

Crime Victims' Institute

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Risk and Resilience: Exploring Intimate Partner Violence Among Hispanic College Students in a Border Region Fei Luo, Ph.D.

Intimate partner violence (IPV), including physical, psychological, and sexual forms, remains a significant public health and societal concern that affects individuals across all demographic groups, but poses particular challenges among college populations. Studies estimate that approximately one in three women experiences some form of IPV during their lifetime, with psychological aggression being the most prevalent (Sabina et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2021). Among college students, the estimated rates are even higher, reaching up to 90% (Banyard et al., 2000; Neufeld et al., 1999).

The college years represent a developmental stage marked by increased independence and exploration of relationships, which can heighten vulnerability to victimization. Consequences of IPV among college students are severe, including depression, anxiety, academic decline, and long-term trauma (Kaukinen, 2014; Willie et al., 2023).

Despite the growing body of research on IPV, Hispanic students, especially those residing in border regions, remain underrepresented. There is limited understanding of how behavioral, familial, contextual, and cultural factors influence IPV experiences among Hispanic college students, many of whom navigate bicultural expectations as well as unique economic and family stressors. This study seeks to address this gap in the research by identifying the behavioral, familial, peer, and cultural factors that shape different forms of IPV among Hispanic college students in a United States–Mexico border community.

Literature Review

IPV Among the Hispanic and Latinx Populations

Hispanic and Latinx populations represent one of the largest minority groups in the U.S. and increasingly make up a substantial portion of college students (Cummings et al., 2013; Humes et al., 2011). Research indicates that IPV prevalence among Hispanic populations is higher than that observed among non-Hispanic White populations (Morrison et al., 2024; Bentley et al., 2023). Hispanic populations are also more vulnerable to the consequences of IPV, including adverse physical and mental health outcomes (Azziz-Baumgartner et al., 2011; Cummings et al., 2013).

IPV risk within Hispanic communities may be shaped by cultural, structural, and contextual influences. Factors such as *familismo*,¹ acculturation stress, and gender norms can affect both vulnerability and protection (Cummings et al., 2013). While *familismo* can foster strong social support and cohesion, adherence to traditional gender roles such as *machismo* and *marianismo*² may increase relationship conflict or discourage help-seeking (Da Silva et al., 2021; Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2023). In border communities, where bicultural dynamics and family loyalty are particularly salient, survivors may face additional challenges in balancing the desire to preserve relationships with the need for personal safety (Espinoza et al., 2023).

Behavioral Risk Factors: Substance Use and Low Self-Control

Substance use is widely recognized as one of the strongest behavioral predictors of IPV (Cafferky et al., 2018).

¹ As discussed in social science research on Hispanic/Latinx culture, *familismo* refers to “a core cultural value that requires the individual to submit to a more collective, family-based form of decision-making, and responsibility for, and obligation to ensuring the well-being of family members” (Smith-Morris et al., 2012, p. 37).

² In their research on traditional gender roles in Hispanic/Latinx culture, Bonilla and colleagues (2025) explain that *machismo* “is a set of values and behaviors that [Latinos are expected to endorse], with a focus on hypermasculinity, dominance, control, and power” (p. 1212), and describe *marianismo* as “the traditional set of values and beliefs Latinas are expected to endorse,” with its primary dimensions including the “family pillar, [virtue and chastity], subordination to others, self-silencing to maintain harmony, and spiritual pillar” (pp. 1212-1213).

Alcohol and drug use impair judgment and escalate conflict, thereby increasing both perpetration and victimization (Cafferky et al., 2018; Edwards et al., 2023). Among Hispanic populations, substance misuse often co-occurs with depression and stress (Kim-Godwin et al., 2014; Noonan et al., 2020). In a meta-analysis of 285 studies, Cafferky and colleagues (2018) found that alcohol and drug abuse significantly predicted IPV victimization. Peer drug use also heightened the risk. This is consistent with social learning theory (Akers, 1998), which emphasizes the role of behavioral modeling within social networks.

Low self-control, a central concept in Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) *General Theory of Crime*, is another key predictor of IPV. Individuals with low self-control are more impulsive and prone to risky situations that increase IPV exposure (Gulledge et al., 2023). Research has linked low self-control to both IPV perpetration and victimization across various populations (Gulledge et al., 2023; Muniz & Zavala, 2023). Among Hispanic samples, low self-control also interacts with cultural assimilation and peer influences to shape IPV patterns (Luo et al., 2023; Muniz & Zavala, 2023).

Familial and Early-Life Influences

Family relationships are central to shaping young adults' social and emotional development as well as their approaches to intimate relationships. Attachment theory suggests that the quality of early relationships, especially parental relationships, plays a significant role in shaping individuals' experiences and behaviors (Ponti & Tani, 2019). Supportive family bonds, particularly strong maternal relationships, have been shown to reduce the likelihood of IPV victimization (Espinoza et al., 2023). Conversely, insecure maternal attachment has been associated with a higher risk of IPV victimization. These findings are consistent with *familismo* values that emphasize emotional closeness and mutual support. Paternal relationships, however, may have more complex effects when shaped by patriarchal norms or controlling expectations (Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2023).

Childhood maltreatment is also a well-established risk factor for IPV in adulthood (Li et al., 2019; Robles et al., 2022; Widom et al., 2014). The cycle of violence framework and social learning theory suggest that early exposure to violence normalizes aggression as a means of conflict resolution and increases vulnerability to later victimization. Empirical research supports these theoretical explanations and shows that early trauma predicts adult IPV among individuals, especially when

compounded by discrimination or stress (Robles et al., 2022; Widom et al., 2014). For example, Widom and colleagues (2014) found that child abuse and neglect significantly increased the likelihood of IPV, and a meta-analysis by Li and colleagues (2019) further supported the strong association between childhood maltreatment and later IPV experiences.

Peer Context and Sociocultural Factors

Peer networks play a significant role in shaping behaviors, attitudes, and norms during the college years. According to social learning theory (Akers, 1998), individuals learn norms and behaviors through observation and reinforcement from those around them. Peers influence risk-taking behaviors such as substance use, sexual activity, and aggression. Within the context of IPV, peers who engage in risky or deviant behaviors can increase exposure to situations and environments that facilitate victimization (Curtis et al., 2023).

Sociocultural factors also influence IPV risk. Acculturation, the process of adapting to a host society and culture, can introduce both opportunities and strain. Research has found that higher levels of acculturation are associated with increased IPV risk among minority groups (Luo et al., 2023; Sabina et al., 2015). Acculturative stress, shifting gender norms, and bicultural tension may all contribute to relational conflict among Hispanic young adults (Alvarez & Fedock, 2018; Terrazas-Carrillo et al., 2024). For example, research has found that Anglo cultural orientation was linked to increased odds of experiencing all forms of IPV, while Latino cultural orientation was associated with lower odds of IPV (Sabina et al., 2015).

Gaps in the Research Literature and Purpose of the Present Study

Despite the growing literature on IPV, limited quantitative studies focus specifically on Hispanic college students, particularly those living in border regions. Prior research rarely integrates behavioral, familial, peer, and cultural predictors into a single model, which limits our understanding of how these factors interact to shape IPV risk and resilience. The present study addresses these gaps by examining physical, psychological, and sexual IPV among Hispanic college students attending a university along the U.S.–Mexico border.

Guided by Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) *General Theory of Crime* and Akers' (1998) *Social Learning Theory*, this study examines whether:

- (1) Substance use and low self-control increase IPV risk;
- (2) Strong maternal relationships reduce IPV risk;
- (3) Acculturation and childhood abuse elevate IPV risk; and
- (4) Peer drug use contributes to IPV victimization.

The findings aim to inform prevention and intervention efforts, particularly within Hispanic college communities.

Methodology

Data for this study were obtained from a self-administered online survey conducted among students at a public university located along the U.S.–Mexico border. The institution serves a predominantly Hispanic student population, with many students commuting from nearby communities. Participants were recruited through Sona Systems, a cloud-based research management platform that facilitates participant recruitment and manages research credits or compensation. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and anonymous.

A total of 423 surveys were collected. After excluding non-Hispanic respondents and incomplete cases, the final analytic sample consisted of 402 Hispanic students. Participants ranged in age from 18 to over 50 years, and the majority identified as female (79.6%). More than half of the respondents were upper-level undergraduate students, and approximately 61% reported being employed either part-time or full-time (see Table 1).

Dependent Variables: This study examined three forms of IPV: physical, psychological, and sexual. These dependent (or outcome) variables were measured using the Short Form of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2). For each form of IPV, respondents indicated whether they had experienced specific partner behaviors within the past year:

- *Physical IPV* included acts such as pushing, slapping, kicking, or beating.
- *Psychological IPV* involved behaviors such as insults, yelling, or threats.
- *Sexual IPV* captured experiences of forced or coerced sexual activity.

Responses were recorded on a six-point scale and subsequently dichotomized to indicate whether the respondent had experienced at least one incident (1 = yes, 0 = no). In the current sample, 14.4% of respondents reported experiencing physical IPV, 53.9% experienced psychological IPV, and 17.1% reported experiencing sexual IPV (see Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean/%	SD	Min	Max
Physical IPV				
Yes	14.4%			
Psychological IPV				
Yes	53.9%			
Sexual IPV				
Yes	17.1%			
Age	1.923	0.942	1	5
Gender				
Male	20.4%			
Female	79.6%			
Education	3.367	0.999	1	5
Employment				
Not in the labor force	38.4%			
Part-time	42.4%			
Full-time	19.2%			
Acculturation	14.137	3.441	4	20
Binge Drinking				
Yes	40.6%			
Peer Drinking				
Yes	74.2%			
Drug Use				
Yes	11.2%			
Peer drug use				
Yes	45.3%			
Relationship with mother	3.492	0.692	1	4
Relationship with father	3.189	0.900	1	4
Self-Control	17.929	6.294	7	35
Childhood Abuse				
Yes	80.9%			

Independent and Control Variables: The independent and control variables for this study included behavioral, psychosocial, and demographic characteristics. The main independent (or predictor) variables were as follows (see Table 1):

- *Acculturation* was measured by a four-item scale assessing language use in daily life ($\bar{x} = 14.14$, $SD = 3.44$), with higher scores reflecting greater acculturation to U.S. culture.
- *Substance use* measures included binge drinking (40.6% yes), friends' binge drinking (74.2% yes), drug use (11.2% yes), and friends' drug use (45.3% yes).
- *Parental relationship quality* was measured separately for mothers and fathers on a four-point scale. Higher scores indicated better relationships.
- *Low self-control* was measured by a seven-item scale ($\bar{x} = 17.93$, $SD = 6.29$). Example items include "I often try new things just for fun or thrills, even if most people think those are a waste of time" and "I often do things based on how I feel at the moment."
- *Childhood abuse* was a dichotomous measure indicating whether respondents experienced any form of physical or verbal abuse while growing up (80.9% yes).

Control variables focused on demographic factors. Age was coded into five categories ranging from 18-21 (1) to 50 and older (5) ($\bar{x} = 1.92$, $SD = 0.94$). Gender was dichotomized as male and female. Education level included five categories: freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate student. Employment status was categorized as not in the labor force, part-time employment, or full-time employment.

For the analytic strategy, three binary logistic regression models were estimated to examine risk and protective factors associated with each form of IPV.

Findings

The findings of this study indicate that both behavioral and familial factors influence IPV among Hispanic college students. Table 2 presents the unstandardized coefficients and odds ratios for all three binary logistic regression models. Overall, the three models explained between 15% and 24% of the variance in IPV outcomes.

For physical IPV, binge drinking ($B = 0.86$, $p < .05$) and personal drug use ($B = 1.46$, $p < .001$) significantly increased the likelihood of victimization. In contrast, having friends who binge drink ($B = -1.03$, $p < .05$) and reporting a stronger maternal relationship ($B = -0.63$, $p < .01$) were associated with a reduced likelihood of experiencing physical IPV. These findings suggest that personal substance use represents a key risk factor for physical victimization, while strong family bonds, particularly with mothers, may function as protective factors. Low self-control was also positively associated with physical IPV, indicating that individuals with lower self-control are more likely to experience victimization.

For psychological IPV, several similar patterns emerged. Higher levels of acculturation ($B = 0.07$, $p < .05$), binge drinking ($B = 0.47$, $p < .10$), drug use ($B = 1.13$, $p < .01$), stronger relationships with fathers ($B = 0.38$, $p < .01$), and lower self-control ($B = 0.04$, $p < .05$) were associated with greater odds of experiencing psychological IPV. In contrast, stronger relationships with mothers continued to serve as a protective factor ($B = -0.43$, $p < .05$). Childhood abuse was also a significant predictor ($B = 0.69$, $p < .05$), which reinforces the long-term influence of early victimization on later relationship outcomes.

For sexual IPV, full-time employment ($B = 0.92$, $p < .05$), personal drug use ($B = 0.89$, $p < .05$), peer drug use ($B = 0.62$, $p < .10$), and childhood abuse ($B = 0.81$, $p < .10$) were positively associated with victimization. Full-time employment may reflect greater role strain and stress from balancing work and school responsibilities, which can contribute to relational tension and conflict. In contrast, having friends who binge drink ($B = -0.84$, $p < .05$) and reporting a stronger maternal relationship ($B = -0.46$, $p < .05$) were negatively associated with sexual IPV. These results suggest that economic strain, early-life victimization, and substance use continue to shape vulnerability to sexual IPV victimization, while close maternal relationships and certain peer contexts may buffer against such experiences.

Discussion

This study examined factors associated with physical, psychological, and sexual IPV among Hispanic college students attending a public university along the U.S.-Mexico border. The findings highlight the interplay between behavioral, familial, and sociocultural factors in shaping experiences of IPV within this understudied population. Across all models, substance use and family relationships emerged as the most consistent predictors. Personal substance use heightened the risk of IPV, while strong maternal relationships provided a protective buffer against all three forms of IPV. Acculturation and low self-control functioned to elevate psychological IPV risk, suggesting that cultural adaptation and self-control may shape relational dynamics in important ways. Childhood abuse also demonstrated a lasting impact, particularly on psychological and sexual IPV, which reinforces the long-term consequences of early victimization.

Behavioral Factors and IPV

Consistent with previous studies, binge drinking and drug use were significant predictors of IPV victimization (Cafferky et al., 2018; Edwards et al., 2023). Students

Table 2. Logistic Regression Predicting Physical, Psychological, and Sexual IPV

Variables	Physical IPV		Psychological IPV		Sexual IPV	
	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR
Age	-0.23	0.80	0.10	1.11	0.15	1.17
Gender	-0.59	0.56	0.32	1.38	0.57	1.77
Education	-0.16	0.86	0.05	1.06	0.20	1.22
Part-time job	-0.02	0.98	0.17	1.18	0.33	1.39
Full-time job	-0.33	0.72	0.17	1.18	0.92*	2.51
Acculturation	-0.02	0.98	0.07*	1.07	0.02	1.02
Binge drinking	0.86*	2.32	0.47*	1.59	0.01	1.01
Friends' binge drinking	-1.03*	0.36	0.31	1.36	-0.84*	0.43
Drug use	1.46***	4.29	1.13**	3.10	0.89*	2.44
Friends' drug use	0.42	1.51	-0.23	0.80	0.62*	1.86
Mother relationship	-0.63**	0.53	-0.43*	0.65	-0.46*	0.63
Father relationship	0.17	1.19	0.38**	1.46	0.05	1.05
Low Self-control	0.06*	1.061	0.04*	1.04	0.03	1.03
Childhood abuse	-0.04	0.97	0.69*	2.00	0.81*	2.25
Nagelkerke R ²	.236		.150		.170	

Note: + $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

who reported personal alcohol use were more likely to experience both physical and psychological IPV. Drug use is one of the most robust and consistent predictors across all three forms of IPV victimization. Substance use may compromise decision-making and increase the likelihood of conflict, which in turn heightens the likelihood of aggression within intimate relationships. These findings highlight the importance of addressing substance use in IPV prevention efforts among college populations. Programs that integrate substance use education with relationship violence prevention may be particularly effective in reducing risk among Hispanic college students, as they may face additional stressors related to work, family, and school balance.

Low self-control emerged as a significant individual-level predictor of physical and psychological IPV. Students with lower self-control were more likely to encounter or remain in risky relational situations. This finding aligns with Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) *General Theory of Crime*, which posits that individuals with lower self-control are more prone to engage in or be exposed to risky situations, which increase their vulnerability to victimization. Prior studies have similarly linked low self-control to both IPV perpetration and victimization, including among young adult and college populations (Gulledge et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2023; Muniz & Zavala, 2023). Among Hispanic college students, challenges related to impulsivity or short-term decision-making may increase vulnerability to volatile relationships and limit their ability to avoid or exit unsafe situations. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating self-regulation and decision-making skills into campus-based IPV prevention programs.

Familial and Early Life Influences

Family relationships were also influential in shaping IPV risk. Across all three models, better maternal relationships were associated with lower risks of IPV victimization. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that supportive, high-quality relationships with mothers protect against IPV victimization (Espinoza et al., 2023; Ponti & Tani, 2019). Among Hispanic students, close maternal ties may reflect the broader cultural value of *familismo*, which emphasizes emotional support, loyalty, and reciprocal support. Such support may strengthen coping mechanisms and reduce vulnerability to unhealthy relationships.

In contrast, stronger relationships with fathers were associated with increased odds of psychological IPV. The unexpected positive association between paternal

relationship quality and psychological IPV may reflect complex family dynamics, as culturally shaped communication patterns, gendered expectations, and parental role structures may contribute to these relational outcomes. For example, close paternal relationships could coexist with traditional norms, including *machismo* or *marianismo*, that may overlook or minimize certain forms of psychological aggression. This relationship warrants continued investigation; future qualitative or longitudinal research is needed to further explore these dynamics.

Childhood abuse was another key predictor that significantly increased the odds of psychological and sexual IPV in adulthood. This result supports the cycle of violence perspective that early victimization may shape expectations about relationships and increase susceptibility to later abuse (Li et al., 2019; Widom et al., 2014). These findings highlight the long-term consequences of early trauma and emphasize the importance of early intervention and trauma-informed support services.

Peer Context and Social Environment

Peer influences were significant correlates of IPV in this study. In particular, peer drug use was positively associated with sexual IPV, suggesting that social networks characterized by substance use may facilitate risky behaviors and normalize unhealthy relationship dynamics. Prior research has shown that peer contexts can shape behavioral norms, including substance use and aggression, which can elevate IPV risk among young adults (Curtis et al., 2023). Students embedded in peer groups where drug use is prevalent may be more likely to experience exposure to risk-taking contexts, which contribute to vulnerability to victimization.

Although peer binge drinking showed a negative association with IPV, this relationship should be interpreted with caution. Students who belong to socially active peer groups spend more time engaging in group-oriented activities where alcohol use occurs in social rather than intimate settings. These environments may reduce the time spent alone with partners, thereby lowering exposure to conflict-prone situations and, in turn, decreasing the likelihood of physical aggression. This pattern suggests that the social context in which drinking occurs may be as important as the behavior itself when considering risk factors for IPV among college students, and it underscores the need for future research to examine how different forms of peer socialization shape relationship experiences and IPV risk.

Sociocultural Factors

Acculturation demonstrated a notable association with IPV, with higher levels associated with increased odds of psychological IPV. This finding may reflect cultural stress or shifts in gender norms and communication styles as individuals adapt to U.S. cultural contexts. As students become more acculturated, they may experience tension between traditional and modern relationship expectations, which can heighten relational conflict. The role of acculturation should be explored in more depth in future research, particularly regarding how bicultural identity, language use, and value orientation interact with relationship dynamics and IPV risk.

Implications for Policy and Practice

These findings provide meaningful implications for IPV prevention and intervention efforts on college campuses, particularly those serving Hispanic populations, including campuses in the state of Texas. Prevention programs should adopt approaches that integrate discussions of family dynamics, cultural norms, and acculturation stress, which are especially salient in Texas's southern and border regions. Campus initiatives that integrate substance use education, relationship skill-building, and trauma-informed care may be particularly effective at reducing IPV risk when coordinated with county health departments and community organizations. Strengthening family and community support systems, including maternal support networks, may offer additional protection and support for students navigating interpersonal relationships while enrolled in higher education institutions. Furthermore, universities located in Texas border regions are uniquely positioned to implement community-engaged strategies that reflect the lived experiences as well as the social and familial contexts that shape the lives of Hispanic college students.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional design prevents causal inference. Also, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias, a limitation in survey research in which respondents overreport behaviors generally viewed favorably by others and/or underreport behaviors generally viewed unfavorably by others (Gordon, 1987). Moreover, the sample was drawn from a single university, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other Hispanic populations or institutional contexts. Future studies should employ longitudinal designs to better understand causal

pathways, incorporate mixed-methods approaches to capture contextual nuances, and include additional factors such as partner characteristics, relationship duration, and social support networks.

Conclusion

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on IPV among Hispanic college students by identifying key behavioral, familial, and sociocultural predictors of victimization. Substance use and early-life trauma emerged as significant risk factors, while maternal support consistently served as a protective factor. The findings highlight the need for tailored prevention programs that address substance use, family relationships, and acculturation stress within Hispanic college communities. Continued research in this area is essential for informing interventions that promote safe, healthy, and equitable relationships among student populations.

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