Young Women in Foster Care: Social Support Capital as an Empowerment Resource against Gender-based Violence in Intimate Partners

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Abstract

This research seeks to map perception of gender-based violence and social support capital and its impact on the position and coping strategies in these situations of a group of young women in foster care (FC) who have been mentored and a group of non-foster care undergraduate women (N-FC) who participated in a mentoring program on gender-based violence. The study also examines whether there are differences between the two groups. Using an intersectional mixed-methods approach, the research explores coping and prevention strategies among 29 FC and 30 N-FC participants. Data analysis combines first a thematic analysis (using Nvivo 12 software) for qualitative perspectives, and secondly frequency analysis and statistical measures to find a relationship between strategies and social support capital (via SPSS software). Findings emphasize that N-FC and FC are similarly tolerant of violence, though some N-FC tolerate more verbal violence. FC women's resilience to direct violence is clearly higher due to past experiences, but they have less social support capital, making it harder to leave toxic relationships. Indeed, FC women's lower social support capital is correlated with greater difficulty leaving toxic relationships. Despite this, for the first time the research identifies FCs' strategies to deal with gender-based violence, including education, silent resistance, confrontation, and the termination of the relationship. Again, FCs are more likely to use silent strategies to prevent partner violence and less likely to use confrontational strategies due to their social support capital. Participants use their gender capital to confront gender-based violence, balancing personal resources, agency, perceived danger, and social support. The findings highlight friends as the most crucial support source, suggesting that friends' role as a resource against gender-based violence warrants further research for FC.

Keywords Foster care · Young women · Intimate violence · Strategies · Social support · Agency

Introduction

Gender-based violence is a phenomenon inherent to the cis-heteropatriarchal system and is articulated from different power mechanisms at the educational, medical, economic, social and political levels that legitimize certain gender positions and sexual-affective bonds (Esteban & Távora, 2008). Embodying or transgressing these mandates of sex-gender-desire involves being exposed to these forms of gender-based violence (Butler, 2002). Thus, living within the social norms of machismo means that every person feels the regulation of gender norms in one way or another, also in their interpersonal relationships, even when trying to break away from this social model (Jovanovic & Williams, 2024).

In 2024, the World Health Organization stated that one in three women has experienced intimate partner violence at some point in their lives, and that one-third of women between the ages of 15 and 45 who have been in a sexual relationship have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence (WHO, 2024). In addition, the Macro-Survey on Violence against Women (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2019) found that 39% of women between the ages

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of 16 and 24 have felt afraid of their partners, thus manifesting a dimension of psychological violence that is less evident. No less relevant is the association between having suffered from intimate partner violence and its devastating consequences for women's mental health, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal behaviors (White et al., 2024).

Likewise, approximately 29.3% of women between the ages of 16 and 19 have suffered from gender-based violence, specifically physical and sexual violence, within a sexual-affective relationship (Eurostat, 2023). International data reveal gender-based violence in the relationships of adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19, with an increase observed at these ages (Johnson et al., 2024). However, it is also easier for younger women to identify gender-related violence than women in other age groups (Barjola et al., 2021; CEO, 2023; Eurostat, 2023; Gómez-Bueno et al., 2021).

The phenomenon of sexist violence against women in heterosexual relationships must be understood by conceptualizing the three elements that comprise it: the reproduction of normative gender behaviors, the discursive positions of power of "the masculine" over "the feminine" (Serra, 2024), and the thought of "romantic love" as "magical thinking" underlying the myths that forge toxic forms of love in sexual-affective relationships, whether within stable partnerships or among various sexual partners (Esteban & Távora, 2008; Sánchez-Sicilia & Cubells-Serra, 2019). Indeed, gendered socialization around "romantic love" is based on a process of consolidating the different expectations for each gender, rooted in the inequality of women as the central element (Esteban & Távora, 2008). The repertoires of "romantic love" also seem to guide the "proper" (normative) ways of feeling, thinking, and acting, favoring heterosexual, romantic, monogamous, long-term relationships. Thus, convenient subjectivities are generated to reproduce and maintain the heteropatriarchy (Sánchez-Sicilia & Cubells-Serra, 2018, p.153).

Gender-based Violence in Young Women in Care

Likewise, this study focuses on young women in care due to the overlooked gender-based violence they experience. While there are no official national or international data available on this group, recent cases of sexual violence against young women in care in Spain underscore the urgency of addressing this issue (Colom, 2014; Jurado, 2024; Suárez, 2024), So, violence against women can occur regardless of any factor, including age, social class, or ethnicity, or being in care among many others, because gender is an element of social inequality that affects all areas of society (Istanbul Convention, 2011). Consequently, this violence specifically exists in cisheterosexual-based sexual-affective relationships, a relational space of intimacy that consolidates and exposes them more to inequalities and gender violence, including through online relationships on the social media or instant messaging (Bailey et al., 2024). Thus, while we cannot forget the common root of this violence (Becker et al., 2021), we know that violence among young people is determined by the generational social practices that characterize young men and women (Foradada-Villar, 2021, 2024; Sánchez-Sicilia & Cubells-Serra, 2018).

Precisely, this perspective on gender-based violence among youths challenges research in this field and compels us to study violence within the heterocentric sexual-affective frameworks that young people perform, according to the life stage during that period (Bender et al., 2021) and considering different forms of sexual-partners, while avoiding adult-centric paternalism views on adult gender-based violence experiences (Barjola et al., 2021).

In addition to the gender system that modulates intimate partner violence in the case of young women in care, from an intersectional perspective other emerging elements must be added that also dimension gender-based violence. In this sense, by questioning women's tolerance of violence, psychology's feminist theory of attachment has contributed to new explanations of the constitution of violence. Thus, women with low self-esteem and self-confidence, and especially those who have experienced violence in childhood and adolescence, are more likely to experience intimate partner violence (Miyagawa & Kanemasa, 2023). However, experiencing past violence does not necessarily diminish young women's agency or their ability to recognize power dynamics and abuse in a sexual-affective relationship (Overall & Cross, 2019). Thus, the approach taken in this study recognizes that agency presents itself in different forms of resistance and resilience to overcome violence in sexual-affective relationships (Butler, 2019; Canyelles & Gamundí, 2019; Jovanovic & Williams, 2024).

In this sense, different studies agree that the experiences of vulnerability of young women in care expose them more to gender-based violence (Camarasa-Casals & Francolís-Sanglas, 2013; Zárate-Alva et al., 2018; Zárate-Alva & Sala-Roca, 2019; Wallace et al., 2024). Despite the scant research into young women in care, including from the feminist intersectional perspective, it is known that they may be more exposed to experiencing victimization or polyvictimization (Segura et al., 2015), especially sexual violence in its different forms (Barboza-Salerno & Remillard, 2023; Kachingwe et al., 2020; Salerno et al., 2020). In addition, the studies carried out by Camarasa-Casals and Francolí-Sanglas (2013) show that most young women in care

suffered from gender-based violence in a relationship and/or from an adult man when they were children. Therefore, since many of these experiences of gender discomfort due to the psychological and emotional distress experienced when children's gender identity or expression is at odds with socially imposed gender norms, and gender-based violence occurred in childhood and/or early adolescence, it is necessary to work therapeutically to repair the victims (Pujal, 2018) so the young women are able to establish sexually-affectively healthy relationships, with the aim of achieving a relational model of gender equality in all types of relationships and contexts. However, after having suffered from previous experiences of violence and abuse, building a safe bond of trust can become a real challenge if the aim is to work on building a stable safety and support network for the young woman, including sexually-affectively (Mäder et al., 2024). It is therefore essential for a network of community interdependence to be institutionally promoted for each young person if the process of transiting to adult life is to be sustained in all areas of their life (Pears et al., 2012) and their emotional well-being (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007).

Social Capital of Support for Vulnerability among Youth in Care

Several studies on social capital, which is tantamount to social support, find that it has positive effects on young people, especially considering the vulnerability of many young people in care (Arnau-Sabatés & Gilligan, 2015; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2017; Van Audenhove & Vander Laenen, 2017). However, young women in care face unique challenges in building protective social capital due to frequent placement changes, which disrupt stable support networks (McCauley et al., 2017). In addition, developing social capital requires skills that must be taught, highlighting the need to strengthen their support systems (Berejena Mhongera, 2017; Lanctôt, 2020). Likewise, we know that young people in care with a positive perception of their support network feel that they are safer and have better conditions than those who find themselves in adverse contexts (Paul, 2018, 2020). Following Hackman et al. (2017), Ministerio de Igualdad (2019), and Semahegn et al. (2019), the hypothesis of this study is that social and emotional support is crucial for the development of coping strategies when young women are in a situation of gender-based violence. These strategies are conceived through intersectionality (Gill, 2018) to observe the mobilization of resources through the agency of each young person and to offer a positive view on all the sources of support identified by the young women, including family, friends, and even community.

As Mancini et al. (2006) point out, it is necessary to promote community systems whose social capital is critical of gender-based violence within intimate relationships. In this sense, Foradada-Villar (2024) argues that gender capital is a multifaceted and agentic source of protection against gender-based violence and vulnerability that intersects with other cisheteropatriarchal discrimination. Gender capital operates both symbolically and materially, and individuals draw on it at three levels in their communities: the cognitive, the formal, and/or the informal. Thus, gender capital allows young women to identify and promote strategies to get out of situations of gender-based violence individually along with the community. In the current study, gender capital is employed as an analytical tool to examine the relational sharing sources of social capital that girls in care build collectively. This approach challenges deficit-based, paternalistic and coloniality perspectives, which often frame these girls solely as victims of gender-based violence and women in foster care systems (Roberts, 2023; Webb at al. 2020), by highlighting their capacity for agency and resilience. Likewise, given the difficulties creating a social network that young women in care experience (Sala-Roca et al., 2012), they may also have less gender capital and be more vulnerable to gender-based violence.

In this sense, there are no studies that explore young women in care in terms of their tolerance of gender violence, their coping strategies, and whether their social support network may be a protective factor. That is why the purpose of this study is to map the perception of gender-based violence, the social support capital, and its impact on the position and coping strategies in these situations by comparing two groups of young women: (1) a group of young women with foster care (FC) experience who have been mentored and (2) a group of university women without foster care (N-FC) experience who participated as mentors in a mentoring program on gender-based violence. The study also examines whether there are differences between the two groups.

Methodology

This study takes a social-constructionist and feminist approach with an exploratory transactional design. The socio-constructionist perspective invites us to denaturalize concepts and understand that the categories we use to interpret the world are deeply influenced by social and cultural practices (Biglia, 2017).

The research was carried out using an intersectional mixed methodology with an ad-hoc semi-structured interview. The methodological approach of intersectional mixed methods allows for capturing the complexity of the experiences of young women in care from a perspective that accounts for the multiple dimensions of inequality that shape their lives (Quest & Hyde 2016). By integrating

quantitative and qualitative data, this approach recognizes that social phenomena cannot be fully understood through a single source of information or from a homogeneous lens.

These data are part of a feminist peer mentoring project, in which FC played the role of mentees and N-FC played the role of mentors. This mentoring program sought to develop the young women's social support capital, life plans, and healthy sexual and affective relationships. This program paired university students with girls in care to spend leisure time together. Zarate et al. (2018) found that young women in care prioritized romantic relationships and motherhood over personal and professional goals, whereas their peers not in care aspired to these later in life, after pursuing personal and career objectives. The mentorship aimed to expand the social networks of young women in care by connecting them with university students focused on educational and professional goals, without immediate aspirations for motherhood or relationships. Over six months, the program fostered exchanges on life plans, emotions, and perspectives.

Participants

The participants were part of this mentorship program. Mentors and mentees were invited to participate in the present study before beginning their mentoring relationship. All agreed to participate, and none of them withdrew from the study.

A total of 60 women were interviewed, 30 FC and 30 N-FC. Their ages ranged from 16 to 24 years, with a mean of 19.2 (2.6) years, with the mean of the FC being 17 (1.1) years and the N-FC 21.2 (1.9). The girls in FC group were undertaking some type of study, vocational training, high school, or university degree. The girls in N-FC group were studying university degrees in Education.

Instrument

An ad-hoc semi-structured interview was prepared with two main dimensions. The first covered sexist violence against young women and the participants' strategies for dealing with it in a sexual-affective relationship. The second dimension mapped the women's social support capital and its preventive role in such a situation.

In the first dimensions, six hypothetical situations were proposed to examine sexist partner violence by introducing different degrees of intensity. These situations were designed considering the scientific and theoretical framework in this field (Fernández Zurbarán, 2018; Sánchez-Sicilia & Cubells Serra, 2018; Cubells Serra & Calsamiglia-Madurga, 2015; Sánchez-Sicilia & Cubells Serra, 2019), embracing a feminist theoretical framework of the iceberg structure in the

conception of gender-related violence (James & MacKinnon, 2010). For this research, we basically focus on situations that allow us to detect physical, psychological, or verbal abuse and social, environmental, or online violence. The specific questions in this dimension were: What would you not forgive your partner for? What would you do if your partner often called you an idiot/asshole? What would you do if your partner forbade you from going out with your friends at night out of jealousy? What would you do if your partner asked for your social media password(s)? What would you do if your partner showed up at a party/dinner with your friends because they need to check that you aren't cheating on them with someone else? What would you do if your partner hit you?

The second dimension gathered data on relational and structural social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Specifically, it examined the participants' network of interpersonal relationships characterized by trust and support in emotional, financial, and tangible assistance domains. The questions included: If you had a few free days without any financial limitations, what would you do, and with whom? Why would you choose this/these person(s)? Imagine that you get off public transportation one day, and you are robbed of all your belongings. Who would you turn to for help? Imagine that you need to pay your rent, but you don't have enough money. If not paid, you would face eviction. Who would you ask for financial assistance? Imagine that you are feeling down one day and need someone to talk to. Who would you reach out to?

Ethical Aspects and Data Collection

The research methodology was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in accordance with current research ethics regulations(CEEAH 2228). The research also adheres to the European ethical conduct guidelines for research integrity as outlined by the All European Academies (ALLEA, 2023).

Both the participants and the legal guardians of the FC, who were minors, were informed of the objectives of the research, the right to leave the project at any time they wished, the right to oppose and cancel their participation. They were provided with a written informed consent document containing all the information related to the research, as well as the confidentiality agreement. All participants freely decided to participate. Each participant signed the document with the researcher present. The consent forms were kept in a locked cabinet at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

The participants were interviewed individually through a semi-structured open-ended interview; within the context of a qualitatively-oriented research. This allows other

questions to be introduced during the interviews if the participants brought up new topics of interest that would allow them to contextualize and better understand the information they provided.

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed and processed.

Analysis

A mixed analysis, first qualitative and second quantitative, of the participants' responses was performed. In the first phase of analysis, a qualitative analysis was carried out in which the responses were coded via a thematic analysis following a mixed deductive-inductive process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase of analysis made it possible to identify social discourses and tolerance of gender-based violence among the adolescents, as well as their strategies for addressing experiences of gender-based violence. Nvivo 12 software was used for the analysis. The data were coded by a researcher with expertise in gender-based violence and qualitative data analysis. However, to ensure the reliability of the analysis process, a second researcher independently coded 10% of the data, and the concordance between the coding was subsequently analyzed. A very high level of agreement was achieved in the coding (between 92.5% and 97.4%) according to the Kappa index. In the second phase of analysis, supportive social capital and strategies to address gender-based violence were statistically studied to determine the importance of FC support in relation to gender-based violence contexts in sexual-affective relationships and coping strategies. Following Quest & Hyde's (2016) intersectional quantitative methods, the main strategy was analyzing interactions between categories to capture the combined effects of social capital and strategies for addressing gender-based violence. Additionally, differences and similarities across intersecting positions of young women were explored, with a focus on power dynamics and inequality in the group comparison.

The frequency of use for each type of strategy was recorded and analyzed. To determine the relationship between supportive social capital and strategies to address gender-based violence, and to analyze the differences between the two groups, descriptive statistics (frequencies and means), Pearson correlations, and analyses of variance were performed.

Results

Acceptance of Violence

The level of acceptance or tolerance of gender-based violence was analyzed in four situations representing different types of verbal violence (insults), restriction of freedom, physical violence (hitting), and online violence (control). Participants were asked if they would forgive these actions. The results show a relationship between the severity of the violent situation and the level of rejection.

The vast majority of participants would tolerate their partner restricting their personal freedoms; more than half (59.3%) would tolerate their partner controlling their mobile phone interactions, and half of the young women would tolerate insults (55.9%). Similarly, not as relevant but no less remarkable, were the participants who confirmed that they would not go out with friends (18.6%) or that they tolerate some physical aggression in the name of love (28.8%).

It is noteworthy that, in some cases, attitudes reflect previous experiences of intimate partner violence. Some participants indicated that they would now respond differently to situations in the past than they did at the time.

> Oh, I don't. That… That's already been done to me… I already had a partner who was like that, who wouldn't let me go out, and I spent a year doing what…, I mean, the whole time I was with him I was doing what he wanted. If someone really loves you, they will love you with what you have, with your flaws, and with everything. Now I would go out, yes. (Indira, FC., age 16)

Regarding the difference by profiles, there are no statistically significant differences between the level of tolerance to gender-based violence among the FC and their N-FC peers. Only in the case of tolerance of verbal violence (forgiving insults) was there a higher percentage among N-FC than FC, who stated that they would forgive them more (70% vs. 41.4%; $p = .05$).

Coping Strategies

Qualitative Analysis of Strategies To Deal with gender-related Violence

Four coping strategies emerged from the inductive analysis of the discourses of the young women in both groups regarding the four situations of gender violence in the interview: education, silent resistance, confrontation, and breakup. These strategies indicate that through their agency, the young women demonstrate their own gender capital,

Table 1 Coping strategies for Gender-Based violence

Strategies	Verbatim
The **education strategy** aims to change the partner's violent/abusive behaviors associated with machismo through dialogue and education when the young women detect violence.	Well, I'd probably be angry at first, but I'd try to talk to find out why he thinks this and what has made him come (to control me) and make him think that he can't distrust me, you know. If it can be fixed, it will be fixed. If I see that it's because he's jealous and there's no solution, then get out and that's it. (Tina, N-FC., age 21)
Silent resistance tries to reduce tensions when young women experience specific situations of violence from their partners and they want to prevent the violence from escalating.	If he gets so desperate [to know about social media interactions], I'd enter my password and show him my conversations. (Laura-Valentina, FC, age 17)
Confrontation seeks to eliminate or challenge the partner's aggressive/violent behavior, even with the awareness that they are exposing themselves to further violence.	First of all, I would say, "What's the matter? Don't you trust me enough?" If the person doesn't trust me, I would break up with them. I'm telling you the truth… from the very first day! Because I believe that the foundation of a relationship has to be a lot of love, but above all, respect and trust. If there's no trust, then there's nothing at all, you know? If the foundations like respect and trust aren't there—which you can also have with a friendship—then it's over. You can't stay in a relationship like that. And I would tell them, "Who do you think you are, trying to control me?" I would walk out to avoid causing a scene in the restaurant and I would certainly give them a piece of my mind. I would also say, "How can you do this in front of my friends? How embarrassing!" (Fadila, N-FC., age 21) Well, I'd start yelling at him, I'd push him and leave, and that would be the end of it. (Idoia, FC., age 16)
Breakup represents the end of the relationship, and it occurs when they identify the violence for a certain period of time or even at the same time that they are experiencing it and decide to cut off the relationship.	I'd hit him back (laughs). No, I wouldn't hit him. I suppose I'd go file a report because there's no reason to justify him hitting me. And I wouldn't stay with him. (Aitana, N-FC., age 19) Ugh… I'd hit him back! (Laughs). No, I wouldn't stay with him, no question about it. (Regina, FC., age 17)

Summary Thematic Analysis. "Dimensions and strategies to cope with gender-related violence" (Source: Authors)

Table 2 Coping strategies in different types of violence

	Breakup		Confrontation		Education		Silent resistance	
	FC	N-FC	FC	N-FC	FC	N-FC	FC	N-FC
Restricting freedom	3.4%	10%	34.5%	43.3%	37.9%	43.3%	24.1%	3.3%
Physical violence	62.1%	86.7%	3.4%	3,3%	24.1%	10%	10.3%	0%
Insults	34.5%	20%	24.1%	23.3%	37.9%	56.7%	3.4%	0%
Digital control	6.9%	0%	20.7%	50%	37.9%	33%	34.5%	16. 7%
Average	26.7%	29.2%	20.7%	30%	34.5%	35.8%	18.1%	5.0%

The percentage of young women using the different strategies for each situation of violence. Analysis by profiles

which they have mobilized in the past or would mobilize in the future in situations of gender-based violence in sexual-affective relationships. Table 1 describes these strategies and includes exemplary quotes illustrating how participants would use them in various gender-based violence situations.

Quantitative Analysis of Strategies

All in all, the most common strategies were education ($M = 1.4$; $SD = 0.99$), followed by breakup ($M = 1.1$; $SD = 0.68$). However, the coping strategies are used differently depending on the perception of the situation of violence. Thus, ending the relationship would occur more in a situation of physical violence (74.6%); confrontation is a strategy that would mostly be used in situations of restricted freedom (39%); educating the partner to change his attitude was chosen the most in the situation of being insulted

(47.5%); and silent resistance was the most common strategy in situations involving digital control (25.4%).

By profiles (Table 2), more FC chose silent resistance than N-FC (18.1% vs. 5%; $p = .01$). On the other hand, confrontation strategies were used less by the FC (20.7% vs. 30%; $p = .09$).

No relationship was found between tolerance of violence and the use of any particular strategy, with the exception of physical violence. The young women who would not forgive their partner's physical violence were the ones who would use the breakup strategy the most in all four hypothetical situations [$M = 1.21$ (0.65) vs. $M = 0.88$ (0.70); $p = .086$].

Table 3 Social capital of young women in care and their non-foster care peers

	Foster Care	Not-Foster Care	*P*-value	η²
TOTAL	5.3(2.7)	8.2(2.5)	*p* <.001	0.25
SC– economic support	1.4(1.9)	5(2)	*p* <.001	0.47
SC– leisure time	4.2(2.4)	5.9(3)	*p* =.02	0.09
SC– emotional	2.3(1.9)	3.7(2.4)	*p* =.02	0.09

Averages and standard deviations of the number of people mentioned by the young women

Table 4 Correlation between social capital and coping strategies

	Confrontation (0–4 situations)	Education (0–4 situations)	Breakup (0–4 situations)	Silent resistance (0–4 situations)
Leisure time	0.392**	−0.179	0.058	−0.148
Family	0.232	−0.138	−0.056	0.026
Friends	0.302*	−0.134	0.099	−0.177
Partner	0.073	0.062	−0.171	0.057
Educators and other adults	−0.082	−0.089	0.079	0.176

Note. * *p* <.05; ** *p* <.01

Social Capital: Social Support Capital and Strategies To Deal with Gender Violence

Overall

As observed in Table 3, the FCs collectively possess less social capital. Specifically, on average, they have three fewer individuals in their network compared to N-FC. In this case, the profile variable accounts for 25% of the observed variance. This difference is more pronounced in socioeconomic capital. The FC group has, on average, 3.6 fewer individuals to rely on for economic support, with the profile variable explaining 47% of the observed variance. Similarly, this group also has less emotional and leisure time capital, although in these two cases, the statistical relationship with the profile variable is weaker (η^2= 0.09 in both cases).

Relationship between Social Capital and Acceptance of Violence

No statistically significant relationship was found between the availability of social capital and acceptance of violence.

Relationship between Social Capital and Coping Strategies: Differences in Supportive Social Capital by Subgroups

Some significant correlations between social capital and coping strategies were found for gender-based violence

(Table 4). Thus, the confrontation strategy correlated positively with total social capital (*r*=.31, *p* =.016) and with leisure and free time social capital (*r*=.39, *p* =.002). On the other hand, this relationship was carefully analyzed based on the profile of people who comprised the women's social capital. Thus, the confrontation strategy, which implies more exposure to a situation of aggression, was used more by the young women with more friends and peers in their free time and leisure network (*r*=.30, *p* =.02). In contrast, no statistically significant relationship was found between the strategies and the other support people, such as partners, educators, and family members, associated with the leisure time network.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study is the first to map the social support capital of young women in care, considering social capital a protective element against gender-based violence in sexual-affective relationships. Additionally, the strategies for dealing with violence have been conceptualized as part of the gender capital that these young women possess to prevent and/or exit abusive and toxic relationships. This contribution is valuable for the study of young women in care, a typically overlooked group, given that there are no previous analyses of gender-based violence in their sexual-affective relationships from an intersectional feminist perspective.

In general, the participants of both profiles show, a priori, a high level of identification with the kinds of violence mentioned. However, the rejection of this violence is more unanimous when a very direct subjective degree effect on the young woman's daily life is perceived. The situations that generated the most rejection were physical violence and restricting their freedom to interact with friends. These data confirm the findings of other research, in which young women would have no difficulty identifying sexual, physical, and control violence (CEO, 2023; Ministry of Equality, 2023), especially if they have previously suffered from violence which impact limited different key areas for them, such as their leisure, studies, or emotional well-being (Gómez-Bueno et al., 2021). Similarly, as Jovanovic and Williams (2024) point out, cisheterosexual relationships between young people perpetuate positions of masculinity and femininity in sexual-affective relationships, which was also found in our results.

However, this study reveals that the participants are challenging sexual-affective male chauvinist models. Following other previously mentioned works (Johnson et al., 2024), this research precisely aims to contribute to the field of gender-based violence in young people while avoiding adult-centrism and paternalism. In this sense, acts of

noncompliance are considered an indication of rejection of female subjugation in sexual-affective relationships, especially when control is exerted over their contact with other people, such as friends. Consequently, disagreement prompts actions associated with the exercise of freedom. However, especially when the young women do not immediately leave toxic relationships, these rejectionist positions are not free of violence. Thus, the two groups compared show gender capital at the cognitive level, which allows them to identify the violence presented in the interview in a very similar way. Nonetheless, coping differences were found due to the differences in the two groups' social support capital. Thus, our results showed that young women in care use stealthier strategies to avoid violence in the couple. According to the data in this study, this could be due to the fact that their social capital provides less security and stability for them to confront gender-based violence in sexual-affective relationships. They do not perceive the emotional support and security of a network that would enable them to more decisively break away from these abusive and toxic relationships. This does not imply lower gender capital in identifying violence; rather, the support determines whether they can exit the situation sooner or later.

Equally, and in accordance with Canyelles and Gamundí (2019) and Hercovich (2000), there is not always a correspondence between what the women would do in a hypothetical situation of violence and what happens in reality. Thus, the agency of the participants in this study allows them to imagine themselves in such circumstances and makes it easier for them to create these strategies without the more immediate pressure of violence. On the other hand, since we are mostly talking about hypothetical situations, these results can also be interpreted as a limitation of the study. In addition, the young women may have responded under the influence of the expectations of the study, since they were aware of the objectives.

Additionally, it is even more important to understand that this limitation of the study comes from the restrictions on the very idea of tolerance. As part of the participants' gender capital, tolerance, like consent, is a complex concept that is difficult to pin down. Consent can be confusing and contradictory, although a young woman is still socially expected to offer a "socially coherent" response to a situation of violence (Serra, 2024). Therefore, it is difficult to determine to what extent a position of greater or lesser tolerance can be revealed as actual acceptance or rejection of violence outside the real context of violence. In addition, in real situations there are other variables that affect "tolerance" to violence, such as the fear of emotional loss due to breakup (Jayamaha et al., 2016), and in this situation, young women in care may be more vulnerable. In this sense, historical relationships of power and abuse due to relational

machismo are crucial elements in better measuring attachment in relationships of dependency and violence. For this reason, understanding attachment from an ecological and systemic perspective (Miyagawa & Kanemasa, 2023; Overall & Cross, 2019) better explains other factors through which emotional dependence can occur in the couple, especially when the attachment bonds in childhood have not been as secure and stable as in typical FC experiences (Baynes-Dunning & Worthington, 2012; Dowdell et al., 2009; Kliewer-Neumann et al., 2023).

The most common and significant strategies in both groups were education and the termination of the relationship. Surprisingly, the FC, who expressed less tolerance for verbal violence and insults, used the silent strategy more than the confrontational one. One possible explanation for this is that silent resistance would allow them to avoid or reduce the level of tension/violence without terminating the relationship. The affective needs stemming from their histories of abuse and family uprootedness due to their experience in the protection system (Baynes-Dunning & Worthington, 2012; Dowdell et al., 2009) may lead them to stay in violent relationships longer, especially if they do not have a real support network, as happens with their economic support network. In fact, the study found that the social network in leisure time is directly related to confrontation and that this social network is poorer among FC than N-FC. On the other hand, many studies suggest that child maltreatment leads to deficits in the ability to regulate emotions (Messman-Moore & Bhuptani, 2017), and emotional regulation is a key skill in resolving interpersonal conflicts, including in situations of abuse and violence (Hopkins & Yonker, 2015). In addition, as mentioned above, we must also consider subjective factors, such as the experience of attachment, within a more systemic framework that may limit young women from leaving a relationship of gender violence sooner or later. However, one limitation of the study is that the group of young women in care, on average, was younger than the non-foster care girls. Future studies should confirm the results with samples that have similar educational backgrounds and ages.

The study's results indicate that perceived social support capital influences coping strategies. However, no relationship was found between this support and the degree of tolerance for gender-based violence within intimate relationships. It was noted that material support typically comes from family, while the leisure time social network is predominantly made up of peers, such as friends. Given the vulnerable contexts of their families, the young women in care were expected to have a smaller material support network. However, the fact that they have more precarious leisure time support networks may be more attributable to the limitations associated with guardianship and residential

care, which affect social integration within the community. Indeed, in a qualitative analysis of leisure and free time support, Foradada-Villar (2021) found that many of the referents were young people from the same protection system. This has a twofold impact on these young women's gender capital; on the one hand, it makes it possible for them to establish alliances and forms of support in situations of violence among young people in the protection system or the same reality, as Paul's (2021) study in the LGBTIQ+ population in the United States indicates. Yet, on the other hand, the gender capital they share can be limiting and reproductive in terms of form and resources for dealing with situations of gender-based violence. Likewise, concurring with Paul (2019), the importance of peers in addressing gender-based violence cannot be ignored. Therefore, future research should continue to research friendships as a way to prevent gender-based violence in the sheltered population.

It is not an overstatement to emphasize once again the presence of social support capital as a preventive factor in gender-based violence. On the one hand, economic support capital quantitatively showed that the FC have very few resources and people to cope with basic economic adversities, and consequently, a weakness in this vital network for anyone leads to a high degree of vulnerability to gender-based violence in the couple because it produces dependence on the partner (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2019). On the other hand, the overall social capital of FC, which also affects the emotional and leisure time dimensions, is also lower than N-FC and therefore determines the mobilization of strategies to get out of situations of violence among young women in care.

This leads us to posit that young women's gender capital should be cognitively dimensioned not only through their perception and notion of gender-based violence in sexual-affective relationships but also through other areas that can help them identify and stop the violence via other people, namely friendships and community. Thus, strengthening a support network that is also sensitive to gender-based violence can prevent young people from experiencing abusive and dependent relationships, especially when they leave the residential system.

Data Availability Not applicable.

Declarations

Competing Interests The authors has no conflict of interest. The authors did not receive support from any organization for the submitted work.

Informed Consent Both the participants and the legal guardians of the FC, who were minors, were informed of the objectives of the research, the right to leave the project at any time they wished, the right to oppose and cancel their participation. They were provided with a written informed consent document containing all the information related to the research, as well as the confidentiality agreement. All participants freely decided to participate. Each participant signed the document with the researcher present. The consent forms were kept in a locked cabinet at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

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