Psicothema

Indicators of liberation from gender-based intimate partner violence in Spain related to when charges are dropped

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Abstract

Background: While the reasons female victims of gender-based intimate partner violence (GIPV) withdraw from legal proceedings continue to fuel debate, little is known about the heterogeneity of these women regarding the timing of their decision and its connection to liberating themselves from the violent relationship. **Method:** We used Analyses of Variance and Chi-squared tests to identify variables related to withdrawal from legal proceedings and variables indicating progress in the separation process related to the timing of withdrawal: in the initial or final stages of the legal proceedings. The analyses were performed in a sample of 105 women who had dropped charges. Then, we ran Binary Logistic Regression analyses to predict the risk of withdrawal during the initial stages of proceedings. **Results:** Women withdrawing in the initial stages showed more indicators that the ending of the relationship was still incipient. The predictive model included two variables: not expecting protection from the judicial system and not applying for a protection order. **Conclusions:** Detachment from the relationship is essential in the complex decision surrounding withdrawal; professional action is needed that does not jeopardise recovery from GIPV.

Keywords: Women survivors, gender-based violence, legal proceedings, withdrawal.

Resumen

Indicadores de liberación de la violencia de género en la pareja relacionados con el momento de renunciar al procedimiento judicial en España. **Antecedentes:** a pesar del interés por conocer los motivos por los que las mujeres renuncian a continuar a un procedimiento judicial por violencia de género en la pareja (VGP), poco se conoce sobre la heterogeneidad entre quienes renuncian en función del momento del procedimiento en que toman dicha decisión y su relación con el grado de liberación o desvinculación de la relación. **Método:** mediante modelos de Análisis de la Varianza y pruebas Chi-cuadrado se estudiaron qué variables relacionadas con las renuncias y qué variables indicadoras de liberación diferenciaron a un total de 105 mujeres que habían renunciado a un procedimiento judicial por VGP, en función de si decidieron renunciar al inicio o en etapas avanzadas del procedimiento. También se desarrollaron análisis de Regresión Logística Binaria para predecir el riesgo de abandonar en etapas iniciales. **Resultados:** quienes renunciaron al inicio presentaron más indicadores de una liberación aún incipiente. El modelo predictivo de las renuncias en etapas iniciales contó con dos predictoras: no esperar y no solicitar protección al sistema judicial. **Conclusiones:** la desvinculación de la relación se torna esencial en la compleja decisión de renunciar al procedimiento judicial; se requieren actuaciones profesionales que no dificulten la recuperación.

Palabras clave: mujeres supervivientes, violencia de género, procedimiento judicial, renuncia.

Gender-based Intimate Partner Violence [GIPV] leaves a deep mark on surviving women's health (e.g., García-Moreno et al., 2013) and, although the physical, psychological and emotional effects persist long after the violence has ended, separation is fundamental for recovery (Landenburger, 1989). However, leaving the relationship is an arduous, drawn-out process (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Keeling, Smith, & Fisher, 2016) and it takes a long time for women to recover physically and psychologically (Roca-Cortés et al., 2015).

During this process of what Roca-Cortés et al. (2015) referred to as *liberation*, some steps take women forward and others

take them back (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Cala, Godoy, & Rebollo, 2009; Landenburger, 1989; Roca-Cortés et al., 2015), in what are essentially several stages of a process of active survival (Landenburger, 1989; Flasch, Murray, & Crowe, 2017). To move forward, women employ several tactics and strategies to take back control of their lives (Cala et al., 2009) and end the abuse, according to Brown's Transtheoretical Model [TTM] (as cited in Alexander, Tracy, Radek, & Koverola, 2009). Karen Landenburger (1989) distinguished four stages: binding, enduring, disengaging, and recovering. In the initial stages, there is a prevalence of devotion and commitment to the relationship, with attempts made to improve and preserve it (Landenburger, 1989), as women still hope their partner will change. Disengagement from the relationship starts with the search for help and resources. The breakup is not definitive until mourning for the lost relationship is over (Hou, Ko, & Shu, 2013) and women's feelings of guilt and the need to return to him diminish (Reynolds & Shepherd, 2011).

The complexity of this process can be attributed in part to the socialization of women regarding the importance of maintaining intimate relationships (Jack, 1991; Landenburger, 1989). The Silencing the Self Theory (Jack, 1991, 2011) argues that women do not usually express what they truly feel to avoid conflicts in the relationship, and this occurs much more in female victims of GIPV (Jack & Dill, 1992), especially during the early stages of the process of liberation (Landenburger, 1989). In addition, one has to consider the strategies the aggressor uses to keep control (Keeling et al., 2016), and the cycle of violence (Walker, 1979) in which recurrent episodes of reconciliation and promises of change delay separation by creating the illusion of an improvement in the relationship.

In their attempt to try to change their situation, many women turn to social and psychological resources for help, but also legal and police resources by reporting their (ex)partner, for example. Nevertheless, some of these women decide to withdraw from legal proceedings: in Spain, 21% of female victims of GIPV eventually drop charges (Government Delegation for Gender Violence, 2015). This can take place in different ways: not ratifying the complaint within the 72-hour period; denying the facts when the complaint is filed by someone else; exercising their right not to testify against someone with whom they have or have had a relationship analogous to marriage (under Article 416 of the Criminal Procedure Act); and refusing to ratify their testimony or denying the facts in the oral hearing.

To explain this phenomenon, there has been a proliferation of studies at judicial (e.g., Bennett, Goodman, & Dutton, 1999; Erez & Belknap, 1998; García-Jiménez, Cala, Trigo, & de la Mata, 2019; O'Neal, 2017), socio-demographic and psychological levels (e.g., Cala, Trigo, & Saavedra, 2016; Cerulli et al., 2014). In general, these works have concentrated on the differences between women who withdraw from proceedings and those who do not, searching for explanatory and/or predictive factors. Nevertheless, little is known about the possible heterogeneity existing among women who decide not to participate in the judicial system.

To date, no research has looked at how the process of recovery may affect the timing of the decision to withdraw from legal proceedings. This is particularly interesting since certain psychological and emotional variables related to the decision to drop charges could be considered as indicators of the process of liberation from the violent relationship: feeling higher levels of guilt (Cala et al., 2016; Bennett et al., 1999); the desire to return to the relationship, being in love with him and believing he will change, (Cala et al., 2016, Erez & Belknap, 1998); the existence of emotional attachment or reconciliation (Alexander et al., 2009; Robinson & Cook, 2006); fear the consequences of the complaint such as the partner´s imprisonment (Bennett et al., 1999); or the escalation of violence and threats after the separation or pressing charges (Robinson & Cook, 2006; Sleath & Smith, 2017).

Just as feelings of guilt, love, and hope that he will change appear to hinder the breakup (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Erez & Belknap, 1998), these may also act as an obstacle to continuing with prosecution when women do not yet feel liberated from the abusive relationship. Additionally, the reason women go to the judicial system seems to depend on the stage they are at within the process of recovery (Shearson, 2017). At the beginning of the process, they want to stop the violence, warn him, and/or improve the relationship (Hoyle & Saunders, 2000; Ford, 1983; Gillis et al., 2006; Shearson, 2017). While dropping the charges in cases where the woman is only looking for the violence to stop could be a reflection of her efforts to maintain the relationship with the partner (Shearson, 2017), it is consequentially logical to consider that in order to achieve a definitive breakup, first the women have to detach themselves from the love, the guilt, and stop thinking about the possibility of forgiving him and restarting the relationship. Indeed, these factors have been shown to be an obstacle to women's involvement in legal proceedings (Cala et al., 2016).

This leads us to ask whether we might expect a greater presence of indicators that the process of liberation is in its early stages in women who drop charges at the beginning of the legal process compared to those who withdraw in advanced stages of the proceedings, and which of those indicators might predict the timing of withdrawal. Thus, there are two objectives in this study. Firstly, we study the differences between GIPV women victims who have disengaged from the legal proceedings in Spain in terms of the timing of withdrawal, and look at which variables indicate progress in their recovery. We expect that those variables indicating a still incipient liberation from the relationship will occur to a greater extent among those women who dropped charges in the early stages of the judicial process. We do not expect differences in terms of the timing of withdrawal for those variables which are not indicators of the process of liberation from the relationship, even if previous studies have found them to be related to withdrawal (i.e., variables related to the judicial process such as obtaining a protection order [PO] or feeling they have professional support when having to make decisions).

The second objective is to predict the timing of withdrawal – early versus late stages of legal proceedings – using those variables which were significantly related to the stage of the legal procedure in which withdrawal took place.

Method

Participants

The initial study sample included 763 women with an in-course or finalized GIPV judicial process. They were contacted because they were users of the Victim Assistance Service of Andalusia [VASA], which offers support in legal, social and psychological aspects, but not therapeutic intervention, to victims of any crime during the judicial proceedings; or users of the Municipal Information Centres for Women [MICW] and other GIPV victim service associations. Some women ($n = 43$) answered more than one questionnaire since they had more than one open procedure against their (ex)partner, in these situations we only considered the last opened case. Of the 763 women, in 345 cases we knew the outcome regarding continuation or not with legal proceedings: 135 (38%) had disengaged from legal proceedings. The magnitude of this percentage was a result of a deliberate effort to encounter cases finalized in withdrawal in order to enhance the representativeness of this group with respect to the number of those who did not withdraw. We were only able to find out the variable of interest concerning the timing within the judicial proceedings in which the withdrawal took place in 105 cases. Of the 105 participants, 48.5% of the women were or had been users of the VASA in Seville ($n = 39$) and Granada ($n = 12$); the remaining 51.4% were women users of the MICW and other GIPV victim service associations.

The average age of the sample was 37.29 years ($SD = 11.30$), and the country of origin was mainly Spain (80%). The level of

education of these women was predominantly compulsory studies or vocational training (52.9%), 33.7% had no formal education, and 13.5% had higher levels of education (high school/university). Their average income was 446.35 euros per month ($SD = 371.08$) and they had an average of 1.57 children ($SD = 1.82$).

Instruments

The questionnaire used to collect the data was elaborated *ad hoc* for the original project by Cala et al. (2012) trying to maximize its internal and content validity. In order to do so, the authors first conducted 35 interviews with key informants and reviewed the literature to identify as exhaustively as possible the probable reasons why a woman might drop the charges. The first version of the questionnaire was evaluated by 8 experts, and the resulting version was piloted with a group of women survivors of GIPV. Some results obtained have been published in previous studies; they studied the relationship between disengaging or not from the legal proceedings and socio-demographic, psychological, and emotional variables (Cala et al., 2016), and with variables related to the legal system (García-Jiménez et al., 2019). A total of 22 questions were selected from the questionnaire for this study (see Table 1).

Procedure

The research project was submitted for evaluation to obtain the pertaining permits from the funding institution, the Department for Equality and Social Welfare of the Andalusian Regional Government, and the Research Foundation of the University of Seville. We also obtained permits from the directors of those services where data was to be collected.

Before completing the questionnaire, the participants were informed about the general subject of the study, the confidentiality of their data was guaranteed, and we requested their consent to participate. The questionnaire was completed by the professionals working at the support services described above. They were able to vary the order of the questions during the interview with each woman, which lasted from 20 to 60 minutes. Neither the professionals who gathered the data nor the participants knew about the working hypothesis.

Data analysis

The independent variable was the moment at which the women decided to withdraw, with 4 initial values: the first 72 hours after pressing charges ($n = 37$), moment of the fast trial ($n = 13$), the

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Table 1
Questions from the questionnaire by Cala et al. (2012) taken for the analyses performed

Socio-demographic variables

Age; educational level (No/Compulsory/Vocational training/High school/University); number of children; monthly incomes; moment at which she disengaged from legal proceedings (First 72 hours after filing the complaint/Fast trial/Investigation phase/Oral hearing; Was the abuser imprisoned? (yes/no)

Questions related to the complaint

1. Did you apply for a PO? (yes/no)
2. Was the PO granted? (yes/no)
3. *How would you describe your decision to press charges? (A well-thought-out decision/ after a traumatic event/ someone else presented charges)
4. What was the reason which led you to press charges? a) Receive protection? (yes/no) b) give him a scare/warning (yes/no)
5. *How often did you have contact with the abuser? (frequent/occasional/none)[1]
6. *Did you think about going back with him? (yes/no/don't know)[2]
7. *How much did you worry about the possible incarceration of the aggressor? (0-10)
8. How did you feel at the time of the oral hearing? (0 = *very bad*; 10 = *very good*)
9. How would you score the following professionals regarding the way they treated you? (0 = *very badly*; 10 = *very well*): a) Judge b) Lawyer
10. Who did you go with to press charges? (Alone/ accompanied)
11. Did you have a private or public lawyer?
12. Who do you think made the decisions during the judicial proceedings? (You alone/ your lawyer/ you assisted by your lawyer/ the lawyers from either side)[3]
13. *Was the separation/divorce being processed together with the complaint? (yes/no)
14. Have you received any psychological support? (yes/no). From what type of service?[4]

Questions referring to their feelings during the judicial proceedings

1. *How guilty did you feel about what might happen to him? (0-10)
2. **Were you concerned about the lack of money and or work? (0-10)
3. Did you feel your life was in danger? (0-10)
4. What was the level of support received from your family and friends? (0-10)
5. **Did you regret having pressed charges against him? (yes/no)

Questions referring to their beliefs (0-10)

1. **Love can do anything and is forever, that is why sometimes you must endure in order to save the relationship
2. **I still love him, and I would go back with him if he promised to change
3. *Women are more capable of taking care of the family than men. That is why women should know how to forgive and be more tolerant and patient than men

Note: [1] Type of contact with the abuser was recoded as direct, by telephone, through children, or through family members; [2] The value "don't know" was omitted from the analyses for lack of cases; [3] The variable was recoded as follows: Her alone, her lawyer, her assisted by her lawyer; [4] Values were recoded into: no support, by social services, by health services
* Variables described as indicators of a certain degree of liberation from the relationship that showed a significant relationship with dropping the charges in previous works
** Variables described as indicators of a certain degree of liberation from the relationship that did not show a significant relationship with dropping the charges in previous works

investigation phase ($n = 47$), and the phase of the oral hearing ($n = 8$). These values were recoded into two in order to ensure a sufficient number of cases in the groups to be compared: initial stages of the proceedings (women in the first 72 hours and in the fast trial, $n = 50$), and advanced stages of the proceedings (women in the investigation phase and the oral hearing, $n = 55$).

The dependent variables selected (see Table 1) were all those which, in previous studies with a Spanish population (i.e., Cala et al., 2016; García-Jiménez et al., 2019), were significantly related to disengagement from legal proceedings with an effect size close to medium or large. We looked at whether these same variables could predict the timing of the withdrawal. Additionally, to gauge the effect of the process of liberation from a GIPV relationship on the timing of the decision to withdraw, we also included all those variables covering emotional, motivational or behavioral aspects that, according to the literature, were indicators of the degree of progress in the process of liberation, even when these variables did not meet the statistical criteria in said studies (see the variables marked with ** in Table 1).

We ran ANOVA models (Snedecor's *F* tests or Welch's *F* tests when unequal variances were assumed) to analyze the relationship between the quantitative dependent variables and the timing of disengaging from the legal proceedings. Chi-square tests were performed to analyze the relationship between the categorical variables and the moment of withdrawal, with a study of the standardized residuals in the tables with more than one degree of freedom. We considered a significance level of .05 in all the statistical tests. The effect size index considered for each test was R^2 for the ANOVA models (.01, .06, and .14 for small, medium, and large effect sizes) and the coefficient of contingency for the

Chi-square tests ($\phi = .10$, .30, and .50 for small, medium, and large effect sizes) (Cohen, 1988). The statistical power of this study ($N = 105$), calculated post hoc through G*Power 3.0 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), was .71 for medium effect sizes for the ANOVA models and between .79 and .86 for the Chi-square tests with 1 or 2 degrees of freedom, respectively.

To achieve the second objective, we ran a Binary Logistic Regression analysis that included as predictive variables all those with a statistically significant relationship with the timing of the withdrawal and an effect size close to medium or large. We used SPSS 20 for all the analyses.

Results

Analyses of the differences regarding the timing of withdrawal

The ANOVA analyses for the quantitative variables regarding the timing of women's disengagement from legal proceedings only revealed two statistically significant relationships with a medium effect size. The average of the feelings of guilt was higher in those who dropped charges during the initial stages of proceedings ($M = 8.20$, $SD = 2.86$) than those who withdrew in the later stages ($M = 5.87$, $SD = 4.21$), Welch's $F (1,90.27) = 10.44$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = .09$. Likewise, the belief that love can do anything had a higher average in women who withdrew during the initial stages of the judicial proceedings ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 4.01$) than in those who dropped charges later on ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 3.42$), Welch's $F (1,92.99) = 6.56$, $p = .012$, $R^2 = .06$.

Table 2 shows the categorical variables for which statistically significant differences were found regarding the timing of withdrawal, reaching medium or close to medium effect sizes.

Table 2
Findings for the Chi-squared tests: Significant differences depending on the timing of withdrawal (initial vs. advanced stages)

| Variable | Timing of withdrawal | | | | χ^2 | df, N | p | ψ |
| | Initial stages | | Advanced stages | | | | | |
	n	%	n	%				
Thoughts of going back with him					7.64**	1, $N = 105$	.006	.26
Yes	50	57.1	55	42.9				
No		28.6		71.4				
Contact with the partner					7.19*	2, $N = 103$	.027	.25
None		20.0		80				
Occasional	48	41.7	55	58.3				
Frequent		57.7		42.3				
Feeling of regret					8.13**	1, $N = 80$	.004	.30
Yes	35	56.0	45	44.0				
No		23.3		76.7				
Expected that he got a warning sign					6.21*	1, $N = 104$	.013	.24
Yes	49	61.4	55	38.6				
No		36.7		63.3				
Expected protection					8.39**	1, $N = 104$	.004	.27
Yes	49	30.2	55	69.8				
No		59.0		41.0				
Applied for a PO					11.93**	1, $N = 103$	.001	.32
Yes	49	34.8	54	65.2				
No		70.3		29.7				
Within divorce proceedings					7.45**	1, $N = 100$	.006	.26
Yes	45	20.8	55	79.2				
No		52.6		47.4				

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

One can see that, in those women who withdrew at the beginning of the legal proceedings, certain categories showed statistically higher frequencies than expected: the idea of going back with the partner, expecting that the complaint would serve as a warning sign to the abuser, and *not* applying for a PO. At the same time, other categories showed statistically lower frequencies than expected: not having *any* contact with the (ex)partner, as well as *not* feeling regret after pressing charges, expecting to get protection after filing the complaint, and the processing of divorce proceedings at the same time as the judicial proceedings for GIPV.

The logistic regression model

All the variables that reached statistical significance and an effect size close to medium were included in a binary logistic regression model in order to observe which variables were able to predict withdrawal during the initial phase of judicial proceedings, controlling for the remaining variables. The following variables were entered in the model following a stepwise forward likelihood ratio method: the feelings of guilt, the belief that love can do anything, having had the idea of returning to the partner, contact with the aggressor (making two contrasts and taking as the reference value the group that did not have any contact), the feeling of regret, the expectation that he would receive a warning, expecting protection, applying for a PO, and being in the process of divorce. However, only two variables showed statistical significance: expect protection after pressing charges and applying for a PO. For this reason, we decided to construct a simplified model with only those two variables (see Table 3).

In the resulting model, the fact that a woman did not expect protection from the judicial system multiplied by 4.08 the probability of disengagement from the legal proceedings in the initial stages, and not applying for a PO multiplied this probability by 4.28. The model did not show problems of multicollinearity with a tolerance index of .88 and a Variance Inflation Factor below 10 (VIF = 1.14). Furthermore, the model reached a medium effect size in the case of Cox and Snell's R^2 and close to large in Nagelkerke's R^2, classifying correctly 67% of the cases. The model showed a sensibility of 86.2% and a specificity of 53.5%.

Discussion

The predictive model developed in this paper complements other previous models (e.g., Cala et al., 2016; García-Jiménez et

al., 2019; O'Neal, 2017; Sleath & Smith, 2017) that established the probability that a victim would drop charges but not the moment at which this would occur. The importance of knowing whether this decision will be taken at the beginning of the procedure lies in the fact that this is a moment that may coincide with the incipient stages of the process of liberation from the violent relationship. The findings showed that almost all the variables indicating early stages of liberation were more prevalent in the group of women who dropped the charges within the first 72 hours after having filed the complaint and/or during the fast trial. On the contrary, the variables that were not indicators of detachment from the relationship did not show differences related to the timing of withdrawal, even though they have previously been identified as predictive factors of disengagement from legal proceedings, such as not obtaining a PO (García-Jiménez et al., 2019).

In addition, the group of women who decided to drop charges at the beginning of the legal proceedings showed more feelings of guilt and regret after filing the complaint against their partner, acknowledged to a greater extent that they were thinking about going back with him, and kept in contact with the abuser. They also admitted to believing that love can do anything, they had not started divorce procedures and, in comparison with those who disengaged in the final stages of legal proceedings, protection was not what they were seeking with the complaint nor had they requested a PO, while they were actually expecting that the complaint would serve as a warning sign to the aggressor.

These results are coherent with still being in the initial stages of the process of emotional disengagement and liberation from the relationship, when the woman may still love her partner and has not been able to leave him permanently, holding on to the hope of a change in his behavior. In particular, these feelings would be characteristic of the enduring stage proposed by Landenburger (1989), and far from the action stage in the TTM by Brown (as cited in Alexander et al., 2009) since the emotional ties with the partner are stronger at the beginning of the relationship (Alexander et al., 2009).

Feeling regret after pressing charges could be associated to the feelings of guilt for transgressing those social norms that lead women to maintain their intimate relationship (Jack, 1991) and for seeing themselves as primarily responsible for the consequences that filing the complaint may have for their (ex)partner. Women have to work on these aspects at an emotional level throughout their recovery, because recovery as such is not possible without overcoming the guilt (Landenburger, 1989, 1998).

At the same time, women are not prone to using the justice system as punishment (Ford, 1983), but as a way of gaining a certain degree of control in the relationship, to try to improve it (Hoyle & Sanders, 2000; Landenburger, 1998). When they realize the possible consequences of filing a complaint, they may decide to drop charges because events exceed their initial expectations (Hoyle & Sanders, 2000) which were to stop the violence while maintaining the relationship (Shearson, 2017). In our results, the expectation that the complaint would serve as a warning sign, not expecting protection from the judicial system, and not applying for a PO could be examples of tactics of adherence to the relationship aimed at maintaining it (Cala et al., 2009). These tactics usually come into play during the stages prior to the eventual disengagement from the abusive relationship (Landenburger, 1989).

On the other hand, the fact that victims are less capable of avoiding contact with the abuser may show that there is still some

Table 3
Findings for the Binary Logistic Regression model to predict the timing of dropping charges, following a stepwise forward likelihood ratio method, N = 72 (n $_{initial\ stages}$ = 29; n $_{advanced\ stages}$ = 43)

Variable	B	ET	χ^2 Wald	p	OR
Constant	-1.68**	.49	11.97	.001	0.19
Expected protection (yes/no)	1.41*	.58	5.91	.015	4.08
Applied for a PO (yes/no)		.61	5.78	.016	4.28

Model	χ^2	df	p	R^2 Cox & Snell	R^2 Nagelkerke
Likelihood Ratio	16.49**	2	< .001	.21	.28
Hosmer & Lemeshow	.094	2	.954		

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01

commitment to or need for the relationship when the breakup is not final (Landenburger, 1989). This in turn hinders the grieving for the lost relationship that is a necessary step for disengagement (Landengurger, 1989). Separated or divorced women, as the best example of a definitive breakup, are generally found in more advanced stages of their process of change according to the TTM (Alexander et al., 2009), and at the same time divorce appears to be related to women going through with the judicial procedure (Ford, 1983). In our sample, the percentage of women in a divorce process was much lower among those who dropped charges in the initial stages of the legal proceedings. This may be one more indicator of insufficient liberation from the abusive relationship that prevents them from continuing with prosecution.

It may seem surprising that, of all the analyzed variables, only two succeeded in conforming the model to predict withdrawals in the initial stages of the procedure, mainly because these two variables were not apparently related to the process of liberation: not having applied for a PO and not expecting protection from the judicial system. Nevertheless, these two factors do make sense if we take into consideration Shearson's findings (2017). This author found that when women go to the judicial system during the early stages of the process of ending an abusive relationship, they do so to stop specific episodes of violence. It is not until the disengaging stage identified by Landenburger (1989) that the motive becomes receiving formal protection through the legal system and staying away from the relationship (Shearson, 2017).

The main contribution of the model developed in this work is to be able to predict, in the event of a possible case of withdrawal, whether this could be attributed to the fact that the female victim is still not yet sufficiently liberated from the GIPV. Thus, while other models may predict if a woman will withdraw from legal proceedings (e.g., Cala et al., 2016; García-Jiménez et al., 2019), our model complements this by predicting the timing of this decision, based on specific indicators of liberation. On the other hand, we do not consider the fact that the model detects a higher percentage of false positives than false negatives to be completely unfavorable as we believe that it should be a priority to reduce the number of undetected women in risk situations as much as possible. Being able to predict if a woman will drop charges at the beginning of the legal procedure merely by whether or not she wants protection provides an excellent opportunity to gauge the level of disengagement from the partner and take the appropriate professional measures for an accurate evaluation of the process of liberation.

One of the limitations of this study was that the sample only included participants from Andalusia, and they were also users of specific services that may not be present or vary in other regions in Spain. Even within Andalusia, the percentages of withdrawals varied from one province to another (General Council of the Judiciary, 2018). Although our selection procedure enabled us to

work with a more homogeneous and extensive sample of women that withdrew from the judicial procedure, there is a strong argument for replicating this study with samples from diverse origins.

Likewise, the results are based on self-report responses, meaning that our conclusions have to be treated with caution. This fact, along with having considered the variables included in the questionnaire developed by Cala et al. (2012) which was for different objectives, might have meant the omission of variables required to define the process of liberation. Furthermore, it would be particularly interesting to study the variables explaining withdrawals in the advanced stages of legal proceedings for GIPV, once the obstacles of emotional attachment had been overcome (i.e., guilt, regret). These would include the loss of fear as a protective factor by diminishing the frequency of contact with the aggressor (Cala et al., 2016), fatigue caused by lengthy proceedings (Bennett et al., 1999; Gillis et al., 2006), or the possibility of secondary victimization of women (Cubells & Calsamiglia, 2018; Erez & Belknap, 1998). In short, in-depth research is required on the impact of liberation from GIPV as an overall process beyond isolated variables and indicators at each stage – and how it may influence the decision to disengage from legal proceedings regardless of the timing of that decision.

Regarding practical implications, these results highlight the need to focus on the psychological intervention and assistance for women. While respecting their agency, rhythms, and needs, this is required to facilitate the process of liberation until they reach the stage of a complete separation and empowerment (Cala et al., 2009), or what Landenburger (1989) identified as the stage of recovery. Therapeutic work to help them overcome the sense of guilt is essential, and this is closely linked to a decrease in the need for the relationship despite the suffering this entails (Jack, 1991, 2001). At the same time, we stress the importance of raising awareness in professionals in the judicial arena and their sensitivity regarding the onerous process of breaking free from a violent relationship. Greater awareness and sensitivity would facilitate a more appropriate professional response to each survivor's condition and needs and improve attitudes toward this type of violence (Ferrer-Pérez, Bosch-Fiol, Sánchez-Prada, & Delgado-Álvarez, 2019). This could also help reduce secondary victimization which is still very present in the judicial system (Cubells & Calsamiglia, 2018). It might also improve the way professionals cope with their frustration at certain decisions taken by victims that are erroneously qualified as irrational.

Acknowledgments

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