

Legitimation of sexual violence: an exploratory study in students of Social Education

Pires, C., & Prada, A.

Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, School of Education

Background and aims

Attitudes and beliefs about Sexual Violence (SV) play a significant role in its early detection, and on help-seeking behavior among adult victims (p.e., Scarpati et al., 2014). In this sense, this study aims to:

- describe the prevalence of abusive sexual behaviors experienced and committed by students;
- analyse the degree of legitimation of SV depending on students' sociodemographic characteristics and students' perception as victims/ aggressors of SV.

Methods

RESEARCH DESIGN

- Cross-sectional, descriptive and exploratory study

SAMPLE

- 151 students of Social Education of a public Higher Education Institution of the northern interior region of Portugal

Table 1. Sociodemographic characterization of the sample.

		N	%
Gender	Male	27	17,9
	Female	124	82,1
Age categories	≤ 21 years	94	62,3
	> 21 years	57	37,7
Academic year	1 st	53	35,1
	2 nd	51	33,8
	3 rd	47	31,1

MEASUREMENTS

■ A questionnaire including sociodemographic data; students' perception as aggressors (Have you ever sexually assaulted another person?) and victims (Have you ever been a victim of SV?) and students' perpetration/ victimization experiences accordingly to 16 indicators of SV.

■ The Portuguese version of the Scale of Beliefs about Sexual Violence/ECVS (Martins et al., 2012) organized into five domains.

- Global ECVS internal consistency was high ($\alpha = 0,910$)
- Domains internal consistency ranged from weak to good (Factor 1- Stereotyped representation of rape, $\alpha = 0,848$; Factor 2- Provocation of the victim, $\alpha = 0,792$; Factor 3- Consent of the victim, $\alpha = 0,711$ and Factor 5- False claims, $\alpha = 0,690$), except with Factor 4- False notion of personal invulnerability- being inadmissible ($\alpha = 0,458$) and not considered in the data analysis.

Results

Students' perception as aggressor/ victims of SV.

- Most students don't perceive themselves as an aggressor (99,30%; n=150), neither as a victim (93,40%; n=141) of SV (Fig.1).

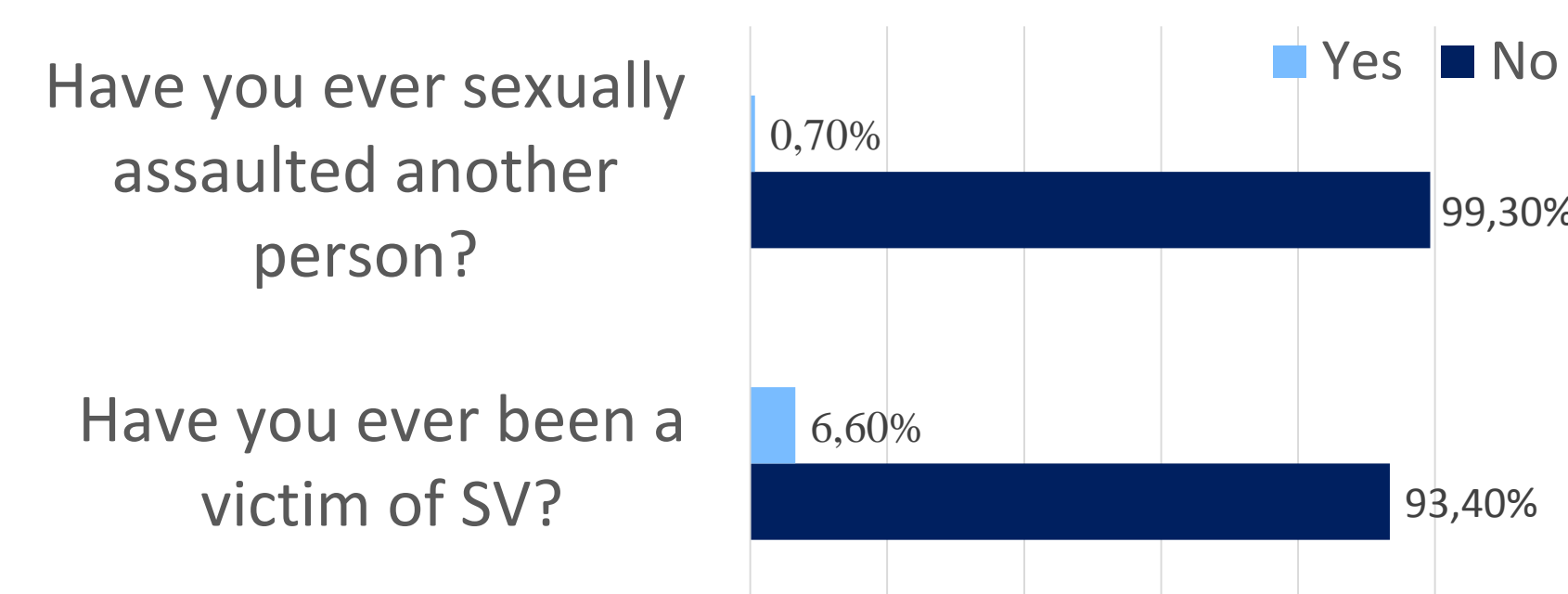


Figure 1. Students' perception as aggressors/victims.

Students' perception of abusive sexual behaviors

- 47% (n=71) and 9,9% (n=15) of the students have experienced, respectively, one or more indicators of SV victimization and perpetration.

Scale of Beliefs about Sexual Violence/ECVS

- Female students presented a lowest mean range than male students in Factor 2 (Fig. 2).

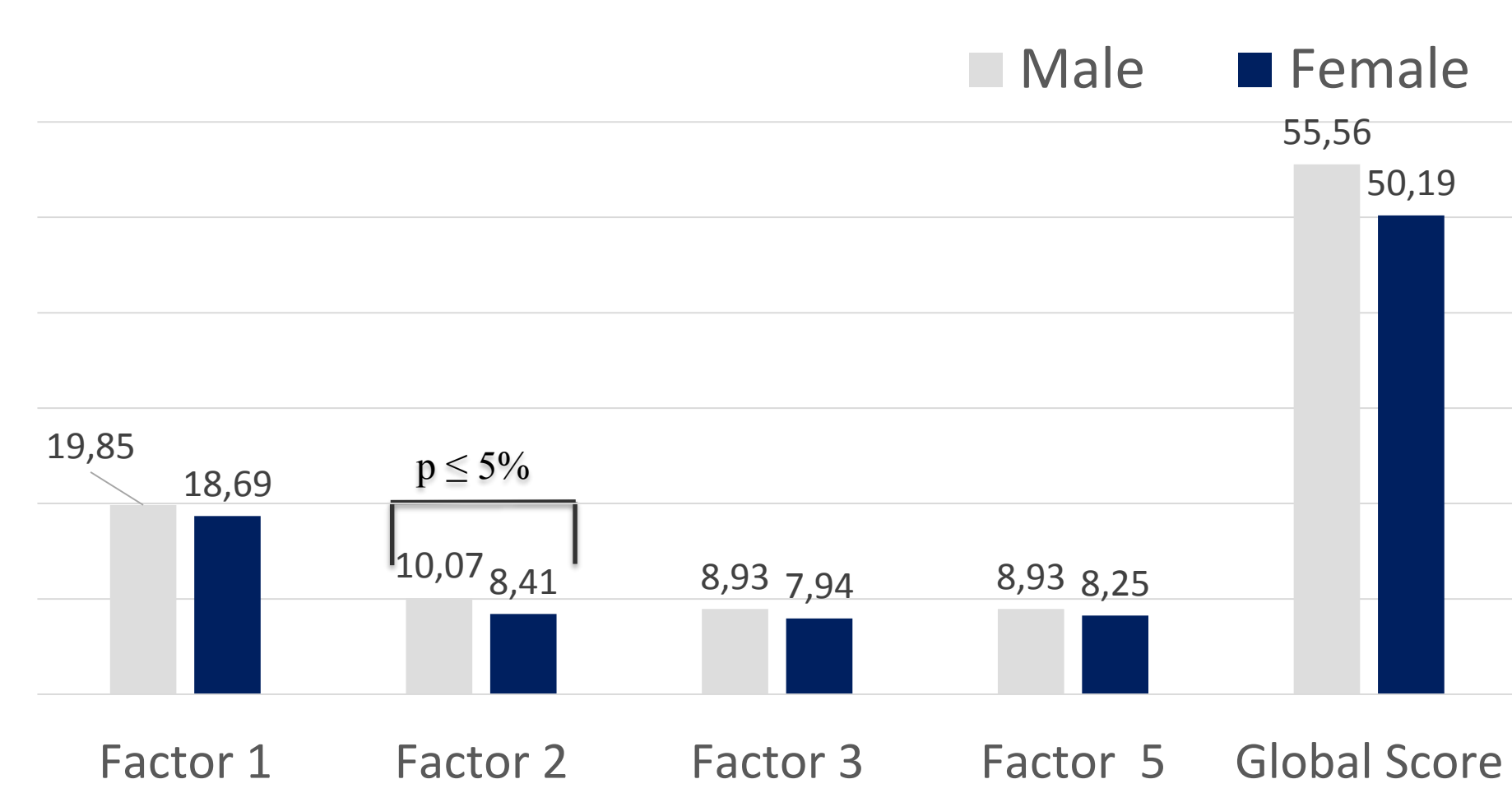


Figure 2. Legitimation of SV according to students' gender.

- Younger students (≤21 years) and those attending the 2nd grade showed a low mean range in Factors 1 and 2, and also in the Global Score (Fig. 3).

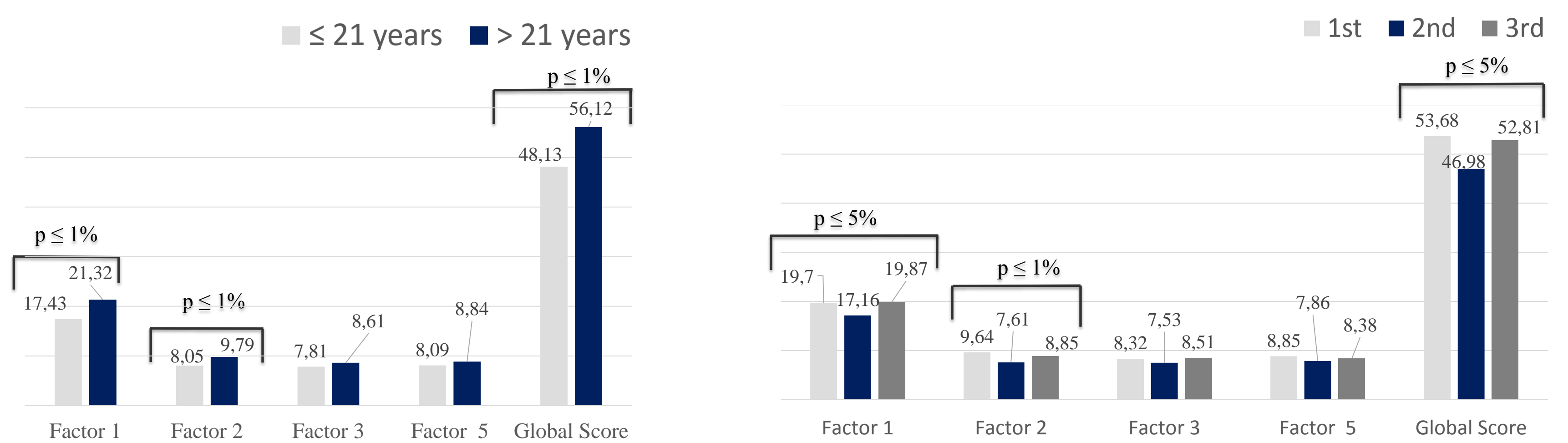


Figure 3. Legitimation of SV according to students' age and academic year.

- Since only one student was classified as an aggressor, no statistical analysis were performed. Students who perceive themselves as victims of SV had lower mean scores in Factor 1 (Fig. 4).

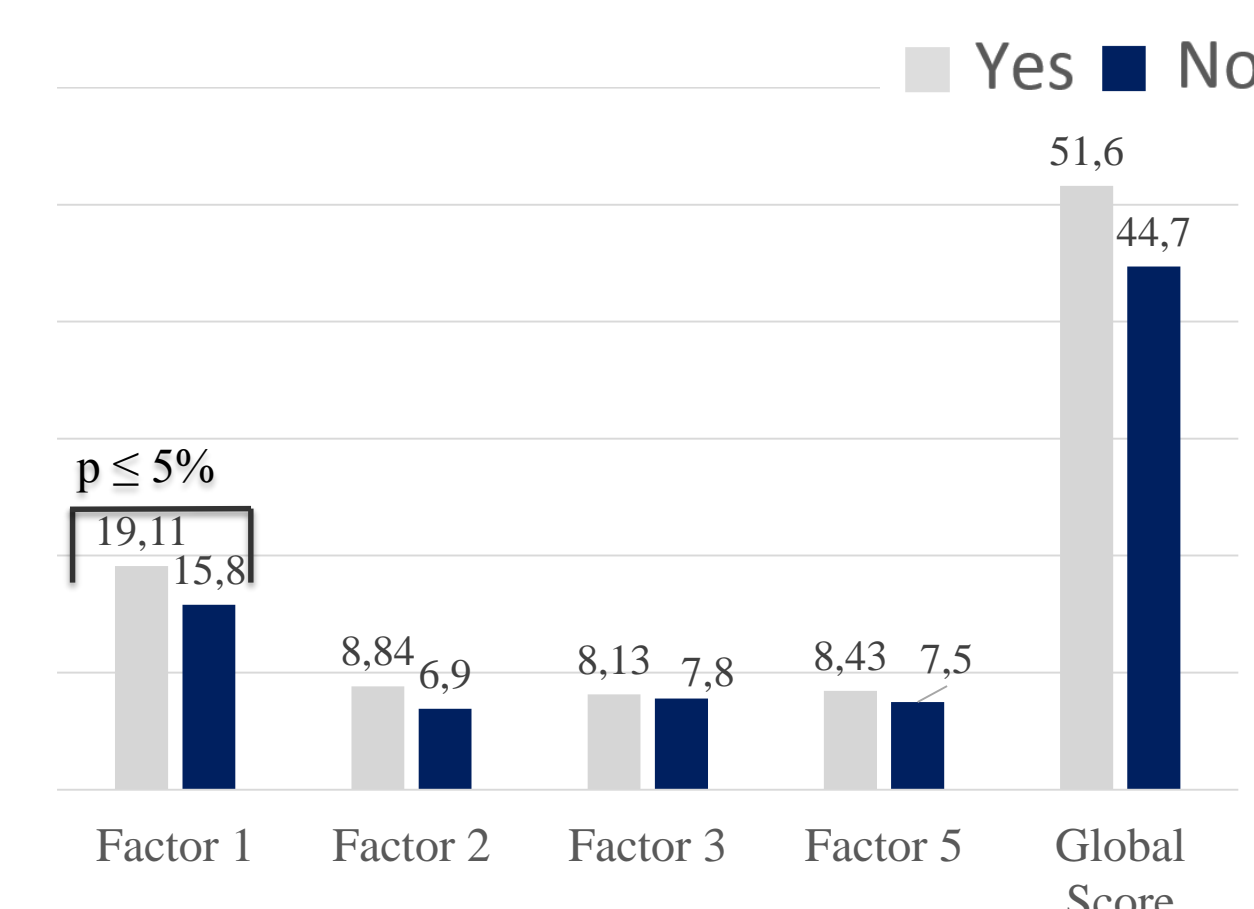


Figure 4. Legitimation of SV according to students' perception as victims.

Conclusion

- In line with other studies (e.g., Martins, 2012), results highlight a discrepancy between students' perception as victims/aggressors and the presence of indicators of victimization/perpetration. Most likely, young people tend to devalue the occurrence of abusive sexual behaviors in certain circumstances (Caridade, 2011).
- Data from ECVS scale confirm that, participants from this study, who will later develop their professional activity as Social Educators, demonstrate a greater intolerance towards legitimation of SV, which may favor the adequate care of the victims.

References

- Caridade (2011). *Vivências Íntimas Violentas: Uma abordagem científica*. Coimbra: Almedina.
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- Martins, S., Machado, S., Abrunhosa, R., & Manita, C. (2012). Escala de Crenças sobre Violência Sexual (ECVS). *Análise Psicológica*, XXX (1-2), 177-191
- Scarpati, A., Guerra, V., & Duarte, C. (2014). Adaptação da Escala de Aceitação dos Mitos de Estupro: evidências de validade. *Avaliação Psicológica*, 13(1), 57-65.