is often needed to help this break.

Finally, regression analyses were performed to determine the predictive capacity of age, schooling, and the dimensions of abusive relationships in relation to four outcome variables: experience of an abusive relationship; experience of psychological aggression; experience of sexual assault; and experience of physical aggression. The results indicate that the abusive relationship variables have explanatory power to all the outcome variables studied, but with special strength in relation to the Abusive Relationship Experience ($p < .001$) and Psychological Aggression ($p < .001$). Despite this, it was also possible to identify explanatory power in relation to Physical Aggression ($p < .001$) and Sexual Assault ($p < .001$), even if in a more modest way. Even so, these are results that deserve an initial debate so that they can be deepened in future studies, suggesting the possibility of thinking about models to explain toxic relationship processes, as will be discussed below. Age and schooling did not provide explanatory value to any of the models tested.

Table 05 – Predictive models of abusive relationship experience based on the abusive relationship dimensions

	Experience of an abusive relationship			
	R ²	B	SE b	β
Constant		0,261	0,299	
Handling	0,506	0,378	0,114	0,446**
Aggression-Lack of Control-Guilt		0,399	0,154	0,347**
Notes: b = non-standardized regression coefficient; SE b = Standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient. ** $p<0.01$; * $p< 0.05$				
Source: Field research				



In terms of the Experience of Abusive Relationships (Table 05), the results point to a high explanatory power of the model, with 50.6% of the variance being explained by the identified variables. In relation to these, although the three dimensions indicated correlations, only two of them were maintained in the explanation of the Abusive Relationship Experience. In this sense, and considering the strong correlation between Manipulation and Submission/Isolation, it is possible that there is a mechanism associating these two dimensions in certain contexts, enabling their overlap. This pattern, however, needs to be further investigated in future studies. What the results indicate is the existence of patterns of physical violence ($\beta=0.347$) and, especially, manipulation ($\beta=0.446$), when we talk about the experience of abusive relationships between lesbians.

This first model dealt with the experience of abusive relationships in general. The study, however, dealt with different types of violence and aggression suffered in these relationships. Thus, the following models emphasized how each of the forms of aggression can be explained based on the variables present in the study, which is discussed in the results below.

Table 06 – Predictive models of the experience of psychological aggression based on the dimensions of abusive relationship

	Experience of psychological aggression			
	R ²	B	SE b	β
Constant	0,532	-0,061	0,522	
Handling		1,388	0,196	0,729**
<i>Notes:</i> b = non-standardized regression coefficient; SE b = Standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient. ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$ Source: Field research				

Being the most prevalent form of aggression among those mentioned, we will start with psychological aggression. In this case, the manipulation variable was the only one that added explanatory value, although with a significant relationship. It is important to note, in this sense, that 53.2% of the variance is explained with this variable alone. Here it is possible to think about the model of aggression established in the case of a toxic relationship between women. Dysfunctional relationships of a heterosexual nature may have an increased likelihood of physical aggression, given the issues of some models of masculinity. In the case of dysfunctional relationships between women, this component tends to be less expressive, with other modes of aggression occupying its space. In this sense, manipulation ends up playing a central role, including in the perception of psychological aggression. It is even possible to think about the possibility of indirect relationships between manipulation, psychological aggression and the experience of abusive relationships. This, however, requires further studies with the appropriate sampling plan.



Table 07 – Predictive models of physical aggression from the dimensions of abusive relationship

	Experience of physical aggression			
	R ²	B	SE b	β
Constant	0,167	0,051	0,502	
Aggression-Lack of Control-Guilt		0,638	0,215	0,409**
Notes: b = non-standardized regression coefficient; SE b = Standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient. ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$				
Source: Field research				

Table 07 shows the model's data on the experience of physical aggression. As previously stated, the data presented here not only represent one of the least prevalent dimensions of aggression among the respondents. They also present a less expressive explained variance (16.7%), although with a statistically significant model. Despite the lower explanatory power, the data obtained offer value in the understanding of the phenomenon, which pointed out as one of its bases a mechanism based on the loss of impulse control and feeling of remorse. Thus, as long as psychological violence has a clearer relationship of power asymmetry in relations between lesbians, it is possible that physical aggression tends to occur in a dimension of reciprocal aggression, with cycles of violence and guilt interspersed. It is worth noting, however, that there is a robust variance to be explained, which indicates the need for additional studies, including with qualitative methods and/or specific participants.

Table 08 – Predictive models of sexual assault experience based on the dimensions of abusive relationship

	Experience of sexual assault			
	R ²	B	SE b	β
Constant	0,122	0,364	0,394	
Submission/Isolation		0,422	0,171	0,349*
Notes: b = non-standardized regression coefficient; SE b = Standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient. ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$				
Source: Field research				

The last set of data presented here, table 08, presents the model related to sexual assault. This factor, as previously mentioned, was the one with the lowest prevalence (20%), although the index draws attention due to common sense to expect that this type of case does not exist. At the same time, this was also the type of aggression with the lowest variance explained by the regressions (12.2%). In this case, despite the association between manipulation and submission/isolation, the latter added explanatory value, while the former did not. In the case of sexual assault and its relationship with submission/isolation, it is possible that we have a more specific relationship, where the loss of social relationships and support networks make the victim vulnerable to the behavior of a predatory partner.

Although some models are more powerful than others in explaining the outcome variables, the results presented here offer a basis for understanding a phenomenon that is still little investigated. These relationships still need to be further investigated, with the evaluation of additional factors, either directly or with mediation and/or moderation relationships between the variables. Questions such as the profile of the partner and the woman's life history can help to understand the way the data are



presented. Finally, it is important to return to the issue of age and education. As previously mentioned, none of them provided explanatory value to the models evaluated. This is a fact, however, that deserves attention, considering that maturation and schooling would tend to act as protective factors, at least in theory. The data did not show this, indicating that they act with the same force on younger and older women, more educated and less educated.

4 FINAL THOUGHTS

Although abusive relationships have become the object of more frequent interest in different studies, investigations with the LGBTQIAPN+ population are still rare. The present study analyzed the profile of the experience of abusive relationships led by lesbian couples, as well as their consequences. For this, a survey was conducted with 46 women. The instrument assessed abusive relationships based on three dimensions: Submission/isolation; Lack of Control and Guilt and Manipulation. In addition, experiences with types of aggression suffered and the profile of the respondents were evaluated.

The results indicate that abusive relationships led by female same-sex couples tend to present manipulation as a more marked form of aggression than the others. The prevalence of psychological aggression in relation to other forms of aggression was also verified, which may be associated with the type of social role attributed to women and their socialization process. The results also point to the central role of manipulation as a variable to be understood in its role in the dynamics of dysfunctional lesbian relationships.

The fact that the occurrence of abusive relationships in lesbian couples is extremely high makes the scarcity of debates on the subject even more alarming, both in the public sphere and in studies. This question becomes even more relevant when the results point to two issues. Firstly, the existence of specific patterns of dysfunctionality in these relationships, demanding a better understanding of their dynamics to support them. Secondly, the existence of a significant number of dysfunctional relationships, contrary to what common sense may suggest, strengthens the importance of developing a support network for the LGBTQIAPN+ population in their relationships. Heteroaffective abusive relationships end up gaining more attention, since they fall under the dominant heteronormativity. The marks generated by abusive relationships are not exclusive to heteroaffective relationships. In same-sex couples (and here specified in lesbian couples) these marks often end up being neglected.

Although this article has made contributions, it has limitations that should be considered. The first limitation refers to the fact that the study has an exploratory character, which is a natural limitation of the study, which is a first step towards more in-depth research. Another limitation is related to the quantitative method used in this study. As it is a questionnaire composed of objective questions, the respondents had limited options for answers, preventing a greater depth in certain important aspects.



In this sense, there is a need to carry out qualitative studies that allow the necessary deepening, especially about predictive models. It should be noted that the results presented in this study refer to the respondents' perception of the experience of abusive lesbian relationships and not to the numbers referring to the experiences identified and analyzed by the researchers. A significant number of participants do not identify having experienced one or more abusive relationships, or identify it partially. However, we chose to work with data related to the participants' perceptions. This fact is one of the limitations of this study, since, at this first moment, we are not considering the real numbers of abusive experiences of these experiences. Another limitation is related to the sampling plan, which had a small number of respondents, with a large predominance of the southeast region, a limited age range from 20 to 40 years and a predominance of high schooling. Such characteristics of the sample studied make it impossible to generalize the results obtained, since there is no diversification or a reasonable sample number. Thus, the need for future studies that address the weaknesses pointed out and allow a greater deepening of the theme is signaled.



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