

# Social characteristics of aggressor in the risk level of victims of family violence

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## CITATION

Callata Timaná LV, Condori Valladares SDW, Calizaya-López J. (2024). Social characteristics of aggressor in the risk level of victims of family violence. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*. 8(13): 9697. <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd9697>

## ARTICLE INFO

Received: 11 February 2024

Accepted: 18 October 2024

Available online: 14 November 2024

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**Abstract:** Family violence is the act that causes harm, suffering, or death to members of the family group, especially if they are in a situation of vulnerability due to characteristics associated to age or physical condition. **Objective:** The social characteristics of aggressors were associated in the risk level of victims of family violence in the city of Arequipa, Peru. **Method:** The study was descriptive, quantitative, and non-experimental. A total of 205 randomly selected judicial files of aggressors reported for domestic violence were evaluated. The data were secondary, and the chi-square test (association of categorical variables) was used for statistical analysis. **Results:** A moderate risk level (31.2%) was found, with a tendency to be severe and very severe (49.5%). Likewise, the most observed types of violence are physical and psychological violence (89.3%) and sexual abuse (10.7%). The female aggressor exerts mild violence, while the male aggressor exerts moderate to extreme severe violence, causing more harm to the victim. The profile of the aggressor with low or high education, with high or low incomes, and who occupies a house or only one room can be associated the level of violence that occurs. **Conclusion:** Men are more likely to attack women, and similarly, female aggressors tend to target men more frequently. Moreover, men exhibit a higher tendency to attack their partners, including wives, cohabitants, and ex-partners, whereas women tend to target a broader range of family members, including parents, children, grandparents, nephews, cousins, as well as in-laws such, brothers-in-law and other relatives.

**Keywords:** social characteristics; family violence; aggressor; risk level; victim

## 1. Introduction

Family violence is explained as the act that causes harm, suffering, or death to members of the family group, especially if they are in a vulnerable situation, due to characteristics associated to age or health, including categories such as violence against women, childhood abuse, and elder abuse. This social phenomenon highlights the aggressor, in charge of carrying out the acts of violence, and the victim who is the object of violence (Negrete Cortes et al., 2023). According to Law 30364 (2015), enacted to prevent, punish, and eradicate violence against women and members of the family group, women are identified as subjects of protection throughout their life cycle: girls, adolescents, young people, adults, and older adults. The members of the family group are made up of, spouses, ex-spouses, cohabitants, ex-cohabitants, or those who have children in common are understood as such; ascendants or descendants by consanguinity, adoption, or affinity; collateral relatives up to the fourth degree of consanguinity or adoption and the second degree of affinity; and those who live in the same household as long as there are no contractual or labor relations at the time of the violence.

When reported acts of violence occur, protective measures are implemented to mitigate or neutralize the harmful effects of the violence perpetrated by the accused individual. One of the criteria for issuing protective measures by judicial decision is risk assessment, which provides pertinent information to determine the level of risk that facing the victim (Legislative Decree 1386, 2018). Assessing the characteristics of the aggressor and their associated risk level allows us to understand the correlation between these variables.

On the other hand, different theories explain the mechanisms of transmission of violent attitudes and behaviors from parents to children. In this sense, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) shows how children imitate other people's behaviors and attitudes, while attachment theory (Bowlby, 1998) holds that children's initial relationship with their caregiver shapes their future attachments and relationships. There are also external factors that can increase the propensity to crime and violence, such as belonging to a low-income household, teenage pregnancy, or residing in neighborhoods with high rates of violence. In particular, intimate partner violence observed by children in the past is a significant predictor of intimate partner violence today (Grijalva Eternod, 2023).

While the social characteristics of the aggressor are mentioned, this describes to a set of attributes and circumstances linked to the aggressor in the context of family violence. These characteristics cover various aspects that influence the dynamics and manifestation of violence carried out in the family environment. It is important to highlight that these social dimensions are not only individual but are also rooted in the cultural, economic, and social environment in which the aggressor operates (Fabian et al., 2020).

Then again, the risk level of victims of family violence refers to the systematic evaluation of the probability and severity of harm that a victim faces as a result of violence exerted by an aggressor in the family (Araujo et al., 2021). This variable involves the consideration of various factors that can contribute to vulnerability and the negative impact on the physical, sexual, emotional and psychological integrity of the victim. Therefore, violence is not only generated by relationship inequalities in the family environment, but also by sexist culture, economic dependence, substance consumption, and inequity of opportunities to participate in public spaces; and the most vulnerable populations to be victims of violence are due to socioeconomic, affective, and emotional disadvantage (women, children, adolescents, and older adults) mainly of the female gender (Saldaña and Gorjón, 2020).

From the review of previous studies, little information was found about the aggressor in the scenario of family violence, due to the difficulties of accessing this population, however, the studies that have been carried out in Peru date back to the last decade and more. were concerned about violence against women, in that sense, Nóbrega (2012) studied the characteristics of the aggressors in violence against women, finding a low association between the demographic variables of the aggressors and the appearance of violence in its different forms and modalities; Likewise, Fernández and others (2019) associated the aggressor's profile with intimate partner violence, finding that moderate-level aggression significantly generates physical, psychological and sexual violence. Furthermore, the main factor is due to the aggressor's jealousy and history of violence in their interpersonal

relationships; According to Choque and others (2019) they explained the sociodemographic variables and violence against women in the Tacna Region, finding that the social and demographic characteristics of the aggressor associated with psychological violence had greater significance in age and sex, with women being the who mostly exercise this violence, and the characteristics of the aggressor associated with sexual violence are presented by age, sex and cohabitation, with adult men being the ones who exercise this violence to their partners and children to a greater extent. Finally, a recent study on family violence in times of quarantine explains the increase in violence towards the family, specifically towards women, where the man continues to be the aggressor and the woman the victim. However, it also reports the appearance of female aggressors towards the men and other members of the family or cohabitation, due to their violent experiences and conflicts presented since childhood (Matassini et al., 2022).

In this regard, the present research aims to accumulate empirical knowledge in the face of the lack of collection and systematization of data by the corresponding governments and State institutions, in addition, the data analyzed in the present study should contribute to strengthening the data that is handled in the Peruvian Entity, likewise, the study is an associative approach to analyze how the social characteristics of the aggressors are linked to the level of risk experienced by victims of family violence?, evaluating characteristics such as age, educational level, employment situation , family history and other relevant aspects that can help us understand the intensity and frequency of violence experienced by victims; and if in some way these social variables are associated with the moment of violence by the aggressor.

Furthermore, understanding this association of variables will not only contribute to improving academic knowledge, but it is also necessary to do so because it will provide valuable information to understand the social profile of the aggressor in Peru (a multicultural and multiracial Region), and through this, better practical tools can be implemented for professionals, legislators and organizations that work on the prevention and mitigation of family violence. Likewise, it will allow the design of more effective intervention strategies, adapted to the specific circumstances of each case, with the purpose of improving protection mechanisms—care for victims and being able to build safe and healthy family environments.

Hence, the study aims to associate the social characteristics of aggressors regarding the risk level experienced by victims of family violence in the city from Arequipa, Peru.

## **2. Materials and methods**

The STROBE cross-sectional reporting guidelines were used, which are detailed below:

### **2.1. Type of study**

The study was basic, quantitative, descriptive, and non-experimental - cross-sectional, using second-order or secondary data (Rubinsztejn et al., 2019) (data found in the files of complaints of family violence from the 15 de Agosto health

facility of the Caylloma Health Network—Arequipa). The information was collected from October to November 2023.

## **2.2. Participants**

A total of 205 randomly selected judicial files of aggressors reported for family violence in the city of Arequipa were evaluated. The evaluation included documents between January and August 2023, covering a total of eight months.

In relation to the sociodemographic characteristics of the Arequipa Region, it is located at an altitude of 2328 meters above sea level, located in the south of Peru, it is made up of eight provinces that make up the coastal and mountain sectors, it has a population of one million 497 thousand 438 inhabitants according to the last census, its main productive activities being: Commerce, Tourism, Agriculture, Livestock, Mining, Fishing and Construction. Likewise, 50.4% are women and 49.6% men; 85.7% reside in urban areas and 14.3% in rural areas; Population growth is 1.8% annual rate. 28.7% are children and adolescents under 15 years of age, 63.3% are youth and adults (economically active population) and 7.9% are older adults. Finally, the average human development index is 0.695 and life expectancy is 71.9 years, adult literacy is 93.8%.

## **2.3. Instrument**

Through the documentary review technique (Peña Vera, 2022) a content sheet was prepared to collect the social characteristics of the aggressors; only the social part of the files was considered, collecting information on social traits like age, sex, marital status, level of education, relationship with the victim, economic income and housing. The files contain the multidisciplinary work of health professionals and, by court order, must provide documentary information on the psychotherapeutic treatment of aggressors in a public health facility that manages the “specific products for the reduction of violence against women” program.

Likewise, the information collected with the instrument was only used for research purposes, maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of the data without any personal identification (by the authors), reporting this event to the corresponding authorities, to avoid future conflicts.

## **2.4. Procedure**

Authorization was obtained from the directors of the 15 de Agosto health facility, Arequipa-Caylloma Health Network to collect the information in the selected files. Then, the documents’ content was reviewed in an orderly manner. Finally, the social data of the aggressors were taken, respecting, and safeguarding to the people involved in the files.

## **2.5. Ethical considerations**

The study was conducted based on ethical considerations related to human health research. The guidelines set by the Ministry of Health in Peru according to ministerial resolution 233-2020-MINSA of 27 April 2020, establish the promotion of research in the field of human health in the country through international ethical

standards.

Likewise, approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the Universidad Católica San Pablo, Peru, according to Act 033.CEPI. UCSP.2022, with the project titled: “Multidimensional study of violence against women in the city of Arequipa, 2022”.

In addition, authorization was obtained from the health institutions that provide treatment to the aggressors, for the confidential use of the data provided in the selected files.

### 2.6. Data analysis

The Jamovi statistical program version 2.3.13 (Jamovi, 2022; R Core Team, 2021) was used for data analysis. These data were digitized into a .xlsx database and then imported into the program. Categorical variables were described through frequencies and percentages. The chi-square test ( $X^2$ ) was used to evaluate the association between categorical variables, which showed scores less than .05 indicating a significant association that rules out the independence hypothesis (Ramirez Rios and Polack Peña, 2020).

### 3. Results

Normality tests were performed on the variables, which revealed a non-normal distribution according to the Shapiro-Wilk test. Furthermore, the exploratory analysis did not detect outliers in the data.

Descriptive analyses of the social characteristics of the selected sample were carried out. According to sex, 79% were men and 21% were women. The average age was 44.8 years, between 18 to 59 years. According to marital status, 41% were married, 21.5% lived in a common law union, 35.1% were single, 1.0% were widowed, and 1.5% were divorced. 4.4% had primary education, 49.3% had secondary education, and 46.3% had higher education. Regarding economic income, 17.6% had low income, 61.5% had moderate income, and 21% had high income. 68.3% had a family home, 26.8% had a multi-family home, and 4.9% had a single room.

**Table 1.** Assessment of the level of risk and diagnosis of the type of violence perpetrated.

| Risk level assessment |          |      | Diagnosing the type of violence |          |      |
|-----------------------|----------|------|---------------------------------|----------|------|
| Level                 | <i>F</i> | %    | Type                            | <i>F</i> | %    |
| Slight                | 60       | 29.3 | Physical and psychological      | 183      | 89.3 |
| Moderate              | 64       | 31.2 |                                 |          |      |
| Severe                | 56       | 27.3 | Sexual abuse                    | 22       | 10.7 |
| Extreme severe        | 25       | 12.2 |                                 |          |      |

Note: *F* = frequency; % = percentage.

**Table 1.** The results of the assessment of the level of risk to which the victim of family violence is exposed are described, finding a moderate risk level of 31.2%, with a tendency to be severe or very severe of 49.5%, considering that from the level

moderate, the risk of violence is increasing and this situation, can even predict the death of the victim of family violence. Likewise, it was found that the type of violence most observed is physical and psychological violence, with 89.3%, and sexual abuse 10.7%, describing that the majority of victims who suffer from physical violence also endure psychological violence.

**Table 2.** Assessment of the level of risk according to the sex of the aggressor and the infrastructure of the risk by dwelling.

| <b>Risk level assessment</b> |                             |                |                              |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Level</b>                 | <b>Sex of the aggressor</b> |                | <b>X<sup>2</sup> testing</b> |
|                              | <b>Man %</b>                | <b>Woman %</b> |                              |
| Slight                       | 25.3                        | 44.2           | (N = 205) 7.95 (p = 0.043)   |
| Moderate                     | 31.5                        | 30.2           |                              |
| Severe                       | 30.2                        | 16.3           |                              |
| Extreme severe               | 13.0                        | 9.3            |                              |
| Total                        | 100                         | 100            |                              |
| <b>Risk level assessment</b> |                             |                |                              |
| <b>Level</b>                 | <b>Risk by dwelling</b>     |                | <b>X<sup>2</sup> testing</b> |
|                              | <b>Yes %</b>                | <b>No %</b>    |                              |
| Slight                       | 40.0                        | 29.0           | (N = 205) 5.06 (p = 0.168)   |
| Moderate                     | 20.0                        | 31.5           |                              |
| Severe                       | 0.0                         | 28.0           |                              |
| Very severe                  | 40.0                        | 11.5           |                              |
| Total                        | 100                         | 100            |                              |

Note: X<sup>2</sup> = chi-squared.

**Table 2:** the evaluation results of the risk level faced by victims of family violence were analyzed about the sex to refer to the risk factors within the household infrastructure. Regarding the aggressor’s sex, a significant association of variables was observed ( $p < 0.05$ ), revealing that female aggressors tend to perpetrate mild violence. While male aggressors exhibit extreme or moderate to severe violence, resulting in greater harm to the victim. However, no significant association was found between housing risk factors and the level of violence inflicted on the victim. This suggests that the physical space of the household infrastructure does not necessarily associate with the severity of violence experienced by the victim, regardless of the environment.

**Table 3:** by associating the assessment of the level of risk to which the victim of family violence is exposed according to the educational level of the aggressor, as well as his economic income and the type of housing, it was found that these social characteristics do not discriminate against the violence that the aggressor may exercise. Therefore, the profile of the aggressor with low or high education, with high or low incomes, and occupying a dwelling or only one room does not determine the level of violence that occurs without estimating these social characteristics.

**Table 3.** Assessment of the level of risk according to educational level, income, and housing.

| <b>Risk level assessment</b> |                          |                      |                   |                               |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Level</b>                 | <b>Educational level</b> |                      |                   | <b>X<sup>2</sup> testing</b>  |
|                              | <b>Primary %</b>         | <b>High school %</b> | <b>Superior %</b> |                               |
| Slight                       | 44.4                     | 24.8                 | 32.6              | (N = 205)<br>9.13 (p = 0.166) |
| Moderate                     | 0.0                      | 34.7                 | 30.5              |                               |
| Severe                       | 55.6                     | 26.7                 | 25.3              |                               |
| Extreme severe               | 0.0                      | 13.9                 | 11.6              |                               |
| Total                        | 100                      | 100                  | 100               |                               |

  

| <b>Risk level assessment</b> |                        |                |               |                               |
|------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Level</b>                 | <b>Economic income</b> |                |               | <b>X<sup>2</sup> testing</b>  |
|                              | <b>Low %</b>           | <b>Media %</b> | <b>High %</b> |                               |
| Slight                       | 30.6                   | 31.7           | 20.9          | (N = 205)<br>1.89 (p = 0.930) |
| Moderate                     | 30.6                   | 30.2           | 34.9          |                               |
| Severe                       | 27.8                   | 26.2           | 30.2          |                               |
| Extreme severe               | 11.1                   | 11.9           | 14.0          |                               |
| Total                        | 100                    | 100            | 100           |                               |

  

| <b>Risk level assessment</b> |                   |                      |               |                               |
|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Level</b>                 | <b>Housing</b>    |                      |               | <b>X<sup>2</sup> testing</b>  |
|                              | <b>Familiar %</b> | <b>Multifamily %</b> | <b>Room %</b> |                               |
| Slight                       | 29.3              | 30.9                 | 20.0          | (N = 205)<br>3.45 (p = 0.751) |
| Moderate                     | 30.0              | 32.7                 | 40.0          |                               |
| Severe                       | 28.6              | 21.8                 | 40.0          |                               |
| Extreme severe               | 12.1              | 14.5                 | 0.0           |                               |
| Total                        | 100               | 100                  | 100           |                               |

Note: X<sup>2</sup> = chi-squared. Economic income: Low ≤ \$400 monthly, Media= between \$1500 to \$3000 monthly, High ≥ \$ 3000 monthly in Peru.

**Table 4.** Association of the sex of the aggressor with the sex of the victim.

| <b>Sex of the aggressor</b> | <b>Sex of the victim</b> |                | <b>X<sup>2</sup> testing</b> |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|
|                             | <b>Man %</b>             | <b>Woman %</b> |                              |
| Man                         | 46.2                     | 83.8           | (N = 205) 19.4 (p = .001)    |
| Woman                       | 53.8                     | 16.2           |                              |
| Total                       | 100                      | 100            |                              |

Note: X<sup>2</sup> = chi-squared.

**Table 4:** the sex of the aggressor was associated with the sex of the victim, finding an association ( $p < 0.05$ ), showing that men attack women to a greater extent, and in the case of female aggressors they exercise violence against men to a greater extent, but also, to a lesser extent, to women in the family. An additional piece of information about the age of the aggressor is described through the relationship with the level of risk, the tendency is present in most with the following tendency, the older the aggressor is, the greater the predisposition to exercise violence.

**Table 5.** Association of the aggressor’s sex with the family relationship with the victim.

| Family relationship with the victim | Sex of the aggressor |         | X <sup>2</sup> testing     |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|---------|----------------------------|
|                                     | Man %                | Woman % |                            |
| Spouse                              | 26.5                 | 20.9    | (N = 205) 23.4 (p = 0.001) |
| Cohabitant                          | 13.6                 | 7.0     |                            |
| Former cohabitant                   | 29.0                 | 11.6    |                            |
| Parent                              | 2.5                  | 14.0    |                            |
| Son/daughter                        | 6.8                  | 7.0     |                            |
| In-law                              | 4.9                  | 18.6    |                            |
| Other family members                | 16.7                 | 20.9    |                            |
| Total                               | 100                  | 100     |                            |

Note: X<sup>2</sup> = chi-squared.

**Table 5:** the association between the sex of the aggressor and the victim’s familial relationship was examined, revealing a significant association ( $p < 0.05$ ). It was found that men predominantly target their partners (wives, cohabitants, ex-partners). Conversely, women are more likely to attack other family members, including parents, children, grandparents, nephews, cousins, as well as in-laws and brothers-in-law.

#### 4. Discussion

The study aimed to associate the social characteristics of aggressors and their association with the risk levels faced by victims of family violence in Peru. Initially, the research evaluated the levels of risk experienced by the victims, revealing a moderate level (31.2%) with a tendency towards severe and extremely severe cases (49.5%). It is noteworthy that violence risk escalates from the moderate level onwards, potentially leading to fatal outcomes, as observed in previous studies by Calizaya et al. (2024), particularly in cases involving female victims. However, Acarapi (2023) reported a moderate risk of violence with a decreasing trend, which contradicts our findings. Nevertheless, our study underscores the significant menace posed by the mere presence of an aggressor within the family context, which can adversely affect family dynamics and emotional well-being, ultimately impacting broader societal systems (Torres Condori et al., 2020).

Regarding the type of violence perpetrated by the aggressor, according to the multidisciplinary diagnosis found in the files, a significant percentage of complaints are made for physical and psychological violence, with sexual abuse within the family environment being the second most reported. Both modalities have been normalized through social culture. However, Cahui et al. (2022) point out that there is a greater predisposition to family violence when the victim is younger compared to the aggressor. This assumes that the capacity for protection is scarce and the aggressor utilizes their physical and economic power against their victims. In cases of sexual abuse, it typically occurs towards the woman who is the partner or ex-partner of the aggressor, and there are instances of abuse towards other family members. This is characterized by the imposition of unwanted sexual ideas and acts,



non-consensual touching, and the use of objects that degrade the victim as a human being (Mayor & Salazar, 2019).

A significant contribution of the study focuses on the findings found when associating social variables with the level of risk to which the victim is exposed according to the sex of the aggressor. It was found that female aggressors exercise mild violence, and male aggressors exercise moderate to severe extreme violence, producing more damage to the victim. In this sense, both men and women exercise aggressive behaviors among themselves defined as bidirectionality <sup>[24]</sup>, assuming that it is not only the fact of the one who produces the most visible damage. The important thing is to understand that human beings develop these behaviors, and the explanation of their appearance is based on the sociocultural context of the family, the parenting styles, in any addictions, violation of social norms and rules, patterns of behavior, and the normalization of these events (Nóblega, 2012; Vera Sanchez & Alay Giler, 2021).

Choque et al. (2019) specified that age, sex, and cohabitation serve as social associations that can influence in establishing the profile of the aggressor. They noted that adults are more predisposed to violence, with men being the most aggressive by sex. However, they also reported instances where women attack other women within the family environment, a finding consistent with our research.

Furthermore, it is evident that male aggressors predominantly perpetrate violence against their partners (spouse, ex-spouse, cohabitant, and ex-cohabitant) within the family environment, underscoring the prevalence of violence against women in this context. Conversely, women tend to target other family members, encompassing various forms of family violence such as child abuse and elder abuse. In this sense, men generally attack their partners due to the use of alcohol and psychoactive substances, economic stress, lack of communication as a couple, loss of family values, infidelity, jealousy and change of role on the part of the woman, within the most mains. And women attack their victims because at some point in their life experience they were attacked, normalizing violence, and forming a pattern of violent behavior, being a response of protection, reprisal, retribution, and vengeance for what they experienced, developing a controlling behavior, blaming others for what happens to him and has difficulty managing her impulses and emotions.

Regarding the additional social characteristics of the offenders, no notable associations were observed between the educational level, economic situation, and housing conditions with the exercise of domestic violence. This indicates that the profile of the aggressor is not determined by his level of education or resources nor by the quality of his housing. Therefore, incidents of violence do not seem to be affected by these social factors.

Therefore, it is imperative to inform judicial authorities of the study's results to enable the establishment of collaborative strategies with other ministries aimed at strengthening programs addressing family violence and promoting peace and harmony in familial environments for future generations.

Finally, further studies should be conducted on aggressors as primary actors in family violence to bridge the theoretical gap. However, accessing and evaluating this population remains challenging, necessitating attention to the diverse psychosocial

problems underlying their aggressive behavior.

## 5. Limitations

A first limitation of the study includes the inability to perform more robust statistical analyses due to its cross-sectional nature; a second limitation as well as the lengthy data collection period due to scheduling and work inconveniences in reviewing the files. And third limitation was not having funding to disseminate the results of the study. Despite these limitations, the present study has improved our understanding of the association between the social characteristics of the aggressor and the level of risk of violence that the victim may suffer.

## 6. Conclusions

The analysis of this study leads us to propose the following conclusions:

The social characteristics such as age, sex, and family relationship do exhibit associations with the level of risk to which the victim is exposed within the family nucleus. Consequently, the data emphasize the importance of intervening with aggressors by providing effective programs that address behavioral aspects, regulate emotional states, and, above all, strengthen family bonds.

Men are more likely to attack women, and similarly, female aggressors tend to target men more frequently. Moreover, men exhibit a higher tendency to attack their partners, including wives, cohabitants, and ex-partners, whereas women tend to target a broader range of family members, including parents, children, grandparents, nephews, cousins, as well as in-laws such as brothers-in-law and other relatives.

And it's evident that the social and cultural context continue to be intervening variables in family violence that shape the violent behavior of people and that significantly damages and affects the emotional and mental stability of families, and that this is not distinguished by age, sex, economic condition and lifestyle.

**Author contributions:** Conceptualization, JCL and LVCT; methodology, SDWCV; software, LVCT; validation, JCL and LVCT; formal analysis, JCL; investigation, SDWCV; resources, LVCT; data curation, JCL; writing—original draft preparation, JCL; writing—review and editing, SDWCV and LVCT; visualization, LVCT; supervision, SDWCV; project administration, JCL; funding acquisition, LVCT. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Ethical approval:** The study was approved by Ethics Committee of Universidad Catolica San Pablo, (Approval number: 030-2022). The date of approval is 22/04/2022. All participants signed the informed consent in this study.

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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