

Description of a Domestic Violence Measure for Puerto Rican Gay Males

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ABSTRACT. A sample of 302 Puerto Rican gay males living in Puerto Rico and New York participated in this study with the objective of assessing the prevalence of domestic violence. A self-administered questionnaire was developed addressing issues of intergenerational violence, addictive behaviors, and domestic violence in three dimensions: emotional, physical, and sexual violence. The results concluded that close to half of the participants had experienced some sort of violence in their intimate relationships, have a history of being witness to domestic vio-

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lence in their family of origin, and had identified in themselves and their families, addictive behaviors. Other variables measured are HIV and sexual coercion, drug and alcohol abuse, and levels of acculturation among participants living in the United States. The main objective of this work is to describe the development of the instrument used in the study. Based on the results of this study we describe the psychometric characteristics and content of the final questionnaire. Final recommendations are made for other researchers interested in doing domestic violence studies with Latino gay men and men who have sex with men. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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Domestic violence is manifested through a pattern of abusive behaviors. It emerges as a result of the desire to control, dominate, and coerce another person in the context of an intimate relationship (Lundy, 1993; Schornstein, 1997). Domestic violence includes physical abuse, isolation, psychological and emotional abuse, threats and intimidation, sexual abuse, economic abuse, and property destruction (Vickers, 1996).

There is no doubt that domestic violence is a social problem with implications on multiple levels: individually, socially, and in public health. It is estimated that between 25-33% of people have had experiences with violence in their romantic relationships (Koss, 1990; National Coalition of Anti-violence Programs [NCAVP], 2000; Straus, & Gelles, 1990). However, it is important to emphasize that these numbers include only the reported cases since many victims of domestic abuse do not inform authorities due to fear, learned worthlessness, low self-esteem, and lack of psychological and financial resources, among other reasons (Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980).

Even when domestic violence is a common topic for the last thirty years, as a result of the feminist movement (Hamberger, 1996), its prevalence within same-sex couples had been covered with a veil of secrecy. The reasons why this situation remained unknown for so much time are related to social stigma, homophobia, discrimination, and the gender-based myth that only men are aggressors and women are victims.

Also, there was a denial among the members of the gay and lesbian communities fearing a backlash response from the heterosexual community (Elliot, 1996; Hamberger, 1996; Merrill, 1999).

Island and Letellier (1991) defined gay male domestic violence as any unwanted physical force, psychological abuse, and material or property damage inflicted by one man on another. In addition, there are other forms of abuse unique in gay relationships, which are related to heterosexism and homophobia that are promoted by society. Abusers often use homophobia and heterosexism as a weapon of control over their partners in a variety of ways (Vickers, 1996). For example, threatening to tell families and employers about the partner's sexual orientation; in other cases gay men are threatened of being reported to immigration officers when one of them is an illegal resident (Méndez, 1996).

STUDIES ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG SAME-SEX PARTNERS

As we may know, there has been much research done into the prevalence of domestic violence in heterosexual relationships. Estimates vary depending on definitional and methodological factors; however, most of them tend to fall within an estimated range of 20-35% of participants (Vickers, 1996). The prevalence of domestic violence in same-sex partners is similar to those reported by their heterosexual counterparts.

By the end of the 1980s and the early '90s, Lobel (1986), and Island and Letellier (1991) described for the first time the prevalence of domestic violence among same sex-partners, establishing that between 15-20% of gay and lesbian couples experience violence in their relationships. These researchers estimated at least 500,000 gay men in the United States as victims of domestic violence, and a similar number had been aggressors. These figures are congruent with statistics in lesbians (De Vidas, 1999; Klinger & Stein, 1996).

Some studies suggest higher rates. Lie and Gentlewarrier (1991) reported that more than half of the participants of their study described some kind of abuse. Kelly and Warshafsky (1987) found that 47% of participants had experienced domestic violence in their relationships. Burke and Follingstad (1999) reported similar numbers. In the context of lesbian couples, Coleman (1994) reported that 47% of the sample of his study had experienced repeated acts of violence, and Ristock (1994)

found that 41% of the participants reported been abused in one or more relationships.

These figures are mostly based in studies with Anglo-American gay and lesbian couples. Usually, research on domestic violence among gay and lesbian partners does not include enough ethnic minority representation (Nieves-Rosa, Carballo-Diequez, & Dolezal, 2000). There have been few efforts to identify prevalence of domestic violence among mainly Latino gay males. Some of these studies were conducted by Nieves-Rosa, Carballo-Diequez, and Dolezal (2000) in the U.S. and Toro-Alfonso (1999a; 1999b) in Puerto Rico. These studies showed a prevalence of 13% to 50% of physical and emotional abuse.

Evidently, prevalence of domestic violence among same-sex partners is as serious as in heterosexual couples. The dynamics that construct abusive behavior patterns are similar in both cases because they are related to the use and abuse of power and to gender construction issues. We believe that the abuser holds the power in the relationship, and takes advantage of it, using extreme tactics that make up the myriad of violent behaviors with the intention of controlling the other person. Therefore, we assert that abusive behavior should not be seen as a "loss of control" from the part of the aggressor, but rather as an intentional and deliberate act to gain or maintain control (Gondolf, 1984).

Although we can identify similarities in the manifestation of domestic violence among heterosexual couples and same-sex partners, there is a huge difference in the way society responds to gay victims of domestic violence. Instead of helping the person and providing support, society approaches the issue in a hostile way (Gump, Kulik, & Henderson, 1998) due to homophobia, which does not allow an adequate conceptualization nor the development of preventive and remedial strategies for members of the gay and lesbian community (Coleman, 1997; Lehman, 2002).

ELEMENTS RELATED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is a phenomenon that has to be analyzed, understood and approached with a multi-dimensional perspective because it is related to social and individual elements. To be more specific, domestic violence is related to: (a) vicarious learning of violent behaviors in the family of origin (Arias, 1984; De Vidas, 1999; Kalmus, 1984; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980); (b) the exposure to social messages and discourses that perpetuate the notion that violence is common and

necessary; and (c) the lack of conflict-resolution skills that makes the person choose violence to manage a given difficult situation (Straus, 1979).

Other important elements to perpetuate violence as a value are related to role models and the learning of compulsive behaviors manifested in the form of addictions. A lack of personal control can be linked to violence (Bailey, Montgomery, Sly, Soler, Lacroix, & Moore, 1999).

The literature describes families in which when a variety of compulsive or addictive behaviors are observed, a stronger tendency towards violence is also observed (Toro-Alfonso & Rodríguez-Madera, 2001). Compulsive or addictive behaviors are referred to here as uncontrolled behaviors in eating, alcohol and drug abuse, and compulsive sexual behavior. Studies have shown that there is a direct relationship between these behaviors and domestic violence, as well as unprotected sexual behaviors in heterosexual couples (Bailey, Montgomery, Sly, Soler, Lacroix, & Moore, 1999).

Finally, it is important to consider the influence of acculturation to the Anglo-American culture when we are working with Puerto Ricans. Acculturation is a process by which immigrant people adopt the behavior, values, and cultural patterns characteristic of the culture of the new country (Gordon, 1964). There is evidence that shows that Hispanics in the United States present a bigger rate of violent behaviors with their partners than Anglo people (Kaufman Kantor, Jasinski, & Aldarondo, 1994; Sorenson & Telles, 1991). Some researchers' data concluded that Puerto Rican husbands are more susceptible to initiate incidents of violence towards their wives than Anglo-American and Cuban husbands (Kaufman Kantor, Jasinski, & Aldarondo, 1994). Considering the differences in the construction of masculinity among Latino countries and the U.S., we think it is important to study how the "new" culture's response toward Latino gays may influence their cognition and behavior.

The efforts in studying domestic violence are evidence of different kinds of methodological strategies and approaches (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Coleman, 1994; Farley, 1996; Lie and Gentlewarrier, 1991; Kelly & Warshafsky, 1987; Island and Letellier, 1991; Lobel, 1986; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 1994). Understanding the importance of identifying which are the elements related to domestic violence and the prevalence of this phenomenon in the Puerto Rican context, we developed the study described next.

METHOD

Over three hundred Puerto Rican gay males were recruited, who voluntarily answered a self-administered questionnaire: 199 of them lived in Puerto Rico and 103 in New York. The average age of the participants was 31 years old. Most of them (81%) identified themselves as gay. Close to half (49%) were in a stable relationship at the time of the study.

Instrument

The survey instrument (Toro-Alfonso & Nieves-Rosa, 1999) is a self-administered questionnaire based on the *Domestic Violence Screening Form* developed by Farley (1996). Permission from the author was obtained to use and adapt it. Our questionnaire has two versions, one for English-speaking and another one for Spanish-speaking participants. This tool was designed to assess: (1) acculturation; (2) history of intergenerational abuse; (3) compulsive behavior related to food, sex, drugs, and alcohol; (4) HIV status; (5) domestic violence behavior including three dimensions: physical, emotional, and sexual; and (6) conflict resolution skills, which includes two dimensions: *assertiveness* and *aggression*.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through service organizations targeting gay and bisexual men. Social networks and snowball strategies were also identified. Letters were written to previously identified community gate keepers, asking for their help in recruiting. All participants signed a consent form which detailed the nature of the study and indicated that they had the right to end their participation at any time without consequences either of criticism or the loss of services in the case of those referred by service organizations. The criterion for participation was: to be of legal age, to be Puerto Rican (first and second generation), to self-identify as gay or bisexual, and to have had at least one committed relationship in his life.

The questionnaire was eleven pages long with a hundred twenty-nine items, which took approximately thirty to forty minutes to be completed. Most of the questions were based on Likert-scales and some were multiple choice items. In some instances space was provided for

the respondent to write “other” and to “specify,” if the available options did not fit his answer.

The first section of the instrument consisted of multiple choice questions, requesting demographic data through nominal variables including: age, educational level, employment status, annual income, place of birth, place of residence, and sexual orientation. A scale measuring participants’ level of acculturation (Mantell, Rapkin, Ross, & Ortiz-Torres, 1992) had been included to assess the impact that acculturation may have on domestic violence. Following that, table-format questions were included about intergenerational violence in their family of origin, and compulsive/addictive behaviors.

Several multiple-choice questions were included to assess HIV/AIDS related information (HIV status, tests, current partner’s sero-status), which were adapted from the *Latin American Men’s Study Interviewer Administered Questionnaire* (Carballo-Dieguez, 1998). This section was included to explore the relationship that male-to-male domestic violence could have in the transmission of HIV.

The second section of the questionnaire included a domestic violence scale, a conflict resolution scale, and three questions related to the participant’s perception of being involved either as victim or perpetrator of violence. The domestic violence scale included three dimensions: emotional violence, physical violence, and sexual violence and coercion (Kalichman & Rompa, 1995). In addition, participants were asked whether any of the domestic abusive incidents happened on their current relationship. Four questions were added to explore whether alcohol and/or drug abuse (by the participant or his partner) were involved in the incidents. These questions were added to build upon what Merrill (1996), Farley (1996), and Cruz (1996) found regarding the use of alcohol and/or drugs by the perpetrators of male-to-male domestic violence.

This version of the questionnaire was revised after a pilot project developed by Toro-Alfonso (1999a). Issues of clarity and vocabulary were addressed. Those items that resulted in lesser or no discrimination power were eliminated or rephrased. Issues of translation were also revised. The changes to the questionnaire’s format were made according to recommendations from consultants in order to make it easier to be completed by participants. Some of these changes were: clearer instructions in both languages, measurement scales in table format and clear answering and skip patterns for questions that did not have to be answered by all participants. In addition, the cultural specificity of the Spanish-language version was revised. Spanish words that did not have

specific correspondence with English were adapted so that participants that preferred the English version could understand them better.

The final results of the validation process of the questionnaire are presented in the following section.

RESULTS

Congruent with the variables that were assessed, the instrument was divided into seven sections: demographic data, acculturation assessment, violence and addictive behaviors in family of origin, HIV-related information, domestic violence scale, conflict resolution scale, and participant's perception of violence. The following section presents findings, and the analysis and recommendations for the final version of the questionnaire.

Demographic Data

As explained before, in this section questions were included that provided demographic information about the participants.

Acculturation Scale

The original acculturation scale had eight items (see Table 1). It has a *Likert* format requesting a "never" to "always" answer. The scale was submitted to reliability test, obtaining a Cronbach Alpha of .68. We decided to eliminate two items of the scale (11b and 11d). The revised scale of six items had an Alpha of .81.

The original version included two additional questions (*Amount of close friends that are not Puerto Rican and his desire to live in Puerto Rico*). Finally, it was decided to keep the first one because it was the one that fits better our operational definition of acculturation: someone who is acculturated shows low frequency in items that reflect behaviors related to: (1) helping people of other ethnic groups to understand what it means to be Puerto Rican, (2) hanging out with people of other ethnic backgrounds when socializing or celebrating holidays; (3) telling others how proud he feels of being Puerto Rican, (4) following Puerto Rican traditions, (5) celebrating Puerto Rican holidays, such as Three King's Day, and (6) having some information about the history of Puerto Rico.

Three cut off points were established that divide the punctuation in high, moderate, and low levels of acculturation (see Table 2). Accord-

TABLE 1. Item-Total Correlation from Original Version of Acculturation Scale

Number	Item	Correlation
8	How often do you try to help people of other ethnic groups understand what it means to be Puerto Rican?	.428
9	When socializing or celebrating holidays, how much of the time do you hang out with people of other ethnic backgrounds?	.474
10	How much pride does being Puerto Rican give to you?	.619
11a	How important is it for you to follow Puerto Rican customs?	.613
11b	How important is it for you to adopt US customs?	.105
11c	How important is it for you to celebrate Puerto Rican holidays, such as Three King's Days?	.467
11d	How important is it for you to celebrate US holidays, such as 4th of July?	.052
11e	How important is it for you to know something about the history of Puerto Rico?	.525

ing to this, almost 71% of the participants residing in New York showed high-to-moderate levels of acculturation (see Figure 1).

Intergenerational Violence and Addictive Behaviors

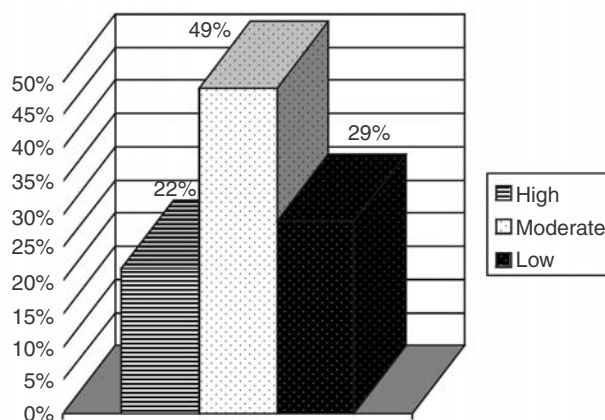
This section was presented in table-format. Intergenerational violence questions approached three dimensions of the participants' experience: the violence experienced from his: (1) father or stepfather, (2) mother or stepmother, and (3) siblings. The participants could categorize the information in physical, emotional, or sexual violence. Due to the "Yes" or "No" format, the information was easily classified. Almost half of the participants experienced some sort of violence in their family of origin (see Figure 2).

The information related to addictive behavior or behavior associated with lack of control was presented in the same format as the intergenerational variable. It was formed by 12 items in which participants identified the behavior of his parents, siblings, and himself. Questions were included regarding lack of control and/or abuse of alcohol, drugs, food, and sex (see Table 3).

HIV-Related Information

Multiple choice questions were included in this section. This was intended to describe the HIV prevalence of the sample and to describe

FIGURE 1. Levels of Acculturation Among Participants from the New York Sub-Sample

TABLE 2. Cut Off Points for Acculturation Scale ($n=102$)

Level of Acculturation	Percent	Frequency
High (4-12)	22	22
Moderate (13-21)	49	50
Low (22-30)	29	30

Note: Participants were the sub-sample that live in NY

possible relationships between serologic status and sexual coercion. No evidence was found that suggested the link between these variables. Fourteen percent of the participants informed that they were HIV positive. Interestingly, all were from the sub-sample of New York. It was wondered whether some of these participants received their initial diagnosis in Puerto Rico and later moved to New York looking for more services or hiding from stigma.

Domestic Violence Scale

Three scales (Farley, 1996; Kalichman & Rompa, 1995) were included to identify different dimensions of violence described in the lit-

FIGURE 2. Kinds of Violence Experienced in Participants' Childhood Households

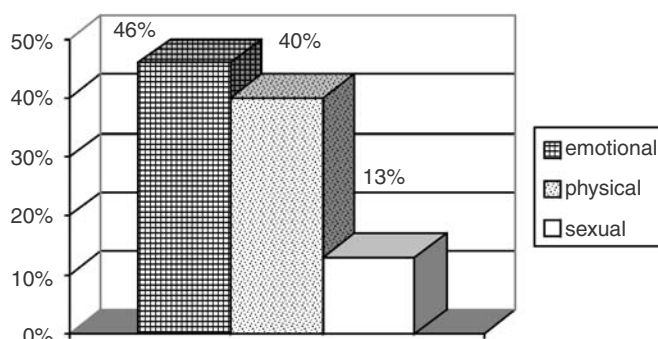


TABLE 3. Addictive Behaviors Identified by Participants

Addictive Behaviors	Fathers (%)	Mothers (%)	Siblings (%)	Participants (%)
Alcohol	41	7	42	45
Drugs	11	6	34	42
Food	18	15	22	36
Sex	14	8	25	45

Note: Participants may have reported more than one

erature review: emotional, physical, and/or sexual (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Coleman, 1994; Island & Letellier, 1991; Lobel, 1986; Nieves-Rosa, Carballo-Dieguez, & Dolezal, 2000; Ristock, 1994; Toro-Alfonso, 1999a; 1999b; Kelly & Warshafsky, 1987). The scales measured the participants' behavior as perpetrator and as victim of domestic violence. Table 4 shows the reliability indexes in each scale.

Although the scales can measure different levels of violence in terms of frequency of the act, there was difficulty establishing the operational definition of low, moderate, or high levels of domestic violence. Self-reports always carried on the subjectivity of the participants and their own operational meaning of the level of seriousness of the incidents. Having found this obstacle after the administration of the instrument and to subscribe to our operational definition of domestic violence, it was decided

to dichotomize the scale in terms of *presence* and *absence* of a pattern of abusive behaviors.

Our definition takes into consideration the number of behaviors included in the scale and the frequency identified by the participants. For the final analysis of all the reported incidents, the participants had to identify: (1) at least one conduct that happens “sometimes” and/or (2) two or more that happen “rarely.” Under these criteria, it was found that close to half of the participants had experienced some kind of abuse in their relationships (see Figure 3).

Conflict Resolution Scales

This scale has 24 items (Table 5) in a *Likert*-format in a range of answers going from “never” to “frequently.” A factor analysis was conducted and two factors were selected that described two ways of coping with conflictive situations: *assertiveness* and *aggression* (Table 6).

TABLE 4. Reliability Indexes for Each Violence Scale and Dimension Measured

Scales	Global Index	Participants Index	Partners Index
Emotional	.8994	.8317	.8045
Physical	.9513	.9122	.9175
Sexual	.9385	.9375	.8842

FIGURE 3. Domestic Violence in Participants' Intimate Relationships

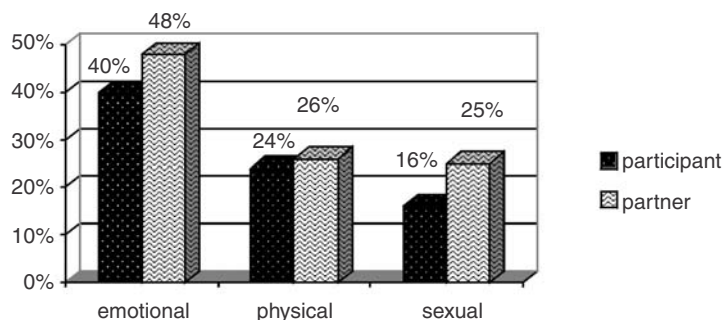


TABLE 5. Items of the Conflict Resolution Scale

Number	Item
	How often did you
103	...pretend he didn't bother you when it really did?
104	...take time out?
105	...were nonverbally threatening, frightening, or aggressive?
106	...thought how he was against you?
107	...decide not to show him how angry you were?
108	...decide that it was his fault that you were angry?
109	...do some physical exercises to avoid feeling angry?
110	...try to find something wrong with him?
111	...thought that you were wrong for feeling angry?
112	...get real quiet instead of getting angry?
113	...swear at him?
114	...think about he was somehow trying to make seem wrong?
115	...put him down verbally?
116	...tell him you were feeling angry against him?
117	...scream at him?
118	...tell yourself you were feeling angry with him?
119	...tell yourself you shouldn't be feeling angry at him?
120	...tell him that he made you feel angry?
121	...verbally threaten him?
122	...think of ways you could control your temper?
123	...think that he wouldn't like you or got angry?
124	...give him an ultimatum?
125	...boss him around?
126	...take a deep breath and try to relax?

Two items were eliminated, which did not fit in any of these factors. After establishing the cut off points for the resolution skills level it was found that most of the participants showed a tendency to use an aggressive style to manage conflict (Table 7).

Participant's Perception

The final three questions of the questionnaire tried to identify if the participant had sought help to deal with violence on his relationships, if

TABLE 6. Items Grouped in Dimension 1 (Assertiveness) and Dimension 2 (Aggression)

Factor 1 Alpha: .8271	Factor 2 Alpha: .8945
Items	Items
103	105
107	106
108	113
110	114
111	115
112	117
116	121
118	124
119	125
120	
122	
123	
126	

TABLE 7. Percentage of Participants in Dimension 1 and 2 of the Conflict Resolution Scale

Assertiveness		Aggression	
Level of Skills	Percent	Level of Skills	Percent
Low (19-29)	11	Low (9-19)	8
Moderate (30-37)	74	Moderate (20-27)	25
High (38-46)	15	High (28-36)	67
Total	100	Total	100

he considered himself to be a victim of domestic violence, and if he thought he had been an aggressor at some time. These questions could be answered with "Yes" or "No."

In contrast with the amount of participants that reported some kind of abuse in their relationships, 27% considered themselves as victims of

domestic violence and only 14% had sought help for this reason. On the other hand, 29% of the participants thought that their partners were victims of abuse in their former relationships.

DISCUSSION

Considering all elements related to domestic violence, it can be concluded that this questionnaire is an appropriate tool to assess the prevalence of abusive behavior among Puerto Rican gay men. The questionnaire is also useful to identify other factors that might be related to domestic violence and that are equally important to be considered: intergenerational violence, addictive behaviors, conflict resolution skills, and acculturation of those who live in the United States. Considering these elements can foster a comprehensive approach to domestic violence in our social and cultural context, they can also propitiate the development of adequate preventive and remedial strategies for intervention.

Ethnicity is particularly relevant in the study of interpersonal violence (Caetano, Schafer, Clark, Cunradi, & Raspberry, 2000). Most of the research done in the United States on the issue of domestic violence has been with Anglo couples. However, some studies have addressed the issue on ethnic minorities, identifying acculturation as an important construct to be examined. Several studies have concluded that Hispanics in the United States show a higher level of violent behavior with their spouses in comparison to Anglo population (Kaufman Kantor, Jasinski, & Aldarondo, 1994; Sorenson & Telles, 1991; Straus & Smith, 1990).

A greater level of acculturation, as measured by comfort with English language, was associated with increased levels of partner violence. On the other hand, being born in the United States was associated with increased risk for wife assault among Mexican American and Puerto Rican American husbands (Kaufman Kantor, Jasinski, & Aldarondo, 1994).

Some researchers state that “ethnic minorities are not inherently more violent than Anglo Americans; rather they are more likely than Anglos to be overrepresented in demographic categories that are at greater risk for physical violence” (West, 1998; p. 193). However, most studies identified acculturation as a possible intervening variable related to interpersonal and domestic violence (Champion, 1996; Sorenson & Telles, 1991; Strauss & Smith, 1990).

The findings of this study, with three hundred and two Puerto Rican gay men who live in Puerto Rico and New York, point out that close to half of the participants had experienced some kind of violence in their intimate relationships, had a history of intergenerational violence, and had identified several addictive behaviors in their families and themselves. The exposure to role models in the family of origin is an important factor in the learning of violent behavior patterns (Dutton, 1995). In addition, they showed lack of adequate conflict resolution skills, choosing violence to solve problems.

Recommendations

The different measures of the final questionnaire described in this paper have scales with adequate Alpha Cronbach indexes that support its reliability (Emotional .89, Physical .95, and Sexual .93). Domestic violence scales such as this could help researchers to obtain a clear panorama of abusive behavior among participants. However it is suggested that it is important to develop operational definitions to the options provided through the *Likert*-format. For example, the meaning of “rarely” versus “frequently”; does rarely/frequently means one specific abusive incident in a month or in a year? This kind of question may guarantee a more accurate answer and can help the researcher to develop a better conceptualization of the phenomenon.

The rest of the items included in the questionnaire present a flexible format that any researcher interested in this population could modify, adding or eliminating those that are not related to his/her interests. For example, this study was interested in the relation between sexual coercion and HIV status so questions were included related to this issue.

Using this questionnaire also identified elements that were interpreted as relating to domestic violence among Puerto Rican gay males. There are other factors that might be important to be explored; for example, the relation between domestic violence and internalized homophobia. This tool could be the basis for the development of similar research among lesbian couples.

Finally, domestic violence is a problem that urgently needs tools for its assessment. It is believed that this instrument is a step towards this direction. Its development is a strategy to understand the elements that are related to domestic violence and to recognize that its impact on Latino gay men needs attention.

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