Development and Validity Evidence of the Myths of Romantic Love Multidimensional Scale (MRL-MS) in Young Chileans

Desarrollo y evidencias de validez de la Escala Multidimensional Mitos del Amor Romántico (MRL-MS) en jóvenes chilenos

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Abstract

Romantic love myths refer to culturally shared beliefs about love, falling in love and relationships. Their study and evaluation are of utmost importance, given that they have been recognized as a risk factor in dating violence with serious implications for the well-being and mental health of young people. The aim of the present study was therefore to develop a scale to evaluate beliefs about romantic love, establishing evidence of reliability and validity for the interpretation of the scores obtained. An instrumental cross-sectional design was carried out, applying the Multidimensional Romantic Love Myths Scale (MRL-MS) to a sample of 1001 Chilean young people between 18 and 25 years of age. As a result, a scale composed of 40 items assessing 8 interrelated dimensions was obtained, with evidence of validity based on internal structure, adequate levels of reliability, and evidence of metric and scalar invariance between sexes. Finally, the limitations of the study are discussed and possible applications and guidelines for future research are proposed.

Keywords: romantic love myths, dating violence, psychometric evidence, adolescence.

Resumen:

Los mitos del amor romántico refieren a creencias culturalmente compartidas sobre el amor, el enamoramiento y las relaciones de pareja. Su estudio y evaluación son de suma importancia, dado que se han reconocido como un factor de riesgo en la violencia en el noviazgo con graves implicancia en el bienestar y salud mental de los jóvenes. Por tanto, el objetivo del presente estudio es desarrollar una escala que permita evaluar las creencias sobre el amor romántico, estableciendo evidencias de fiabilidad y validez para la interpretación de las puntuaciones obtenidas. Se llevó a cabo un diseño transversal de tipo instrumental, aplicando la Escala Multidimensional Mitos del Amor Romántico (MRL-MS) a una muestra de 1001 jóvenes chilenos entre 18 y 25 años. Como resultado, se obtuvo una escala compuesta por 40 ítems que evalúan 8 dimensiones interrelacionadas, con evidencia de validez basada en la estructura interna, adecuados niveles de fiabilidad, y evidencias de invarianza métrica y escalar entre sexos. Finalmente, se discuten las limitaciones del estudio y se proponen posibles aplicaciones y directrices para futuras investigaciones.

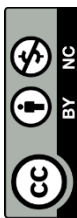Palabras clave: mitos del amor romántico, violencia en el noviazgo, evidencias psicométricas, adolescencia.

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Introduction

Dating violence refers to violence that occurs between couples, commonly adolescents and young people, who do not have economic dependence, legal ties or mutual cohabitation (Dodaj et al., 2020). In recent decades this problem has taken on great relevance, being recognized as a serious public health problem (Dosil, et. al., 2020; Murray, 2019), with notorious impacts on the physical and mental health of young people and associated with depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, stress, decreased quality of life and psychological well-being, as well as certain risk behaviors, such as substance and alcohol use, early initiation of sexual relations, early pregnancy, transmission of sexual diseases, among others (e. g. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Niolon, et. al., 2019; Taquette & Monteiro, 2019; Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, 2018; Rojas et al., 2017).

Among factors linked with dating violence, myths of romantic love play a fundamental role. These myths are related to a set of beliefs that refer to ideas assumed by society, which individuals encounter during their development and adopt as their understanding of reality (Díez, 2017). These beliefs carry significant emotional weight and often contribute to shaping and maintaining the group's ideology (Bosch and Ferrer, 2008).

Yela (2003) define myths of romantic love as a compilation of socially shared beliefs about the the supposed true nature of love. Ferrer et al. (2010) point out that myths of romantic love share similarities with other myths in being fictitious, absurd, deceptive, and irrational, making them difficult to fulfill. They are presented in a dogmatic manner, resistant to changes and reasoning, presenting themselves as absolute and inflexible truths corresponding to prototypical representations of love and its expectations (Palomino, et. al., 2021; Gómez & Viejo, 2020; Ferrer & Bosch, 2013).

Myths constitute a peculiar type of belief, characterized by being fictitious, absurd, misleading, irrational, and impossible to fulfill, presenting themselves as absolute truth and not very flexible (Ferrer et al., 2010), represent a set of socially shared beliefs about the true nature of love (Ruiz-Palomino, et. al., 2021; Yela, 2003 in Gómez & Viejo, 2020), corresponding to prototypical representations about love and its expectations, elaborated in sententious terms that are hardly susceptible to modification and reasoning (Ferrer and Bosch, 2013).

Although romantic love myths have been a constitutive part of human history, literature, and cultural development, in recent decades, an interest has emerged in studying these myths from the social and health sciences, given that they have been

recognized as a factor that contributes to favoring and maintaining violence in relationships (Jimenez-Picon, et al., 2023; Bonilla et al., 2017; Bosch, et al., 2008), as these beliefs would justify and reinforce violent love models (Pequeño et al., 2019; Yela, 2003); as well as promote expectations that are difficult to fulfill, dependency relationships and participate in the normalization of abusive situations (Morales, 2017).

Preventing aggression among couples is essential due to the severe consequences for the victims, both directly (e.g., blows, insults, and threats) and indirectly (e.g., rejection and social exclusion) (Carrascosa et al., 2019). Therefore, understanding the participation of romantic love myths in violence between couples is fundamental, as the overestimated importance of romantic relationships and the belief that jealousy is healthy in a relationship would act as a justificatory system for violence in the name of love (Hernández et al., 2020).

Although romantic love myths are present in most stages of life, it is in young people and adolescents where it takes on greater relevance, given that the internalization of these myths plays an essential role in the socialization of adolescents (Ruiz-Palomino, et. al., 2021; Rodríguez et al., 2013). At this stage of development, new forms of socio-affective relationships are experienced, being a period marked by new motivations and interests, in which the first attractions to others, feelings of falling in love, first amorous affairs occur, and sexual relationships begin (Lara & Gómez-Urrutia, 2019; Valledor, 2012). Young people, being a more vulnerable group because of their limited experience in romantic relationships, may come to accept certain inadequate behaviors in a healthy couple relationship, such as thinking that unhealthy jealousy is a proof of love and not a sign of distrust and control (Cerro & Vives, 2019).

Different myths related to romantic love have been collected and presented in literature, which would enjoy a universal appeal (e.g. Rodríguez-Santero et al., 2017; Pascual, 2016; Rodríguez et al., 2015; Ferrer & Bosch, 2013; Valverde Carrasco & Palacios Verdugo, 2019). The most extensive compilation of these myths corresponds to the one gathered by Yela (2003), who, based on a general review of the literature, identified ten different myths:

(1) myth of the better half, referring to the belief that we have chosen the partner we had predestined in some way and that it has been the only possible choice; (2) the myth of pairing refers to the belief that the couple is something natural and universal, and therefore, in all times and cultures, human beings have naturally tended to pair up; (3) myth of exclusivity, referring to the belief that it is

impossible to be in love with two people at the same time; (4) myth of fidelity, referring to the belief that all passionate, romantic, and erotic desires must be satisfied exclusively with only one person, one's partner, if one genuinely loves them; (5) myth of jealousy, referring to the belief that jealousy is a sign of love and even the prerequisite of true love; (6) myth of equivalence refers to the belief that love (feeling) and infatuation (more or less lasting state, desire) are equivalent and, therefore, if a person stops being passionately in love, it means that they no longer love their partner and, therefore, the best thing to do is to leave the relationship; (7) myth of omnipotence refers to the belief that "love can do everything" and, therefore, if there is true love, external or internal obstacles should not influence the couple, and love is enough to solve all problems; (8) myth of free will, referring to the belief that our love feelings are intimate and are not influenced by bio-socio-cultural factors beyond our will and conscience; (9) myth of marriage, referring to the belief that romantic-passionate love should lead to the stable union of the couple and constitute their only basis for living together; and (10) the myth of eternal passion, referring to the belief that the romantic and passionate love of the first months of a relationship can and should last after years of cohabitation.

The importance of these myths in developing young people relationships has led to the development of psychometric proposals in recent years to assess them and deepen their understanding. Bosch et al. (2008) developed the scale of myths about love, composed of 8 items divided into two factors (idealization of love and love-abuse association). However, in addition to the limited number of dimensions it collects, the scale presented significant psychometric weaknesses, with low-reliability estimates (e.g., $\alpha \approx .50-.60$) (Bosch et al., 2008). To improve the psychometric properties of the instrument and obtain evidence of validity, Rodriguez et al. (2013) have made adjustments to the scale, eliminating one item with which they reported higher, although minimally acceptable reliabilities (e.g., $\alpha \approx .70$) and evidence of validity based on the internal structure of the test (RMSEA < .05; CFI > .9 and AGFI > .96), albeit using outdated criteria (Schreiber, 2017). Bonilla-Algovia & Rivas-Rivero (2020), designed and validated the Scale of Myths of Romantic Love (SMRL), composed of 11 items. The results provided evidence in favor of the unidimensionality of the SMRL and offered adequate reliability coefficients ($\omega = .837$). Lara & Gómez-Urrutia (2021), developed the scale Romantic Love Myths, composed of 10 items, grouped in two factors (idealization and love-abuse), to measure beliefs on romantic love myths in young Chilean population, despite the limited number of dimensions, the results reported appropriate evidence of validity based on internal structure (CFI = .93; TLI = .91; RMSEA = .08)

and adequate reliability estimates for each dimension: idealization (α = .73; ω = .78) and love-abuse (α = .82; ω = .88).

The develoed there studyes underscores the relevance that the study of romantic love myths has gained in various empirical models. However, despite the availability of different instruments, some of them exhibit weak psychometric evidence. Furthermore, all available instruments limit myths to a general dimensionality or, at most, to two general factors. In this scenario, it seems crucial to access more specific assessments that can pinpoint concrete beliefs potentially having differential effects on significant phenomena such as dating violence. Therefore, the purpose of this scale is to provide a multidimensional assessment of romantic love myths, enabling the identification and evaluation of specific beliefs, as well as the targeted focus of specific interventions.

Method

Design

The present research is an instrumental cross-sectional survey study with non-probabilistic sampling via social networks

Participants

The sample was composed of 1001 young people between 18 and 25 years of age, with a mean age of 21,01 years (SD= 2.093), of whom 86.0% (n=861) were female, and 13.4% (n=134) were male.

Instrument

Myths of Romantic Love Multidimensional Scale (MRL-MS): self-made scale, the final version of which is composed of 40 items of behavioral/attitudinal 4-point Likert-type statements (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, agree, strongly agree), intended to evaluate 8 dimensions: 1) myth of the better half (5 items); 2) myth of pairing (5 items); 3) myth of exclusivity and fidelity (5 items); 4) myth of jealousy (7 items); 5) myth of omnipotence (4 items); 6) myth of free will (4 items); 7) myth of marriage (6 items); and 8) myth of eternal passion (4 items). The reliability estimates and validity evidence are established and presented in the following article.

Procedure

A theoretical review was used to draft a total of 120 items, attempting to represent the 10 myths identified by Yela (2003), which 14 expert judges evaluated (e.g., psychologists, social workers, doctors in psychology and psychometrics), based on a 4-point evaluation system, on the representativeness of the construct and linguistic adequacy. Subsequently, the items with mean scores equal to or higher than 2 were discarded, leaving 100 items. Following this, a pilot application, voluntary and anonymous (conditions supported by informed consent), was carried out via RRSS to a total of 552 participants not included in the present study, on which refinements were made by item analysis and reliability estimates, leaving a preliminary application version of 53 items.

Finally, the preliminary scale was applied to a sample from the general Chilean youth population (n=1001). The instrument was administered online, including an informed consent form, where the participant stated whether they accepted to participate voluntarily in the research. Participants also received an information sheet in which they were informed of the research objectives, their rights, commitment to anonymity, and use of the information for research purposes only. Reliability estimates were established (Cronbach's Alpha and Omega coefficient), and evidence of validity was based on the scale's internal structure; additionally, the model was tested to see if there were differential effects by gender.

Statistical analysis

An exploratory structural equation modeling (ESEM) with GEOMIN rotation (Asparouhov and Muthén, 2009) and the robust weighted least-squares method of estimation (WLSMV), which has been shown to work well with non-normal discrete variables (Asparouhov, 2007), was performed to establish evidence of validity based on the internal structure of the scale. Additionally, a second-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using the WLSMV estimation method to assess the plausibility of the integration of scale dimensions. All analyses were performed based on the polychoric correlation matrix, which is suitable for treating ordinal variables (Barendse, Oort, & Timmerman, 2014).

The overall model fit was assessed following the cut-off point recommendation proposed by Schreiber (2017) on the following indicators: comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). (e.g., CFI>.95; TLI>.95; RMSEA<.06). The ESEM and CFA analyses were performed on the same sample, given that both have the same purpose, to confirm the factor structure of the instrument.

Reliability was estimated, for each dimension, employing Cronbach's Alpha and McDonald's Omega coefficients. For assessing the scale's stability between subjects of different sexes, metric and scalar invariance tests were performed, using as reference criteria for invariance decreases of the CFI below 0.005 and increases of RMSEA below 0.010 (Chen, 2007). All analyses were carried out using JAMOVI software (2.3.21) and Mplus version (7.4).

Results

Table 1 shows the fit indicators of the measurement models, both for the original version (53 items) and for the refined version (40 items), which were tested in two models: covariate ESEM and second-order CFA.

Table 1. *Indicators of global fit of the measurement models*

Measurement model	N° Par	χ^2	DF	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	RMSEA CI 90%		SRMR
								Low	Up	
ESEM (53 items; 9 dimensions)	599	2053.677	937	.000	.976	.964	.035	.032	.037	.022
ESEM (40 items; 8 dimensions)	412	1589.427	488	.000	.969	.951	.047	.045	.050	.022
CFA (40 items; 8 dimensions)	188	2443.213	712	.000	.952	.947	.049	.047	.051	.055

Note. N Par= numbers of parameters in the model; χ^2=chi-squared; DF=degrees of freedom; p= probability of chi-squared; CFI=comparative fit index; TLI= Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA=mean squared error of approximation; RMSEA CI 90%; SRMR=standardized root mean square residual.

While the initial version presented fit indicators considered adequate (CFI > .95; TLI > .95; RMSEA < .06: Schreiber, 2017), however, it was observed that the dimensions exclusivity and fidelity myths presented an enormous covariance, high cross-saturations, and conceptual redundancy. For that reason, it was decided to merge them. Additionally, those items that presented relevant cross-saturations (>.2) or intradimensional redundancies were eliminated.

Considering these modifications, a final version of the instrument was proposed, made up of 40 items and 8 dimensions (the better half myth, the pairing myth, the exclusivity and fidelity myth, the jealousy myth, the omnipotence myth, the free will myth, the marriage myth, and the eternal passion myth). The fit indicators (see Table 1), both comparative (CFI, TFLI) and absolute (e.g., χ^2, DF,

RMSEA), indicate that the final model is a good population representation of the observed relationships, both in its ESEM and CFA versions.

Loading factors for each dimension are presented in Table 2. The covariates between dimensions and the reliability estimates for each dimension are presented in Table 3.

Table 2. *Standardized factor loadings (λ) for each ESEM model dimension*

	MMN F1	MEM F2	MC F3	MEF F4	MO F5	MM F6	MLA F7	MPE F8
MYTH OF THE BETTER HALF (MMN)								
MMN 1	.848**	-.004	-.003	-.104**	.013	.049	-.007	-.003
MMN2	.563**	.100**	.119**	.070*	.039	-.006	-.018	.090**
MMN3	.798**	-.027	.014	.050*	-.036	.013	-.002	-.006
MMN4	.733**	-.015	-.029	.061*	.102**	-.069*	.037	-.009
MMN5	.631**	.0176	.013	-.012	.008	.064	-.042	.064*
MITH OF PAIRING (MEM)								
MEM6	-.071	.702**	.158**	-.041	.003	-.009	-.067*	.037
MEM7	.017	.792**	.040	.016	.098**	-.019	-.004	-.075**
MEM8	-.039	.850**	.032	-.015	.025	-.010	.032	.047
MEM9	.054	.811**	-.065*	.022	-.052	.071*	.029	-.044
MEM10	.057	.804**	-.050	.029	-.025	-.011	.037	.002
JEALOUSY MYTH (MC)								
MC11	.063	-.001	.896**	.021	-.009	-.021	-.002	-.006
MC12	-.021	.071*	.805**	.051	-.031	.013	.059	-.001
MC13	-.079*	-.004	.869**	-.015	.073	.035	-.043	.099**
MC14	-.016	.056	.838**	-.007	-.002	.004	.060	.040
MC15	.011	.019	.852**	.029	.048	.026	-.045	-.022
MC16	.019	-.014	.879**	.067*	.047	.003	-.011	-.060*
MC17	.133*	-.065*	.799**	-.045	-.055	.013	.032	-.001
EXCLUSIVITY AND FIDELITY MYTH (MEF)								
MEF18	-.024	-.006	.110**	.838**	-.035	.032	.004	.048*
MEF19	.044	-.051	-.064	.760**	.090**	-.062	.023	.073***
MEF20	.081	.103***	.010	.693**	-.086*	.015	.007	-.084**
MEF21	.003	.017	.110**	.622**	.068	.017	-.025	.039
MEF22	-.015	.008	-.007	.676**	.026	.062	-.048	-.026*
OMNIPOTENCE MYTH (MO)								
MO23	.086*	-.061**	.011	.082**	.781**	.012	.032	-.036*
MO24	-.004	.106**	.013	-.002	.766**	.018	.004	.061**
MO25	.063*	-.019	-.025	.005	.845**	.018	-.016	-.007
MO26	-.040	.051*	.060	-.019	.806**	.028	.004	.095**
MYTH MARRIAGE (MM)								
MM27	.026	-.004	-.047	.077*	.138**	.681**	-.011	.021
MM28	.019	-.007	.001	.014	.062	.694**	-.001	-.045
MM29	-.031	.184**	-.162**	.168**	.057	.716**	.017	-.080**
MM30	-.004	.092**	.068	-.038	.003	.745**	.042	.166**
MM31	.017	-.004	.056	.004	-.068	.773**	-.023	.027
MM32	.028	.070*	.079	-.028	-.029	.755**	.035	.205**
FREE WILL MYTH (MLA)								
MLA33	-.040	-.008	.002	.011	-.008	-.059	.827**	.123**
MLA34	.028	.200**	.159**	-.029	.033	.003	.599**	-.015
MLA35	-.042	-.126**	-.103*	.028	-.043	.040	.791**	.002
MLA36	.076*	.133*	.131*	-.039	.104**	.038	.614**	-.076*
MYTH ETERNAL PASSION (MPE)								

MPE37	.010	-.030	.005	.013	-.024	.039	.020	.810**
MPE38	.041	-.055*	-.021	.132**	.132**	-.003	-.011	.688**
MPE39	.048	.083**	.039	-.006	.076*	.117**	-.117**	.593**
MPE40	-.017	.017	-.012	.009	-.005	-.024	.022	.839**

*Note. **p<.01; *p<.05*

Table 3. *Standardized relationships (r) between the dimensions of the ESEM romantic love myths scale*

	MMN	MEM	MC	MEF	MO	MM	MLA	MPE
MMN	α= .829 ω= .830	.186**	.249**	.459**	.473**	.386**	-.045	.236**
MEN		α= .835 ω= .839	.388**	.061	.097**	.215**	.186**	.034
MC			α= .904 ω= .908	.147**	.374**	.450**	.099	.289**
MEF				α= .817 ω= .820	.395**	.291**	-.126**	.228**
MO					α= .864 ω= .866	.472**	.016	.379**
MM						α= .828 ω= .840	.051	.313**
MLA							α= .608 ω= .683	-.029
MPE								α= .799 ω= .802

*Note. **p<.01; *p<.05*

Factor loadings evidence proper representations of each factor ($\lambda \geq .5$), with low levels of cross-loadings ($\lambda \leq .3$). The relationships between dimensions are moderate (r > .3) or large (r > .5) (Cohen, 1988). Reliability estimates per dimension are at least sufficient ($\omega \geq .70$) and mostly adequate ($\omega \geq .80$), showing high levels of internal consistency in all dimensions (Prieto and Delgado, 2010).

Additionally, to demonstrate whether the decisions taken iteratively on the dimensionality of the scale correspond to the estimation of dimensionality by other strategies, a parallel analysis was carried out with the initial version of the scale (53 items) and with the refined version of 40 items. In both cases it is observed that the determination of instrument dimensionality agrees with the proposal presented (see Figure 1).
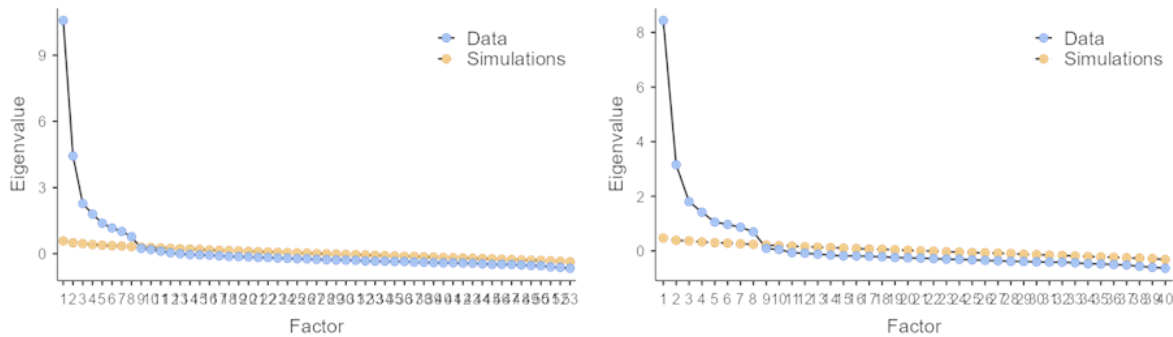
Figure 1. *Determination of dimensionality*

Finally, Table 4 compares the invariance of the instrument between men and women in the scale's final version (40 items).

Table 4. *Invariance test measurement*

Variable	N° Par	χ2	DF	p	CFI	RMSEA	Δχ2	ΔDF	PΔχ2	ΔCFI	ΔRMSEA
Configural	296	3060.673	1424	.000	.906	.048					
Metric	264	3105.509	1456	.000	.905	.048	44.836	32	.0000	-.001	.000
Scalar	232	3189.681	1488	.000	.902	.048	129.009	64	.0000	-.004	.000

Note. Δχ2= For reference model compared to configuration model (unconstrained); ΔDF = delta degrees of freedom, of reference model compared to configuration model (unconstrained); PΔχ2= Probability of fit differences, of reference model compared to configuration model (unconstrained); ΔCFI= delta CFI, for reference model compared to configuration model (unconstrained); ΔRMSEA= delta RMSEA, of reference model compared to configuration model (unconstrained).

The differentials of the CFI and RMSEA statistics do not show relevant changes in the fit of the metric and scalar model compared to the configuration model, so metric and scalar invariance between sexes can be assumed.

Discussion

This research aimed to develop a multidimensional scale to assess beliefs regarding romantic love among young people. The model fit indicators, the magnitude of the factorial saturations, and the inexistence of relevant cross-loadings support the interpretation of the scores according to the structure of the model, providing evidence that the items are consistent with the theoretical proposal. The reliability estimates for each dimension allow us to assume that each dimension has levels of internal consistency that minimize measurement errors. Furthermore, according to the invariance standards proposed by Chen (2007), both structural and metric invariance between genders can be maintained. The scale can be applied to both men and women, allowing for comparative analyses between

them. This is possible because the factor loadings and latent variable variability are equivalent between groups, thus enabling similar interpretations of test scores.

This research, like that conducted by Lara and Gómez-Urrutia (2021), provides validity evidence following contemporary psychometric standards (American Educational Research Association et al., 2014), from a Latin American country (i.e., Chile). Despite these similarities, the present instrument extends the definitions of myths, broadening their dimensionality from 2 general dimensions to 8 specific dimensions (i.e., myth of the better half, myth of pairing, myth of exclusivity and fidelity, myth of jealousy, myth of omnipotence, myth of free will, myth of marriage, myth of eternal passion). This study aims to address the existing blind spot in the scientific literature regarding the multidimensional measurement of romantic love myths, thus enabling a comprehensive assessment of the phenomenon.

This study is subject to some limitations, including typical constraints of non-probabilistic sampling and sample composition, primarily consisting of women. One possible explanation is the tendency of young individuals to participate more in studies through social media (Palenzuela, 2018; García et al., 2014), with women showing a greater interest in participating in research addressing violence-related themes (e.g., Ramírez-Carrasco et al., 2023; Bonilla-Algovia & Rivas-Rivero, 2020; Menéndez, 2017; Bolaños, 2015), as they are more inclined to report such acts and have a higher probability of being victims of the same (World Health Organization, 2021).

The findings of this study can serve as a reference point to guide education professionals, as well as the design of prevention and intervention programs in the educational domain. These programs could encourage young individuals to reflect on and evaluate their ideals and beliefs about romantic love (Standley, 2022), aiming to reduce the potential negative influences of romantic love myths in their current and future relationships, thereby promoting healthier romantic relationships.

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