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Protective factors in adolescent dating violence: A socio-ecological resilience systematic review

Salsabila Humaira*, Nurliana Cipta Apsari✉, Budi Muhammad Taftazani***, Nurul Husna****, Aniza Nazamuddin*****

*Universitas Padjadjaran, Jawa Barat, Indonesia
Email: salsabilahumaira13@gmail.com
**Universitas Padjadjaran, Jawa Barat, Indonesia
Email: nurliana.apsari@gmail.com
***Universitas Padjadjaran, Jawa Barat, Indonesia
Email: budimtunpad@gmail.com
****Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, Indonesia
Email: nurulhusna@ar-raniry.ac.id
*****University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand
Email: an1051@students.waikato.ac.nz

ABSTRACT

Adolescent dating violence (ADV) is a global issue that seriously impacts the psychological and social well-being of adolescents. To date, scientific literature tends to highlight risk factors, while protective factors that can prevent adolescent involvement in ADV are still limited. Therefore, this study aims to identify, classify, and analyze protective factors in previous studies on ADV in adolescents using Michael Ungar's (2011) socio-ecological resilience framework, which includes seven indicators. The study was conducted using the Systematic Literature Analysis (SLA) method, with data collected from six academic databases (SCOPUS, EBSCO, Cambridge University Press, Taylor & Francis, Sage Journals, and Google Scholar). Of the 711 initial documents, 13 eligible articles were selected for thematic analysis and classified based on Ungar's seven resilience indicators. The results showed that social support from peers, family, and teachers was the most consistent protective factor. This finding was followed by school-based interventions, including emotional intelligence, cultural attachments such as familismo (family cohesion), and meaningful communication with parents, as well as social norms that support collective action against violence. This study revealed that adolescent resilience to ADV is multidimensional and is formed through the interaction between individual capacity and their social environment. Preventive interventions should adopt a holistic approach that

✉ Corresponding author:
Email Address: nurliana.apsari@gmail.com
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emphasizes strengthening support structures, promoting education about healthy relationships, and fostering cultural inclusivity. This study provides a conceptual foundation for ADV prevention policies and programs that are responsive to the socio-ecological context of adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescent Dating Violence (ADV); Protective Factors; Socio-Ecological Resilience; Systematic Literature Review; Michael Ungar.

ABSTRAK

Kekerasan dalam pacaran remaja (ADV) adalah isu global yang berdampak serius terhadap kesejahteraan psikologis dan sosial remaja. Hingga saat ini, literatur ilmiah cenderung menyoroti faktor risiko, sementara faktor pelindung yang dapat mencegah keterlibatan remaja dalam ADV masih terbatas. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi, mengklasifikasikan, dan menganalisis faktor pelindung dalam penelitian sebelumnya tentang ADV pada remaja menggunakan kerangka ketahanan sosio-ekologis Michael Ungar (2011), yang mencakup tujuh indikator. Penelitian ini dilakukan menggunakan metode Analisis Literatur Sistematis (SLA), dengan data yang dikumpulkan dari enam basis data akademik (SCOPUS, EBSCO, Cambridge University Press, Taylor & Francis, Sage Journals, dan Google Scholar). Dari 711 dokumen awal, 13 artikel yang memenuhi syarat dipilih untuk analisis tematik dan diklasifikasikan berdasarkan tujuh indikator ketahanan Ungar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dukungan sosial dari teman sebaya, keluarga, dan guru merupakan faktor pelindung yang paling konsisten. Temuan ini diikuti oleh intervensi berbasis sekolah, termasuk kecerdasan emosional, keterikatan budaya seperti familismo (kohesi keluarga), dan komunikasi yang bermakna dengan orang tua, serta norma sosial yang mendukung tindakan kolektif melawan kekerasan. Studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa ketahanan remaja terhadap ADV bersifat multidimensional dan terbentuk melalui interaksi antara kapasitas individu dan lingkungan sosial mereka. Intervensi pencegahan harus mengadopsi pendekatan holistik yang menekankan penguatan struktur dukungan, mempromosikan pendidikan tentang hubungan yang sehat, dan mendorong inklusivitas budaya. Studi ini memberikan landasan konseptual untuk kebijakan dan program pencegahan ADV yang responsif terhadap konteks sosial-ekologis remaja.

Kata Kunci: Kekerasan dalam Pacaran Remaja; Faktor Pelindung; Resiliensi Socio-Ekologis; Analisis Literatur Sistematis; Michael Ungar.

1. INTRODUCTION

Dating violence (DV) is a form of violence experienced by people in their romantic relationships, including physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, and technology-based violence (digital abuse) (Claussen et al., 2022). Although often invisible in public spaces, this phenomenon is increasingly gaining global attention due to its long-term impact on adolescents'

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mental health. According to a 2024 WHO report cited in The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, approximately 24% of women aged 15-19 worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, making adolescents one of the most vulnerable groups to violence in relationships (Sardinha et al., 2024).

Data from the United States shows that 8.5% of high school students experienced physical violence in dating relationships and 9.7% experienced sexual violence, as reported by the CDC in the Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (Clayton, 2023). Another fact: a report from the American Psychological Association (APA) states that up to 19% of teenagers experience violence in romantic relationships, either physical or sexual (Abrams, 2023). Unfortunately, this figure is estimated to be much higher because many cases go unreported due to fear, shame, or the normalisation of violence in relationships by the surrounding environment (Tandoğan & Yakıt Ak, 2025).

Dating violence during adolescence has serious consequences that manifest across different developmental stages (Kim & Jang, 2025). In the short-term, victims often experience immediate psychological and behavioral disruptions, such as acute anxiety, symptoms of depression, social isolation, and a significant decrease in self-esteem. If left unaddressed, these issues can escalate into long-term consequences that persist into adulthood, including chronic substance abuse, engagement in risky sexual behaviors, and the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Barroso-Corroto et al., 2023).

Most critically, exposure to violence during these formative years often results in the intergenerational transmission of violence, where individuals are statistically more likely to repeat violent relationship patterns in their future adult partnerships (Hébert et al., 2019). Therefore, understanding the factors that may prevent or protect adolescents from engaging in DV becomes increasingly important, particularly in the context of preventive interventions and the promotion of adolescent mental health.

Most existing studies focus primarily on risk factors, such as patriarchal gender norms (Fernet et al., 2019; Sulla et al., 2025), childhood experiences of violence (Sorrentino et al., 2023), partner control (Sardinha et al., 2024), and substance abuse (Barroso-Corroto et al., 2023). However, there is limited attention to protective factors that can minimise the likelihood of becoming a victim or perpetrator of DV. Nevertheless, understanding these protective factors is crucial for developing preventive interventions that focus on strengthening the capacities of adolescents and their communities, rather than simply avoiding risk. In this context, mapping specific vulnerability indicators within the community, such as parenting styles and gender-role orientation, is an essential step toward identifying areas where protective mechanisms can be most effectively implemented (Handayani et al., 2022).

To fill this gap, this study uses Michael Ungar's (2011) resilience theory, which views resilience as the result of interactions between individuals and their social environment. Ungar identified seven key indicators in shaping resilience: (1) access to material resources, (2) relationships, (3) identity, (4) power and control, (5) social justice, (6) cultural adherence, and (7) cohesion. Each indicator offers a protective dimension that can strengthen adolescents' ability to face social pressures and the dynamics of violence in relationships. For instance, the development of critical consciousness and individual agency has been identified as a significant protective factor that enables students to recognize, resist, and address issues of violence within educational environments (Fitri et al., 2021).

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By utilizing Ungar's framework, this study moves beyond the descriptive identification of factors found in previous literature (e.g., Hébert et al., 2019; Goncy et al., 2020) and provides a critical analysis of how these factors interact within the adolescent's broader social ecology. Hence, the primary objective of this study is to identify, classify, and critique various forms of protective factors against dating violence in adolescents as reflected in the current academic literature, using Michael Ungar's resilience framework. This mapping is expected to yield a more holistic understanding of the protective mechanisms operating in the adolescent context and provide an empirical basis for designing school, family, and community-based policies and interventions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Dating Violence in Adolescent Relationships and Protective Factors

Dating violence, or violence in dating relationships, is a form of interpersonal violence that occurs in the context of a non-marital romantic relationship, which involves aggressive actions that are physical, emotional, verbal, relational, sexual, or in the form of threats of violence (Miller et al., 2018). According to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021), dating violence among adolescents can fall into four main categories: physical violence, psychological or emotional abuse, sexual violence, and controlling behaviours such as excessive jealousy or spying on partners. This violence often occurs repeatedly and has significant psychosocial impacts, primarily when it occurs during developmental periods such as adolescence.

In the context of developmental psychology, adolescents are generally defined as individuals aged between 10 and 19 years by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2022). However, some sources, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, extend it to ages 10-24 to accommodate today's social and biological changes (Sawyer et al., 2018). Adolescence is a critical phase of identity formation, emotional regulation, and intense exploration of social relationships, making them a highly vulnerable group to unhealthy relationship dynamics, including dating violence. The complexity of these dynamics suggests that not all adolescents experiencing stress will fall into violence or become perpetrators (Sulla et al., 2025). This stage is where identifying and strengthening protective factors becomes crucial.

Protective factors are multidimensional characteristics- personal, environmental, or social - that mitigate or reduce the likelihood of an adolescent becoming a victim or perpetrator of dating violence (Chan & Wong, 2020). These factors commonly include social support, parental supervision, a sense of belonging at school, and socio-emotional skills such as empathy and perspective-taking. While social support from family, peers, and teachers is consistently identified as a primary buffer, its effectiveness is highly contingent upon the socio-cultural context and the specific gender identities involved (Rutman et al., 2024).

For example, in collectivist or traditional cultures, familial loyalty and community cohesion may provide a more robust shield compared to individualistic settings, whereas for marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ or gender-diverse youth, protection is often more dependent on the presence of inclusive social justice frameworks and safe institutional spaces (Espelage et al., 2018). Furthermore, the impact of these factors often differs across gender identities. For young men, the development of emotional regulation and the deconstruction of toxic masculinity norms serve as key deterrents to perpetration, while for young women and

non-binary adolescents, protective mechanisms are more closely tied to the promotion of agency, self-efficacy, and collective empowerment (Pérez-Martínez et al., 2023).

2.2. Resilience Theory by Michael Ungar

Over the past two decades, Michael Ungar has led the development of a social-ecological approach to resilience, emphasising that resilience is not solely an individual matter but rather the result of a dynamic interaction between individuals and their socio-cultural environment. To understand how adolescents can remain resilient and prevent involvement in abusive relationships, Michael Ungar's resilience theory serves as a relevant theoretical framework. Ungar defines resilience as a dynamic process between individuals and their environments that enables individuals to access resources that support healthy psychosocial functioning, particularly in the face of stress or trauma (Ungar, 2013). In other words, resilience does not solely come from within a person but depends heavily on whether the environment provides the necessary support that is contextually and culturally relevant.

One of Ungar's most significant contributions is the concept of seven tensions of resilience, or seven adaptive tensions that individuals must navigate to demonstrate resilience, which was developed through a multinational study conducted in 14 communities across five continents (Mandie Shean, 2015). The seven tensions include (1) access to material resources; (2) supportive social relations; (3) the formation of personal and collective identities; (4) power and control; (5) social justice; (6) adherence to local culture; and (7) social cohesion. According to Ungar, these tensions are universally present but are resolved in ways that are heavily influenced by cultural norms, local risks, and opportunity structures in each community.

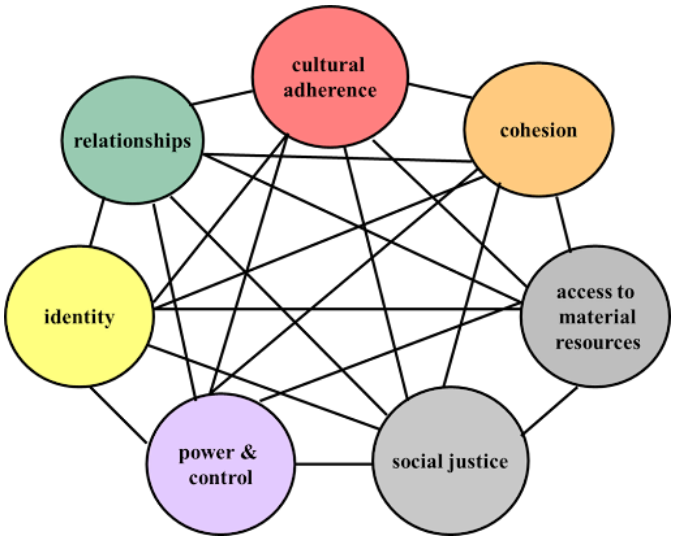

Figure 1. Seven Tensions of Resilience by Ungar (2007).

Ungar's research demonstrates that individuals survive not only through internal mechanisms such as emotion regulation or personality but also through their capacity to navigate complex social systems to obtain support. In this regard, the role of the environment is crucial. For example, positive changes in adolescents that appear to be personal changes are often actually the result of shifts in their social ecology, such as increased social support or decreased social exclusion (Ungar, 2013). Therefore, resilience-based interventions should emphasize changes in the social environment, not solely changes in individual behavior.

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This theoretical framework is particularly relevant for understanding the psychosocial resilience of adolescents experiencing dating violence, as it allows us to explore how protective factors such as supportive relationships, access to services, or cultural identity influence their ability to recover from relational trauma. This approach also allows for forms of resilience that may not align with dominant cultural norms but function adaptively within the adolescents' socially and culturally appropriate context.

While various theories have been used to explain Adolescent Dating Violence (ADV), such as Social Learning Theory or Bowlby's Attachment Theory, they often suffer from an individualistic bias, focusing primarily on internal deficits or past traumas of the victim and perpetrator (Dolmova, 2022). Michael Ungar's (2011) socio-ecological framework is superior for analyzing ADV for several critical reasons.

First, unlike standard socio-ecological models (e.g., Bronfenbrenner's), which often categorize environment layers statically, Ungar emphasizes the dynamic processes of navigation and negotiation. In the context of ADV, resilience is not just an adolescent's internal trait but their capacity to navigate toward resources (like peer support or school counselling) and the environment's readiness to provide those resources in a way that makes sense to the adolescent (Ribeiro et al., 2024).

Second, Ungar's framework addresses the limitations of one-size-fits-all interventions, as many of the dominant cultural norms may not resonate with marginalized youth. Ungar's inclusion of cultural adherence and social justice as core tensions allows for a more nuanced analysis of how power dynamics and cultural expectations (e.g., gender roles or family loyalty) specifically protect or put adolescents at risk (Ungar, 2013). This approach makes the model more relevant than traditional resilience theories that tend to promote a universal, often Western-centric, definition of "healthy" adaptation.

Third, by focusing on the Seven Tensions, this model provides a comprehensive lens that captures the complexity of dating relationships. For instance, the tension of power and control is central to ADV, yet it is often overlooked in general resilience models. Ungar's framework allows to see how an adolescent's sense of agency is not just a psychological state but a result of social justice and access to material resources.

2.3. Previous Systematic Literature Review Research on Dating Violence

Research on dating violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) has grown rapidly, with a primary focus on identifying risk factors, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Claussen et al. (2022), in a systematic review of 20 articles that took place in Europe and America, found that most ADV studies focused on risk factors at the individual and relationship levels, while few explored protective factors, particularly at the community and societal levels. This study also highlighted that previous research tended to be risk-focused and had not widely adopted a strengths-based approach. The review highlights the urgent need for a more comprehensive understanding of protective factors.

Meanwhile, Hébert et al. (2019) in a meta-analysis of 87 studies in America also identified various family and peer factors that play a role in both risk and protection for DV victims, such as parental support, monitoring, and prosocial relationships. While this contribution is important, its primary focus is limited to interpersonal variables without directly linking them to the theoretical framework of resilience. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Goncy et

al. (2020) found a significant association between parental aggression toward children and violent behavior in dating relationships in the Western-aligned countries, but this study still did not incorporate a theoretical model of positive adaptation or psychosocial resilience (Goncy et al., 2021).

A study by Gerino et al. (2018) examining some studies from Southeast Asia, North America, Europe, and Africa found that IPV in older adults found that social support and access to community services were key protective factors. However, this study also did not use a resilience-based theoretical approach, instead emphasizing contextual and structural variables such as economic status, parenting stress, and intergenerational trauma (Gerino et al., 2018). Even in studies examining cyber IPV (Fernet et al., 2019), it was found that although forms of violence are increasingly complex, research on protective factors remains very limited.

Therefore, it can be concluded that although many studies have identified risk factors and some have touched on protective factors, none have explicitly used a resilience theoretical framework, particularly Michael Ungar's ecological resilience theory, to explain how adolescents face and overcome dating violence. This gap provides an important basis for this study to adopt a resilience approach as the primary lens in understanding and categorizing protective factors against dating violence in adolescents.

3. METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Analysis (SLA) approach, adhering to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The SLA approach was specifically chosen because it allows for a rigorous and comprehensive synthesis of diverse findings regarding protective factors, a topic that is often fragmented and overshadowed by risk-focused studies in Adolescent Dating Violence (ADV) literature. By using SLA, this study can bridge the gap between various empirical findings and provide a structured, strengths-based overview that is replicable and transparent.

3.1. Search Strategy and Data Sources

Data were searched through six leading academic databases: SCOPUS, Cambridge University Press, EBSCO, Taylor & Francis, Sage Journals, and Google Scholar. The search utilized a combination of keywords: The article search was conducted using a combination of keywords such as "("*dating violence*" OR "*teen dating violence*" OR "*intimate partner violence*") AND ("*protective factors*", OR "*resilience"* OR "*promotive factors"* OR "*buffer"*) AND ("*adolescence"* OR "*adolescents"* OR "*teenagers"* OR *"teens"* OR "*youth"*).

3.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To systematically screen the 711 initial documents identified, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. These criteria served as the primary filter to ensure the quality and relevance of the final articles. The inclusion criteria in this search were: (1) Peer-reviewed research articles published between 2015-2025; (2) Written in English; (3) Focused on the adolescent population (approx. 10-24 years); (4) Explicitly discussed and identified protective factors against dating violence; and (5) Relevant to the social sciences field.

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Meanwhile, exclusion criteria were set to clarify the limitations of the analysis, namely: (1) Articles focusing solely on risk factors or consequences (e.g., PTSD, depression) without addressing protective mechanisms; (2) Studies involving adult populations or non-romantic relationship violence; (3) Gray literature such as editorials, policy reports, or book reviews; (4) Studies focusing on specialized clinical populations (e.g., veterans or prisoners); and (5) Articles where the full text was unavailable.

3.3. Screening and Selection Process

The selection process followed three rigorous stages: (1) title screening, (2) abstract screening, and (3) full-text evaluation. Initial results from the databases yielded a total of 711 documents (Scopus: 48; Cambridge: 36; EBSCO: 6; Taylor & Francis: 391; Google Scholar: 230). After removing duplicates and applying the inclusion/exclusion criteria during the title and abstract screening, 40 articles were retained for full-text reading.

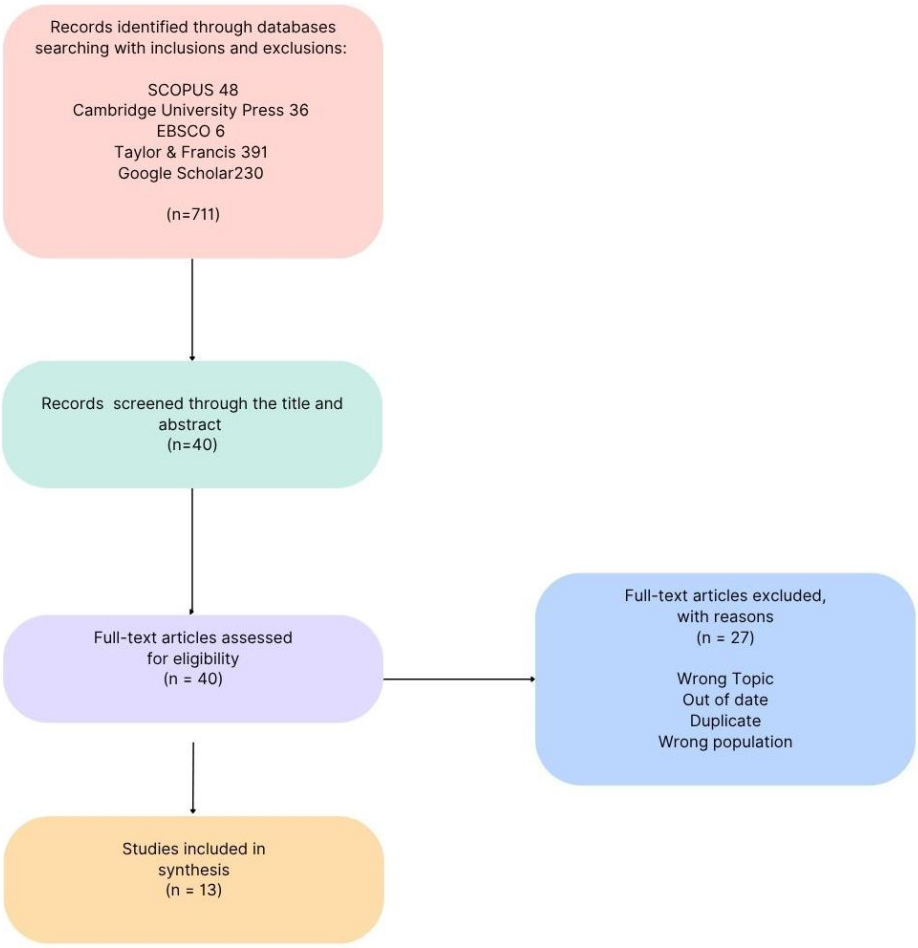

Figure 2. Prisma Diagram.

The final critical sieve involved a detailed full-text assessment to ensure each article provided empirical data on protective factors compatible with the chosen theoretical framework. After this final stage, 13 articles were deemed eligible for in-depth analysis. The distribution of the final articles is as follows: Taylor & Francis (4), Cambridge University Press (3), Google Scholar (3), Scopus (2), and EBSCO (1). These articles were then analyzed thematically using Michael Ungar's social-ecological resilience framework.

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4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Findings

This study reviewed 13 international academic articles discussing various protective factors against dating violence (DV) among adolescents, with participants ranging in age from 13 to 25. The studies covered diverse geographic and cultural contexts, including Europe, the United States, Canada, Spain, Sweden, Brazil, and Hong Kong. Overall, the findings suggest that protective factors against DV originate not only from the individual but also from the broader social environment. Social support from peers, parents, teachers, and the community was a dominant factor consistently mentioned in most studies. Furthermore, educational interventions such as school programs, assertiveness skills training, and healthy relationship education play a significant role in shaping adolescents' safe behaviors in romantic relationships.

Table 1.
Studies on protective factors.

References	Tittle	Sample of Participants	Protective Factors Findings
(Boyce et al., 2022) California	Relationship Factors Associated With Early Adolescent Dating Violence Victimization and Perpetration Among Latinx Youth in an Agricultural Community	296 female students of 8th grade Junior High School students Age: 13-15th Years old	Social connectedness with friends and family, healthy relationship expectations, school interventions, increasing assertiveness skills, and relationship knowledge for adolescent girls.
(Psychogiou et al., 2022) Canada	Adolescents' internalizing symptoms predict dating violence victimization and perpetration 2 years later	974 Adolescents source by Québec Institute of Statistics; ISQ. Age: 13-17th Years old	Social support, academic competence, assertiveness, cognitive/interpersonal therapy, and universal programs for forming healthy romantic relationships.
(Ibabe et al., 2016) Spain	Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Adaptation to Basque Population and Sexism as a Risk Factor of Dating Violence	1378 college students (66% of whom were women) Age: 17-30th Years old	Benevolent sexism in women, understanding the bidirectionality of DV, education on healthy relationships, and non-violent conflict resolution for both genders.
(Rubio-Garay et al., 2019) Madrid	The Contribution of Moral Disengagement to Dating Violence and General Aggression: The Gender and Age Moderating Effects	424 participants (38.9% boys and 61.1% girls) Age: 15-25th Years old	Emotional bonds in relationships, older age, high levels of social desirability, and internal moral values as protection against violence.
(Boyce et al., 2023) California	Multi-Level Protective and Risk Factors Longitudinally	489 Adolescents of 8th grade students	Family cohesion (familismo), family orientation in

	Associated with Dating Violence Perpetration among Non-Urban Mexican-American Adolescents		adolescent girls, and non-violent problem-solving skills.
(Vives-Cases et al., 2021) Europe	Dating Violence Victimization among Adolescents in Europe: Baseline Results from the Lights4Violence Project	1555 students of high school from: Spain, Italy, Romania, Portugal & Poland Age: 13-16th Years old	Social support from parents and teachers (external assets), violence education at school, access to protective resources, and positive relationships with trusted adults.
(Blázquez-Alonso et al., 2018) Spain	Emotional Intelligence as a Protective Factor Against Psychological Maltreatment in Dating Couples According to Age	1080 students of the University of Extremadura (Spain) Age: 17 and 23 years old	Emotional intelligence, negative emotion management, relationship satisfaction, and social-emotional competency education as primary prevention.
(Banyard et al., 2020) New England	Context Matters: Reactive and Proactive Bystander Action to Prevent Sexual and Dating Violence in High Schools	Participants were 3,404 high school students from 25 schools in northern New England Age: 13 and 19 years old	Support of positive social norms from peers, empathy, readiness to act, peer leader involvement, and proactive action in violence prevention.
(Rutman et al., 2024) Hongkong	Examining risk and protective factors on progression of romantic relational aggression among young adults: Parental control, parental care, and peer social support	84 participants. Participants Age: from 18 to 24	Social support from peers as a buffer against the negative impacts of parental control and psychosocial stress (stress-buffering).
(Rutman et al., 2024) America	Experiences of Dating Violence and Protective Factors Among Adolescents in Vulnerable Contexts	13,027 participants Age: 14-21 Years Old	Meaningful communication with parents/guardians and prosocial friendships as moderate protectors against ADV.
(Korkmaz & Överlien, 2020) Sweden	Responses to youth intimate partner violence: the meaning of youth-specific factors and interconnections with resilience	19 Young people Age: 17-23 Years Old	Parental support, positive school responses, adolescent coping strategies (paradoxical resilience), and contextual factors such as family dependency and the school environment.
(Espelage et al., 2018) Wisconsin	Peer Victimization and Dating Violence Among LGBTQ Youth: The	11,794 high school students from Dane	Support for inclusive schools, the presence of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), and

	Impact of School Violence and Crime on Mental Health Outcomes	County. Age: 14-18 Years Old	decreased use of homophobic language are protective factors for LGBTQ youth.
(Espelage et al., 2020) Midwestern	Teen Dating Violence Perpetration: Protective Factor Trajectories from Middle to High School among Adolescents	1,668 students from four Midwestern middle schools Age: 14-18 Years Old	Social support, parental supervision, empathy, and sense of belonging to school; protective effects vary by type of TDV and gender.
(dos Santos et al., 2019) Brazil	Efficacy of a bystander intervention for preventing dating violence in Brazilian adolescents: short-term evaluation	33 students Age: 14-18 Years Old	Helping intention, empathy, sympathetic attitude as a bystander, and perspective-taking as potential protective components although the intervention results are not yet significant.

Some protective factors also reflect personal abilities, such as emotional intelligence, emotion regulation, and the ability to resolve conflicts without violence. Meanwhile, cultural values such as familismo or even benevolent sexism appear ambiguous, demonstrating a protective effect on one hand while reinforcing traditional gender structures that pose risks. Other findings highlight the role of an inclusive school climate, adolescent participation in support groups, and bystander intervention approaches as forms of active engagement in violence prevention. At the family level, family cohesion and meaningful communication with parents have consistently been shown to be protective against DV. These findings are then classified into seven resilience indicators according to Michael Ungar's (2011) theory, which will be discussed further in the following subsection.

Table 2.
Finding identified to Resillience factor of Ungar (2013).

References	Access to Material Resources	Relationships	Identity	Power & Control	Social Justice	Cultural Adherence	Cohesion
(Boyce et al., 2022)		Strong social connectedness with peers and family	Awareness of one's values and rights as a woman	Assertive skills			
(Psychogiou et al., 2022)	Cognitive behavioral therapy and interpersonal therapy		Proud of academic accomplishments	Academic competence and assertiveness skills			
(Ibabe et al., 2016)			Traditional beliefs about the "protected" role of women		Education on healthy relationships and non-violent conflict resolution for both genders.	Traditional beliefs about the "protected" role of women	
(Rubio-Garay et al., 2019)		Emotional bond in romantic relationships			High level of social desirability	Strong internal social norms and	Internal norms and the desire to be accepted

						moral values	
(Boyce et al., 2023)		Family cohesion	Peaceful person	Ability to solve problems non-violently		Ident The cultural value of familismo is loyalty between family members. ified	
(Vives-Cases et al., 2021)	Violence education programs and how to access protection resources	Social support from parents and teachers,			The right to education, protection from violence and equal access		
(Blázquez-Alonso et al., 2018)				Emotional intelligence			
(Banyard et al., 2020)		Support of positive social norms from peers		Empathy, a positive outlook towards helping actions, and a readiness to act	Peer leadership and active student involvement in prevention programs		
(Chan & Wong, 2020)		Social support from peers (peer social support).					
(Rutman et al., 2024)		Meaningful communication with parents/guardians and prosocial friendships.					
(Korkmaz & Överlien, 2020)		Social responses provided by parents, schools, and adolescents themselves. Parental support, such as the mother's active actions helping children out of violent situations	Maintaining academic achievement (as identity, self-esteem, and life goals)	Avoiding dangerous situations			
(Espelage et al., 2018)	LGBTQ support groups such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAS).	Support from the school environment			Reducing the use of homophobic language in bullying prevention programs		The existence of LGBTQ support groups such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAS) (Sense of belonging to the community)
(Espelage et al., 2020)		Social support, parental monitoring	Empathy				Sense of belonging to school (school belonging)
(dos Santos et al., 2019)			Intention to help, empathy, sympathetic attitude as a bystander	Perspective-taking ability.			

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4.1.1. Access to Material Resources

The indicator of access to material resources as a protective factor was explicitly found in three studies: Psychogiou et al. (2023), Vives-Cases et al. (2021), and Espelage (2018). These studies highlight that a school environment providing access to services and information is key to strengthening adolescent resilience. Specifically, the '*Lights4Violence*' project demonstrates that school-based interventions are increasingly incorporating curriculum designed to deconstruct sexist attitudes and 'machismo' as a primary preventive measure against dating (Vives-Cases et al., 2021).

Furthermore, existing school-based programs are suggested to expand their scope beyond relationship skills to include mental health support that targets internalizing symptoms, such as anxiety and depression, which often precede involvement in violent dynamics (Psychogiou et al., 2022). Lastly, effective prevention requires a curriculum that fosters a safe school climate by actively addressing broader forms of aggression, including peer victimization and identity-based harassment (Espelage et al., 2018). This suggests that access to structured educational programs and supportive institutional resources is essential in mitigating the risks of dating violence.

4.1.2. Relationships

The relationship dimension emerged as the most dominant indicator, identified in 11 of the 13 studies. In this context, healthy interpersonal relationships are defined as social bonds characterized by high levels of warmth, mutual respect, and prosocial behavior (Chan & Wong, 2020). These relationships serve a critical protective intention by acting as an emotional buffer and a source of social monitoring. For instance, Chan & Wong (2020) found that parental care marked by affection and responsiveness protects adolescents by fostering better emotional regulation, which reduces the tendency to engage in relational aggression.

Similarly, the benefit of having prosocial friendships and meaningful communication with parents lies in providing adolescents with a safe space to discuss relationship dynamics, allowing supportive adults or peers to intervene or provide guidance when early signs of abuse appear (Rutman et al., 2024). Furthermore, family connectedness and parental monitoring act as a form of intentional protection that limits exposure to risky dating environments without being overly controlling (Boyce et al., 2022).

In the school setting, positive teacher-student relationships contribute to a safe climate that empowers adolescents to reject violent norms, such as *machismo* (in latin) or the acceptance of violence, by providing a healthy model of authority and support (Vives-Cases et al., 2021). Thus, healthy relationships protect adolescents not just through their presence, but through the active promotion of self-worth and the modeling of non-violent conflict resolution.

4.1.3. Identity

Ten of the 13 studies indicated the importance of identity formation as a critical protective mechanism against dating violence. This mechanism reveals that identity acts as an internal compass that guides adolescent behavior through three specific pathways. First, identity construction through emotional intelligence enables adolescents to develop strong self-management and emotional regulation skills. This allows them to anticipate and withdraw from potentially violent relationship dynamics before conflicts escalate (Blázquez-Alonso et al.,

2018). Second, gender awareness specifically the rejection of ambivalent sexism (both hostile and benevolent) protects adolescents by deconstructing traditional identities that normalize power imbalances (Ibabe et al., 2016).

By developing an identity that is critical of sexist norms, adolescents are less likely to perceive a partner's controlling behavior as a form of romance or protection. Lastly, a sense of belonging to the school strengthens an adolescent's social identity. Those who feel connected to their school institution are more likely to adopt prosocial values and utilize institutional support systems when navigating dating conflicts (Espelage et al., 2020). Thus, identity as a core part of self-awareness enables adolescents to maintain a healthier assessment of relationships and the ability to make more autonomous decisions when facing conflict.

4.1.4. Power and Control

The power and control aspects were identified in 6 studies, including the assertiveness ability indicator (Boyce et al., 2022; Psychogiou et al., 2022), defensive strategies (Korkmaz & Överlien, 2020), and understanding the role of a bystander (dos Santos et al., 2019). These findings underscore that an individual's ability to navigate power dynamics in relationships is an important skill that can be trained as part of primary prevention. Regarding the specific vulnerable groups identified in these studies, Latinx youth in agricultural communities are noted as particularly susceptible to TDV due to unique socio-cultural and regional stressors (Boyce et al., 2022).

Additionally, adolescents of both genders who exhibit internalizing symptoms, such as depression and anxiety, are at a higher risk for future victimization (Psychogiou et al., 2022). Furthermore, adolescent girls are frequently identified as a primary victim group, particularly in the context of gender-related partner violence, making the mastery of defensive and resistance strategies a vital protective skill for their self-protection (Korkmaz & Överlien, 2020). Consequently, strengthening power and control is an essential skill that enables adolescents, especially girls and those in marginalized or vulnerable contexts, to safeguard their autonomy and protect themselves from violent dynamics.

4.1.5. Social Justice

Indicators of social justice emerged in 8 studies, with concrete examples such as the influence of collective peer norms (Banyard et al., 2020), gender equality education, and the role of Gay-Straight Alliances (Espelage et al., 2018) as a specific protector for LGBTQ groups. A social justice-based approach encourages structural and normative change in the communities where adolescents grow up.

4.1.6. Cultural Adherence

Cultural adherence was identified in 6 studies. Several studies emphasized the value of *familismo* within Latinx communities, which prioritizes family loyalty, solidarity, and high levels of attachment; this cultural value acts as a protective factor by fostering strong parental monitoring and family support, which buffers adolescents against the risks of dating violence (Boyce et al., 2022). Regarding the internalization of traditional moral values, research indicates that these values serve as a cognitive barrier against moral disengagement. Specifically, adolescents with high moral standards are less likely to employ cognitive

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mechanisms such as rationalization, moral justification, or the depersonalization of a partner to excuse or facilitate aggressive behavior (Rubio-Garay et al., 2019).

Furthermore, traditional gender norms are often examined through the lens of ambivalent sexism, particularly *benevolent sexism*. While this norm is rooted in gender inequality, it prescribes a protective and chivalrous role for men toward women. In certain traditional contexts, this belief may paradoxically serve as a deterrent to overt physical violence, as the cultural framework dictates that women should be protected rather than harmed (Ibabe et al., 2016). These findings suggest that certain cultural values, while not always progressive, can still provide a protective role depending on the context and the specific behavioral standards they enforce.

4.1.7. Cohesion

Cohesion as a protective factor was identified in 3 studies, specifically within the contexts of family, school, and the broader social environment. The protective power of cohesion lies in its ability to create a collective shield that reinforces prosocial norms and provides emotional security. First, Family Cohesion: In Latinx communities, family cohesion is often linked to the value of *familismo* that serves as a primary defense against dating violence. High levels of family solidarity and emotional attachment facilitate better parental monitoring, which has been shown to significantly reduce the likelihood of both victimization and perpetration by limiting exposure to high-risk social settings (Boyce et al., 2022).

Second, School Cohesion: A strong sense of school belonging acts as a longitudinal protector. Adolescents who perceive their school as a cohesive and supportive community tend to follow prosocial trajectories. This cohesion prevents the normalization of aggression, as students who feel they belong are more likely to internalize the school's non-violent values and are less likely to engage in verbal or physical dating violence as they transition from middle to high school (Espelage et al., 2020).

Third, Inclusive Social Cohesion: For marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ youth, cohesion takes the form of an inclusive and safe social climate. In environments where school violence and crime are low, and where there is a collective effort to reduce peer victimization (such as bullying or homophobic teasing), the minority stress that often leads to risky relationship dynamics is mitigated. This inclusive cohesion directly correlates with lower rates of suicidality and victimization among sexual minority youth (Espelage et al., 2018).

Table 3.
Summary of Findings Classification.

Resilience By Ungar	Access to Material Resources
Access to Material Resources	(Psychogiou et al., 2022); (Vives-Cases et al., 2021); (Espelage et al., 2018)
Relationships	(Rutman et al., 2024); (Boyce et al., 2023); (Boyce et al., 2022); (Vives-Cases et al., 2021); (Banyard et al., 2020); (Chan & Wong, 2020); (Espelage et al., 2020); (Rubio-Garay et al., 2019); (Espelage et al., 2018)

Identity	(Boyce et al., 2023); (Boyce et al., 2022); (Psychogiou et al., 2022); (Korkmaz & Överliien, 2020); (Espelage et al., 2020); (dos Santos et al., 2019); (Ibabe et al., 2016)
Power & Control	(Boyce et al., 2023); (Boyce et al., 2022); (Psychogiou et al., 2022); (Banyard et al., 2020); (Korkmaz & Överliien, 2020); (dos Santos et al., 2019); (Blázquez-Alonso et al., 2018)
Social Justice	(Vives-Cases et al., 2021); (Banyard et al., 2020); (Rubio-Garay et al., 2019); (Espelage et al., 2018); (Ibabe et al., 2016)
Cultural Adherence	(Boyce et al., 2023); (Rubio-Garay et al., 2019); (Ibabe et al., 2016)
Cohesion	(Espelage et al., 2020); (Rubio-Garay et al., 2019); (Espelage et al., 2018)

4.2. Discussion

Findings from the 13 studies in this systematic review indicate that protective factors against dating violence (DV) are distributed diversely across the seven resilience domains proposed by Michael Ungar (2011). Although most articles do not explicitly use resilience terminology, mapping the findings suggests interventions or protective conditions that align with these resilience dimensions.

4.2.1. Michael Ungar (2011) Seven Resilience

4.2.1.1. Dominance of Interpersonal Relations and Emptiness of Structural Dimensions

The relationships dimension was the most dominant category, found in 11 of the 13 articles. This indicates that academic literature tends to place social support from peers, family, and teachers as the primary foundation for building adolescent resilience against relationship violence. This finding aligns with Ungar's approach, which emphasizes the importance of supportive social relationships. However, the dominance of this dimension also indicates a psychosocial bias in the adolescent resilience approach, where broader social structures such as access to material resources and social justice are often overlooked or under-elaborated in research designs.

In fact, in a global context, particularly for vulnerable adolescents in poor, migrant, or LGBTQ+ communities, access to mental health services, school safety, and legal protection is crucial. Only three studies explicitly mention the protective role of material access (Psychogiou et al., 2023; Vives-Cases et al., 2021; Espelage, 2018), yet Ungar emphasized that resilience is not only the result of psychological adaptation but also a consequence of equitable access to structural resources. This gap emphasizes the need to deconstruct overly individualistic approaches to resilience and strengthen the structural dimension in research on adolescent relationship violence.

Furthermore, these dimensions must be scrutinized through a gender perspective, as the protective nature of relationships and resources is often gender-dependent. Current research suggests that while social support is a universal protector, the mechanisms of risk and resilience differ; for instance, adolescent girls are more frequently socialized to prioritize relational harmony, which may lead them to misinterpret *'benevolent sexism',* such as extreme

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possessiveness or protection, as a positive relationship trait rather than a precursor to violence (Ibabe et al., 2016).

Conversely, boys may face a school climate where *machismo* or traditional masculine norms discourage them from seeking the very social support identified as a primary protector (Vives-Cases et al., 2021). Without integrating a gender-transformative approach that deconstructs these power imbalances, the dominance of the relationship dimension in literature risks overlooking how traditional gender socialization can simultaneously act as both a bond and a barrier to genuine resilience.

4.2.1.2. Identity and Social Norms

The identity dimension occupies a significant position, identified in 10 studies. Identity is formed through emotional intelligence (Blázquez-Alonso et al., 2018), affiliation with positive social norms (Banyard et al., 2020), and even traditional values such as benevolent sexism (Ibabe et al., 2016), highlighting that adolescent identity construction is not neutral. On one hand, a strong identity can protect against DV by enabling adolescents to resist violence. However, the reliance on benevolent sexism as a protective identity is deeply problematic. While it may reduce physical aggression in the short term by prescribing chivalrous protection of women, it simultaneously reinforces the status quo of gender inequality by positioning women as weak and in need of male oversight (Ibabe et al., 2016).

This necessitates a more critical elaboration of the ideological dimension of resilience. If an adolescent's resilience is built upon traditional gender roles, it may result in a protective trap where violence is avoided only as long as the victim adheres to submissive behaviors. Furthermore, when adolescents internalize identities based on moral disengagement, they may develop a resilient self-image that paradoxically allows them to rationalize verbal or emotional aggression as normal relationship management (Rubio-Garay et al., 2019).

Therefore, expanding Ungar's approach requires a distinction between adaptive resilience, which merely helps an adolescent survive within an unequal system, and transformative resilience, which empowers them to challenge the gendered power dynamics that fuel dating violence in the first place. Not all forms of protection are progressive. Some may actually perpetuate the very structural inequalities that make adolescents vulnerable.

4.2.1.3. Power and Control

Six studies identified indicators of power and control, including assertiveness, defensive strategies, and bystander responses. This underscores the importance of strengthening adolescents' agency, both in the context of romantic relationships and broader social interactions. The transition from a victim-centered to an empowerment-centered approach moves the focus away from simply teaching adolescents how to avoid victimization. Instead, it prioritizes the development of relational power, the capacity to negotiate boundaries, express needs, and utilize resistance strategies when those boundaries are crossed (Korkmaz & Överlien, 2020).

This empowerment is particularly critical for vulnerable groups, such as adolescent girls and Latinx youth in marginalized communities, who may face higher systemic risks of dating violence (Boyce et al., 2022). By fostering assertiveness and emotional regulation, prevention programs empower these individuals to counteract internalizing symptoms, like anxiety and

depression, that frequently increase their vulnerability to both victimization and perpetration (Psychogiou et al., 2022).

However, this approach must be critically examined to ensure it does not overemphasize individual adolescent responsibility without accompanying structural changes. For example, a study by dos Santos et al. (2019) showed that bystander-based interventions have not always yielded significant short-term results, likely because the intent to help is often stifled by a lack of strong institutional support or a social climate that remains unresponsive to violence. In other words, strengthening individual capacity (agency) must go hand in hand with the creation of a supportive social ecosystem; without collective school and community support, the burden of staying safe is unfairly placed on the shoulders of the most vulnerable adolescents.

4.2.1.4. Social Justice and Inclusion

The social justice dimension emerged in eight studies, particularly regarding the existence of inclusive programs such as *Gay-Straight Alliances* (Espelage et al., 2018) or gender equality education (Ibabe et al., 2016). These findings suggest that collective norms and inclusive school environments have a significant protective effect, particularly for marginalized groups. However, challenges lie in program sustainability, cultural resistance, and limited policy support. To overcome these challenges, there is a critical need to promote and institutionalize gender equality education that goes beyond individual awareness to address the root of social injustice. Gender equality education serves as a structural intervention by directly challenging the *machismo* and ambivalent sexism that often permeate school climates and hinder the effectiveness of prevention programs (Vives-Cases et al., 2021).

By deconstructing traditional gender roles and power imbalances, this education provides a common language for both students and educators to resist the normalization of violence (Ibabe et al., 2016). Furthermore, integrating gender equality into the core curriculum helps mitigate cultural resistance by transforming it from a peripheral activity into a fundamental institutional value. Ungar's contextually oriented resilience approach has not been widely elaborated in the context of structural resistance or collective mobilization for social justice. This suggests the need to expand resilience theory to better explain collective resilience, where the promotion of gender equality is viewed not just as a lesson but as a necessary structural shift to create an environment where individual resilience can actually thrive.

4.2.1.5. Cultural Cohesion and Adherence

Four studies demonstrated the role of cohesion, particularly family or school cohesion, as a protective factor. This aligns with the concept of cohesion in Ungar's theory, which refers to social integration as a source of emotional stability. Cultural adherence also emerged in six studies, with examples such as the value of *familismo* or conservative moral norms. However, culturally based protection needs to be examined with caution through a more detailed ecological lens.

While cultural adherence provides a sense of identity and belonging, it can paradoxically limit an adolescent's agency if the cultural framework is built upon rigid gender hierarchies. For example, while *familismo* acts as a protective shield by increasing parental monitoring and family support (Boyce et al., 2022), it can also discourage victims from

reporting violence if doing so is perceived as bringing shame to the family unit or disrupting domestic harmony.

Similarly, adherence to traditional moral values can prevent moral disengagement by setting high behavioral standards (Rubio-Garay et al., 2019), yet it may also foster *benevolent sexism* where protection is exchanged for female submissiveness (Ibabe et al., 2016). Ungar himself emphasized that resilience should enable individuals to live meaningfully within their social context while also having the power to navigate and negotiate for the resources they need (Ungar, 2013).

Therefore, cultural adherence is only a healthy resilience factor when it provides social safety without demanding the sacrifice of individual autonomy or the acceptance of structural inequality. Future prevention efforts must distinguish between repressive adherence, which maintains safety through silence and control, and empowering adherence, which utilizes cultural strengths like family solidarity to advocate for non-violence and gender equity.

4.2.2. Implications for Gender Equality and Social Policy

The synthesis of the 13 analyzed articles reveals that protective factors are not merely individual traits but are deeply embedded in the socio-political fabric of adolescents' lives. For gender equality policies, these findings suggest a critical shift from victim-blaming or individualistic behavioral interventions toward systemic ecological transformation. Policies should not only focus on teaching girls' assertiveness (Power and Control) but must prioritize Social Justice by institutionalizing gender-equitable norms within school curriculum and community programs.

Moreover, the finding of Material Resources is underrepresented suggests that gender equality cannot be achieved without equitable access to services. Policy-makers must ensure that mental health and legal support are accessible to marginalized groups, including LGBTQ+ and migrant youth, and also every adolescent regardless of their background to bridge the gap between individual agency and structural protection. Effective policy must therefore foster identity formation that actively deconstructs traditional gender hierarchies, replacing *benevolent sexism* with transformative gender roles that empower all adolescents to navigate relationships safely.

4.2.3. Comparative Analysis: Socio-Ecological Resilience vs. Conventional Understanding

Comparing these findings with the current understanding mentioned in the introduction (e.g., Claussen et al., 2022; Hébert et al., 2019), this study highlights a significant theoretical departure. While traditional ADV research, often rooted in social learning theory or individual risk models, focuses heavily on the transmission of violence and individual deficits, our findings through the lens of Ungar's (2011) framework emphasize strengths-based navigation. Unlike the interpersonal-heavy focus found in previous meta-analyses (Goncy et al., 2021), this study identifies that resilience is a product of negotiation between the adolescent and their environment.

However, our analysis also confirms the psychosocial bias identified in the introduction; even though we used a socio-ecological lens, the literature still leans heavily toward interpersonal relations, leaving a structural vacuum in the areas of social justice and material access. This comparison validates the initial argument of this study that while protective factors

exist, they are currently understood in a fragmented way that lacks the holistic integration of power, culture, and social structure offered by the socio-ecological resilience model.

5. CONCLUSION

A systematic review of 13 international academic articles indicates that dating violence (DV) among adolescents is a complex phenomenon that cannot be understood solely in terms of risk. Instead, a protective factors-based approach allows for a more constructive and solution-oriented perspective, emphasizing the capacity of adolescents and their environments to build resilience. Using Michael Ungar's (2011) resilience theory framework, it was found that the seven resilience indicators -access to material resources, supportive social relationships, identity formation, power and control, social justice, cultural connectedness, and social cohesion -were reflected in diverse study findings. Factors such as social support from family and peers, emotional and interpersonal skills, and school-based interventions were the most frequently identified protective factors against DV. In certain contexts, cultural values such as *familismo* and traditional gender norms also have ambivalent contributions, requiring a contextual and non-simplistic approach.

Critically, these results demonstrate that dating violence prevention programs cannot be one-dimensional. Effective interventions need to be intersectoral and holistic, strengthening structural supports from schools and families and enhancing adolescents' capacity to build healthy and equitable relationships. Furthermore, strengthening adolescents' identities, embracing diversity (such as in the case of LGBTQ youth), and promoting social justice must be part of intervention designs that are sensitive to vulnerabilities and cultural contexts.

To ensure the sustainability of these interventions, there is an urgent need for formal policy commitment among stakeholders, including educational authorities, healthcare providers, and community leaders. Policy-level integration is essential to move beyond fragmented, short-term projects toward institutionalized protections that provide a legal and financial framework for gender equality education and school safety.

Without such commitment, inclusive initiatives like *Gay-Straight Allian*ces or *bystander programs* remain vulnerable to shifting political climates and cultural resistance. Thus, this article emphasizes the importance of understanding protective mechanisms in preventing adolescent dating violence. Furthermore, this research encourages the development of intervention policies and practices that focus not only on risk reduction but also on empowerment and building adaptive and sustainable support systems at the individual, institutional, and community levels.

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