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# VIOLENCE IN CYBER-SPACE IN TEENAGERS DATING RELATIONSHIPS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY INA MEXICAN STATE IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.

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### 1. Introduction

Burns with cigar, match or lighter; threats with firearms, attempted strangulation, pulling hair, blows and even slaps are just some of the physical abuse suffered by students who have a dating relationship in Mexico. This violence reveals itself in both men and women although it is exercised in different ways (Oliva et al., 2011). Women tend to what is most common in their gender, such as scratches and slaps, while men tend to be instrumental in aggression, being more likely to burn with cigarettes, threats with firearms, to the unusual use of the physical force that sometimes leads along the path of the strangulation attempt.

This violence covered under "love" is almost invisible to the bulk of the population that maintains a sentimental relationship (IMJ, 2008), because its effects and symptoms of mistreatment are unknown for much of the young Mexicans. Visible or not, the violence is there giving traces of horror in the portrait of a Mexican society that witnesses daily the result of an aggressiveness where the exercise of power transforms this human trait into a devastating destructiveness that touches everything, even the most beautiful feeling that humanity can possess: love.

They are symptoms (Flores, 2006) of what they now often call postmodernity, where it is not difficult to recognize hatred, destructiveness and cruelty as distinctive signs of our daily life in relationships with others.

This phenomenon is known in the international literature as dating violence or datingaggression, concepts that emerged from studies of authors such as Collins (2003), Furman (2002), Wekerle and Wolfe(1999), cited by Sánchez et al. (2008), and whose were adaptated to spanish can be understood as violence in teenager relationships.

Rojas (2013) conducted a review of dating violence studies in Mexico from 2002 to 2012, analyzing publications in databases such as Dialnet, Google, Scholar, Psicodoc, Psyscinfo, Redalyc and Scirus, finding only twenty studies, whose results were revealed at scientific conferences or in specialized journals. Among the results of his review, the author emphasizes that 75 percent of the Mexican studies were of a quantitative type, 100 percent were transverse

and 85 percent intentionally selected the sample, concluding that it is necessary to carry out mixed designs, longitudinal with samples selected randomly from public or private schools.

Another conclusion is that in Mexico a line of research needs to be developed to study violent manifestations through new technologies, since only studies by Sánchez and Solís (2009) and Olvera et al. (2012) touched on the subject of technological advances, by measuring the control of the couple through cell phones (Rojas Solís, 2013).

The present study advances in this direction when analyzing the manifestations of psychological violence in couples of datingteenegers who interact in Facebook and other social networks. Sentimental relationships in teenegers have special importance for those who live in because it is when young people move away from the family and their social world takes on complexities, since they are more involved in relationships with peers, friends and couples.

Connolly and Goldberg (1999) cited by Sánchez Viejo et al. (2008) established phases or stages that allow to understand the process of appearance, creation and consolidation of the first relationships during adolescence. The authors characterize the first phase, in the predominance of physical attraction, which does not have to be accompanied by a real interaction; in the second phase, appear the first, more or less stable appointments, which are distinguished by occurring within the group of equals; in the third phase, appear the first dates of couples without the presence of the group of equals, but are casual and non-stable dates. Finally, in the fourth phase, the relationship between partners is predominant, with less presence of the peer group, which leads to a progressive increase in the involvement in the relationship, intimacy and commitment. In Mexico, the ENVINOV 2007<sup>1</sup> survey (IMJ, 2008) revealed that 51.8% of 15-24 years old had a dating relationship during the year that the study was conducted, noting that the motives that led to these teenegersthat the couple liked very much 90%, secondly with a 4.9%, the insistence of the one who was or was courting it was presented, and in the third place with 2%, attributed social pressure as a motivator for the beginning of a relationship.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> ENVINOV 2017 is a National Survey of Violence in Dating Relationships conducted by Mexican Institute of the Youth

As a result of modernity, the romantic relationship is covered by several faces, as there have

been numerous sociocultural transformations, giving rise to new femininities or masculinities

that have modified the emotional relations ofteenegers, as Rojas Solís (2013) calls "the

emergence of informal relationships" as the so-called "free" and "friend" whose essential

distinction is the absence of commitment.

In those ways of modernity (Casas Tello, 2012) who, in the definition of the concept of a couple,

"refers to any type of violence exercised by one partner towards the other with the intention of

harming him or her, and independently of the sex, or the exercise of violence in a mutual

aggreement in the context of a relationship".

The couple, in this conception, embraces all possible compromise, from a date to a stable

relationship and between members of the same sex or different sex. In teen population, he says,

relationships vary according to the degree of commitment:

We can talk about stable relationships, relationships characterized by sporadic sexual

encounters; it can simply be an appointment, or someone with whom you leave eventually, but

with whom there is no commitment.

However, some authors indicate that violence in courtship is seen by young people as something

natural (Ramírez-Rivera and Núñez-Luna, 2010); they do not clearly recognize a violent

courtship, so there are recurrent violations, sexually transmitted infections, lack of pleasure, low

self-esteem, desertion, poor school performance, eating disorders, physical aggression, emotional

instability, early pregnancy, use of addictive substances and suicide.

Regarding the consequences of this type of aggression, the studies available in the international

literature have mentioned the physical, psychological and behavioral aspects of the victim, being

associated, as mentioned above, individual factors such as depression, low self-esteem and

emotional well-being, thoughts and suicide attempts or risk behaviors such as alcohol

consumption, eating disorders, early onset of sexual intercourse and poor school performance.

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The scientific community breaks down theories to explain this phenomenon according to the perspective of its formation and perhaps from the subjectivity and individuality of each researcher. Thus, Patterson Coherence Model (1982) puts the origin of the aggressive behaviors in the educational and disciplinary practices that occur in the family context; Bandura's Theory of Social Learning (1973) is also present when explaining violence as a result of the observation of a behavior carried out by an admired model who is imitated; Bowlby's Theory of Attachment (1969) exerts its influence on the explanation of this phenomenon, especially from the perspective of insecure and avoiding attachment in which the attachment figure is insensitive, avoiding, rejecting and prevents access to the child in a way unpredictable, causing in the child insecurity and concern. Feminist theories also play a large explanatory framework, as well as the Evolutionary Systemic Model of Capaldi and Cols (2004).

In United States, the company Liz Claiborne fund an investigation into violence in courtship through the Internet, which revealed that 36% of respondents were under control by their partner, who came to call up to 30 times a day to know about their activities (quoted by Hinduja and Patchin, 2011). This research, conducted in a *Southern United States School District*, conducted on the basis of a random sample of 4,400 students aged 11-18; found that 12 percent of the students had been victim of some electronic form of dating violence, 10% said their romantic partner had prevented them from using a computer or cell phone; 6% indicated that their sentimental partner had posted something on the net, to mock, threaten or publicly embarrass, 10.4% of the boys and 9.8% of the girls said they received a threatening message on their cell phone, sent to the device by their romantic partner; 5.4% of males and 3.4% of females reported that their partners had distributed a humiliating photo online in order to damage their prestige.

### **Cyber Violence in Adolescent Dating Relations in Mexico**

Violence in cyberspace was seen to come with the emergence of interactive virtual environments that started with chat services, followed with the publication of photographs and guestbook in sites such as Facebook and Photolog; access to upload videos on pages like YouTube and all kinds of images, sounds and texts on Facebook and other social networks.

We live a generation of digital creators who can equally form the most beautiful expression of

love and civility, and others generating the most cruel manifestation of hatred and violence, with

the tools that the network and other electronic devices are available.

Velázquez (2009) warned that;

"violence has a new face, maybe it is a makeup, but it has changed and will continue to

metamorphose even more; the use of ICT is modifying social behaviors ... new terms, new

relationships, new interactions".

The jealousy and the control of the pair begin to appear in the Mexican investigations that study

the coexistence in the cyberspace. Velázquez (2010) noted that;

"a type of harassment that is increasing is when the girlfriend sends messages or makes calls to

control or monitor their partner".

In Veracruz, López Hernández (2009) carried out a qualitative study at the "Ricardo Flores

Magón" high school in the city of Xalapa, during February-July 2009 school period; four focus

groups were formed and five students were interviewed. Men and women with experience or

without relationship experience; when inquiring about the teenegers' relationships, it was found

that non-formal courtship, known as "free" or "friend" relationships are characterized by a

greater erotic-sexual charge.

In that same state, Oliva, González, Yedra, Rivera and León (2012) carried out a study at the

Universidad Veracruzana to investigate the most common forms of violence and the factors

associated with it. Participated in 1988 students between 19 and 49 years old of the different

campuses finding that 27.8% of the students had shouted to their boyfriend, 15.2% had insulted

him, 10.6% had pushed their partner, 4% had pulled the hair, 14.9% had bitten their partner in

the heat of conflict, 7.5% had slapped their partner, 3.8% had struck at them, 2.1% had used

kicks, one in every thousand had threatened fire and three out of a thousand had burned their

mate's skin with cigarettes or matches.

The results of this investigation confirm at first sight that in relationships of courtship, violence

does not always travel towards a single direction, but there is what in the international area has

been called two-way violence, that is, there are either a self-defensive response from the

victimized partner, or else, it is the other party, be a woman or a man, who initiates it. In this

study, the authors conclude, "invite us to make different reflections on the problem of violence,

specifically with respect of gender." Results such as these contradict the feminist theories that

place women as the only recipient of aggressions.

In Sonora, Ramirez Rivera and Núñez Luna (2010) conducted an exploratory study on dating

violence in university students, applying an instrument to 376 students from different bachelors

to learn about the factors associated with violence in the students, finding self-esteem as a

potential factor in inducing violence.

When analyzing harassment behaviors on Facebook in high school and college students, Lucio

(2012) made an approximation to the problems faced by teenegers of both sexes who have a

sentimental relationship and interact in cyberspace. In a study based on a sample of 1,900

students, 31.1% of the respondents, or three out of ten students, had problems with their

boyfriend/girlfriend for accepting friends who were not from their choice.

Studies that reveal the interactions of couples in cyberspace are minimal in the Mexican context,

so this situation leads us to agree with Rojas Solís (2013), in the sense that it is very necessary to

emphasize the inclusion of the study of the "new violence" in a couple, specifically those

associated with new technologies. This reality motivates us to investigate the interactions in the

cyberspace that live the adolescents who have a dating relationship and that live in the social

network such as Facebook, among others.

2. Material and Method

Our study is exploratory, descriptive and cross-sectional, since in Nuevo Leon state and perhaps

in the country studies have not been carried out describing the interactions in the social networks

of teenegers having a dating relationship.

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The study was carried out in 14 public high schools geographically established in 9 municipalities of the state of Nuevo Leon, participating in the sample 1,900 students who were randomly selected in high schools in the metropolitan area of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon.

The type of sample used was probabilistic stratified by educational center and gender, using 95% confidence ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) and with an error limit of no more than 0.3 ( $\pm$  3%). The sample consisted of 50.1% of males and 49.1% of females. Ages ranged from 16 to 18 years old. 69.8% were 16 years old, 25.2% were 17 years old and 5% were 18 years old.

An essential requirement was that they had at that moment a dating relationship or that they had finished one recently, setting a limit of three months previously.

### 3. Instrument

We used an instrument to measure the rates of ciberdating designed by the Laboratory of Studies on Coexistence and Violence Prevention at the University of Córdoba, Spain, and validated by Sánchez, Ortega and Santos (2011). The scale as a self-report contains questions that have to do with the identification of the center of studies to which the student belongs, the sex, the age and the locality. It inquires about the type of family of the student, the time dedicated to the connectivity, the enrollment in social networks, the time that takes the sentimental relation, the formal or non formal of this and the form of the initial contact, either face-to-face or virtual.

By means of 39 Likert-type questions to measure attitudes we explore the coexistence in the social networks of the members of the couple and their possible attitude to this or that situation, for example: I feel jealous if my partner hangs provocative photos in your social network profile with answers of the type Never / Almost never / Sometimes / Almost always and Always.

The questionnaire was adapted to the geographic reality in which it was applied contemplating the uses of the language of the adolescents of Nuevo León so that they were understood, for example, we changed the phrase "touches to the mobile" by "calls to his cellular".

### 4. Process

After the research was authorized, we explained to the groups in the high schools, we explained to the students the purpose of the research, the characteristics of the self-report, guaranteeing

anonymity and requesting sincerity in the answers. Once they were answered, the questionnaires were captured in a database for analysis using the statistical software SPSS version.

### 5. Results and Discussion

84.6% of the students were members of a nuclear family with the presence of the father and the mother; 14.3% belonged to uniparental families with presence of the mother; and the rest with their siblings and other people like grandparents, uncles, stepfathers and stepmothers, etc.

98.6% of the students have Internet service in their home and 28.1% of this total uses the Internet from 1 to 2 hours from Monday to Friday; in that same period 33% of the students dedicate from 3 to 4 hours; 18.7% use the network for 5 to 6 hours; 6.4% use it for 7 to 8 hours; while 5.1% use the Internet from 9 to 10 hours, 8.7% have 11 or more hours of connectivity.

At weekends there are not many differences in connectivity time, since 26.3% dedicate from 1 to 2 hours, 28.3% connect from 3 to 4 hours, 10.6% from 7 to 8 hours, 6.5% from 9 to 10 hours, and 16.7% of 11 hours and more, so it is inferred that 8 out of 100 students takes advantage of the weekend break to be more time in the network.

As for the number of friends who have added to their social network, 54.1% have 500 friends and more; 10.1% have 401 to 500 contacts; 12.4% from 301 to 400; 11.5% from 201 to 300 friends; 8.1% from 101 to 200; 2.6% have 51 to 100 contacts, while 1.2% have 1 to 50 friends added to their network.

At the time of the survey, 33.3% of the sample had a partner, while 66.7% had recently terminated the relationship, so they answered the questionnaire considering the engagement that had just come to an end.

33.3% of the students had 1 to 3 months in their relationship; 13.9% had boyfriend from 4 to 6 months; 9.9% from 7 to 8 months and 9.4% from 10 to 12 months, that is to say, they were to meet or had been one year of relationship. A 10.9% had between 13 and 15 months of relationship; 6.2% from 16 to 18 months; 10.9% from 19 to 21 months; 3.25 from 22 to 24

months, almost fulfilled or had reached two years; 2.3% had exceeded two years with 25 to 28 months of courtship. The literature indicates that violence occurs more frequently in relationships of longer duration, since there is a greater commitment.

We found that 87.5% of the students had met their partner in person and 12.5% initiated their dating relationship in online interactions, so that social networks are changing the ways of relating adolescents emerging as a possibility for the achievement of a sentimental relationship. For 64% of the sample, the relationship was defined as serious; 23% were only dating and 13% defined their relationship as informal. The networks in which adolescents were registered were Facebook, mostly 98%, but they also alternated the coexistence in other social networks like Instagram, WhatsApp, Ask.Fm, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, DeviantArt, Skype, Tumblr, Metroflog, Zello, among other.

As for the emotions that caused some activities of the members of the couple in the network and that could cause restlessness in the relationship, it is related to the graphic images that portray the person. 63.6% of the sample indicated feeling jealous if their partner hung provocative photos in the network; 9.8% noted that this emotion always felt; 8.8% almost always; 27.5% sometimes and 17.5% almost never.

This unease leads adolescents along the paths of insecurity to the extent that 68.7% of the sample expressed concern that their partner could start another relationship with someone through social networks. This wave of concern always reaches 10.9% of the sample; almost always to 9.7%, sometimes to 19.4% and almost never to 18.6%, which tells us that at least six out of 10 students involved in a sentimental relationship feel uneasy about the interaction of their partner in the net. 44.3% confess to flirting with others in the network while their partner is connected and witnessing their cybernetic activity in the network.

The new information technologies enable new forms of connection, of sentimental "click" with other beings with which there is the possibility of starting a relationship. 31.2% of the adolescents surveyed openly expressed that they liked to link on the net and that they occasionally accessed cyberspace with the intention of looking for an "adventurer". 3.1%

indicated entering the network with these intentions always; 3.6% almost always; 17.2% sometimes and 14.3% almost never. What most draws the attention of the other to the adolescents is the physical aspect according to 71% of the students surveyed. This aspect of the person can only be appreciated in the profile photographs or in those that are part of the photographic album of the biographies available on the networks and which are essential elements to be accepted in their requests for additions in the list of friends who are cross in cyberspace. 70.4% of the sample confessed that when he knew someone he liked, he quickly gave his social network account.

Social networks do not only operate on the web, there are also those that are designed to work on mobile devices such as cell phones. WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram are some of them where users can chat, exchange messages, photos, exchange contacts and even texts that show the content of their conversations. It is not surprising that a person shares a photograph that they sent as a recipient in exclusivity. The same thing happens with the texts. A person can transmit fragments of a conversation that was given in the area of confidentiality and put in evidence to which he gave his trust. Our study revealed that 48.3% of students when they meet a person they like quickly give them their cell phone number.

This situation of accepting people with or without a face-to-face interaction is witnessed by the other partner - the list of friends are in view of their contacts in most social networks - provoking a certain type of irritation, insecurity and anxiety, making this a threat. 59% of the students in the sample indicated feeling jealous if their partner adds someone unknown to the opposite sex. This is always the case for 9.3% of the sample; almost always to 10.4%; sometimes to 18.9% and almost never to 20.3% of the students who answered the instrument.

The messages that are posted on the walls - not the inbox ones - are in the eyes of most people; So that one or another member of the couple can realize the comments, good or bad, serious or indiscreet, comical or flirtatious, avoidant or seductive that transmits or receives the other, causing in many occasions conflicts in the couple. 56.3% of the sample said they felt jealous after reading the messages that their partner receives in their account.

This type of interactions provokes conflicts in the relationship of courtship of the adolescents, because they originate distrust and insecurity. Thus, 59.4% of students ask their partner for their Facebook friends and even 59% of them add to their contact list friends of their partner in order to exercise control over their girlfriend's interactions with person he / she has added. The restlessness is such that 59% of the students in the sample perceive that their partner changes, which is not the same when they chat. Suspicion, distrust comes to such a degree that 42.7% - four out of ten - try to gain access to their partner's social network account. Faced with this situation, 27.2% confessed that it has opened accounts with false data - identity suppression - for their partner to add and be able to control it (or).

Another resource used by some members of couples who feel unsafe about their boyfriend is to ask someone in their social network of friends to allow them to use their account and with that profile get their partner, who is unaware that the person with whom you are communicating in the network is not other than your partner.

"I've been posing as a friend to test my partner," confesses 39.5% of the sample, and then question his partner about the talks of the day. "I ask my partner about what he does in social networks," says 59.4% of students who participated in the research.

To show their anger at their partner, 53.7% show their anger using capitalization in their text conversations or write little, as did 63.7% of the sample; also the offended partner is removed from the chat without warning, as it was secured by 59.5% of the sample or also tries to flirt with others (as) in the network - as did 51.3% of the sample - to provoke jealousy in their partner.

Some people at the height of the conflict come to reactivate old relationships or accept people on their list of friends, who know that they can cause discomfort to their partner. 69.6% of the sample was irritated because their partner uploaded a photo where he appears with his former boyfriend.

This type of situations, when faced by couples, generate conflicts that endanger the relationship and cut all types of communication by eliminating the couple from their list of friends, you avoid getting calls and you even get to cancel the account to not read the messages that arrive by chat or inbox.

"When I'm angry and my partner does not respond, I call by cell phone many times," said 41.7% of the sample; "When I am angry and my partner does not respond I leave many messages on his wall," said 38.7% of the sample.

"When we are angry and my partner blocks me, he used a friend's profile to leave messages for him, write on his wall or chat," said 28.8% of the students in the sample. A 36.7% of the sample indicates that when there is anger and is cut off the interaction leaves many private messages in personal mailbox of the account of its pair.

As González Lozano (2009) affirms, violence in courtship can be triggered by many factors and its multi-causality becomes more complex because of the conceptual polemic in which this phenomenon is immersed. Interactions in social networks, as this research has shown, can become a risk factor for the influence, on the one hand, of the personal characteristics of the members of the couple, as well as the scope of the contextual factors in which the sentimental relationship develops. Sociodemographic factors such as ethnic variations, economic status and place of residence are set aside if we are talking about coexistence in a virtual world where the only thing certain is that there are no boundaries. The personal history of the individual persists in this factor, whose beliefs detonate jealousy and the exercise of strategies of control before the disinhibition of the other influenced by the seduction of the social networks that are offered as showcase of the quotidian. As Calmaestra (2011) states, the impact of ICT has transcended the barriers of education and formal contexts to the social life of young people and it is in cyberspace where users can interact very differently to the behaviors learned in the process of socialization to those who had been involved in the physical spaces. Thus, moral values and social expectations that shape human behaviors may not exert sufficient pressure on the behaviors of subjects in cyberspace.

Willard (2004) concerned by Calmaestraasserts that disinhibition in communication over the Internet and mobile phones can lead to hostile communication, in such a way that subjects

influenced by the characteristics of cyberspace can commit aggressions with a low psychological load and great ease.

We are now faced with an emerging violence made possible by ICTs, in the face of a communication of old maltreatment now mediated by computers and mobile telephony, which impact the most precious collective of humanity as are our adolescents and young people in their dating relationship.

It is suggested to continue studies in this, also emerging line of research to examine the possible impact of this new violence in the physical and face-to-face, as Hinduja and Patchin (2011) have already proven, this mediated psychological violence becomes physical aggressions in the three-dimensional reality.

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