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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the results of an online survey carried out by five Italian Universities to investigate the cyber violence phenomenon between young people aged between 19 and 25 (2365 valid questionnaires). The web transforms social relationships because it moves them out of the 'real' context and places them in an undefined space–time dimension where, the identity dimension does not pass only through being passive users but active builders of content and relationships. The web is not without risks, including the well-known phenomenon of cyberviolence. The data collected allow us to focus on formal and informal networks (ref. family and school) that young people activate between real and virtual life to cope with the risks and problems arising from the phenomena of cyberviolence. Within the analysis we adopted a gender approach useful to emphasize the different forms of violence that can be characterized by male and female points of view. In the conclusions we also focus on interventions that can be put in place to address this problem by imagining the characteristics of an alliance between institutions (family and school) that could represent a safety network for boys and girls starting from the awareness of the risks that the network can offer.

KEYWORDS Cyber violence; gender violence; informal support networks; school; family

Introduction: from the global society to the networked individualism: the emergence of new cyber risks

Over the last two decades, a massive shift in the ways that people use computer technol- ogies has occurred (Wall, 2007).

At the beginning of this global process Castells spoke about a network society (2000) characterized by a new way of communication called 'Internet Galaxy' because, for the first time, the internet permitted, to communicate many-to-many, in a specific time and on a global scale.

All human activities are based on communication (Luhmann, 2012). The Web Revo- lution concerned the communication but not only that: the culture is transformed and defined by the technology that a society uses and it impacts the way people organize their knowledge (McLuhan, 1962).

This approach has strengthened the diffusion of media products with passive use in mass media societies. The sociological issue therefore shifts from an originally simplistic thesis, which was found to be ineffective (Bennet, 2008), with passive and immediate reception of

media contents, to the complex relationship between offiine and online soci- ality (Livingstone, 2008). Users are no longer just passive service users but active content and relationships builders on the web (Thompson, 1995) that transform social relation- ships precisely because it deprives them of a real context and relocates them in an unspe- cified space–time dimension, in which the boundaries between the virtual world and the physical world are blurry (Livingstone, 2008). Consequently sociology proposes a new interpretative paradigm known as the network society (van Dijck, 2002) was proposed to describe the way in which the network represents the structural element of human and social relationships which become interconnected and without borders.

We can affirm that there is a transition from spatial communities to networks as pri- mary forms of sociality (Wellman, 2001). Our lives have changed significantly because of this contact with the web. This is particularly true for young people who use technologi- cal devices on a daily basis, leading an online existence (Abel et al., 2010; Floridi, 2015).

Many young people do not experience the online/offiine binary that characterized the lives of older generations (Jandric et al., 2018).

Digital technologies have transformed childhood and adolescence. Young people have adopted the internet and other technologies as a tool for socializing, through which they develop their identities and relationships, their emotional regulation, self-expression and learning (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010). Unfortunately, an increasing number of teen- agers uses these technologies to post damaging text or images to bully their peers or engage in other aggressive behaviors (Oksanen, Hawdon, Holkeri, Näsi, & Räsänen, 2014; Livingstone, Ólafsson, & Staksrud, 2013).

The network has its ambiguities: on the one hand, thanks to it, huge quantities and varieties of information become easily accessible; on the other hand, the widespread cir- culation and availability of data increases the exposure of individuals and collectives, to the online attack risks, which represent old and new forms of social deviance. Online vio- lence is one of them.

There is a growing body of literature focused on the relationship between social media and violence and the risk factors associated with cyberviolence (Patton et al., 2014). New forms of aggression and violence occur exclusively online and they involve both individ- ual-level factors of victims (for example gender and age) and social-level factors (relation- ships with friends, family background) (Peterson & Densleyb, 2017).

Cyberviolence: old wine in a new bottle or a technological variation of an ordinary crime?

Collins (2008), through his microsociological theory, focuses on violence as a social relationship. He states that individuals per se are not violent, it is rather the character- istics of certain situations that shape the emotions of the individuals involved.

Thanks to the process of civilization, violence between individuals in everyday-life situations does not frequently occur. Individuals develop significant emotional tension, which brings them to develop a barrier of confrontational tension and fear, that push them to give up.

Criminological research has expanded its focus over the last two decades to improve our understanding of the impact of technology on the different forms of violence (Taylor, 2010).

In the last two decades, the amount of cybercrime has grown exponentially. Some scholars argue that the study of 'virtual criminality' is merely 'old wine in new bottles' (Grabosky, 2001) or a 'technological variation of ordinary crime' (McQuade, 2006). Otherwise Clark (2002) argues, for instance, that the Internet has created 'completely new' opportunities and environments for 'traditional crimes' to 'take new forms'.

Social media platforms1 have become the preferred communication channel vehicle for individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 where young people engage in bullying and social

harm against their classmates (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Wolak et al., 2012). At the same time, social media has introduced new forms of aggression and violence that occur exclusively online. Studies find that cyber-bullying (Turliuc et al., 2020) and harassment, including threatening or sexual messages delivered via social media, for example, are common among the young population (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Lim
et al., 2013).

In the existing literature on cybercrime the Wall's typology (2001) is considered one of the most comprehensive frameworks that describes the way the technologies have been incorporated into various forms of offences. He offers out four categories of cybercrime:

(1) cyber-trespass; (2) cyber-deception; (3) cyber-porn and obscenity; (4) cyberviolence. We are interested in cyber-violence, even if its meaning remains strongly contested (Grant, 2016). Different literature reviews agree on the fact that cyberviolence is a phenomenon that emerged in the early 2000s because of the widespread diffusion of portable devices and web 2.0, and it encapsulates types of harm and abuse facilitated by and
perpetrated through digital and technological means (Backe et al., 2018).

The UN adoption of the term, in their 2015 Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) report, started a heated debate on the definition of cyber VAWG, its terminological overlaps with other forms of violence and crimes, and the extent to which the attempt to encompass all forms of online violence with just one term was both accurate or fair (Chisholm, 2006). Multilateral organizations like the United Nations (Kaye, 2017; UN Broadband Commission, 2015) brought global attention to the threats cyberviolence poses, while health organizations like the centers for disease control (CDC) began to highlight its public health consequences (Hertz & David-Ferdon, 2008).

The Cyber violence phenomenon may not be confused with online violence against women, although research points out that women are the main victims of this type of violence.

Even if some scholars argue that cyberviolence represents a new term for an old concept and practices, we are interested in studying it as it has been considered an emerging public health problem with a global dimension (Flach & Deslandes, 2017).

This is a current and urgent topic that has not been fully conceptualized or legislated against at EU level. Furthermore, there has been no gender-disaggregated EU survey and there is limited national-level research within EU Member States (EIGE, 2017, Council of Europe, 2018).

So, we decide to promote and conduct research on cyberviolence and youth. The aim of this paper is to investigate and underline the role of two main institutions that are involved in the socialization process: family and school. Today, social media platforms influence all contexts in which young people socialize. From a sociological perspective, today's socialization is mediatized (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). Socialization is an interactive and dynamic process of interwoven macro and microstructural factors, among which two media-based practices that are developed as essential parts of social practices. Family and school institutions remain the most important actors in the socialization process.

More than 30 years ago, Beck (1992, trad.it 2000) was already reflecting on the risks connected to the modern era, defining our society a 'risk society', one characterized by uncertainty. The new risks cannot be predicted, we do not know anything about them nor the possible solutions. During the second modernity risks are the result of the civi- lization process so they are produced by new technologies and the social acceleration of our lives. The new technologies and the social acceleration of our lives have produced new risks. Beck says that the new modern risks are (paradoxically) produced by organ- izations and institutions traditionally established to prevent these risks and containing their effects on the social order. Do we need new institutions to prevent and contain vir- tual and cyber risks? Brand new institutions or old institutions with a new attire, values, and instruments?

What about the old institutions dedicated to the prevention and containment of cyber risks? Are the old institutions able to develop and advance in a culture of uncertainty? The new scenario of virtual environments containing vast quantities of information, languages and knowledge, poses a significant challenge to the two institutions typically dedicated to the socialization process of young: the family and school.

The analysis of the family as an institution capable of accompanying and helping young people within the internet galaxy, immediately brings our attention to the debate between parents and children regarding the use of new media, characterized by the opposition between digital immigrants (parents) and native ones (children) (Prensky, 2009). This contrast suggests that digital environments are hostile to the development of family social capital. Silverstone and Hirsch (1992) argue that Social Networks (SNs) fit into domestication and Meyrowitz (1985) says that digital media develop an intermediate digital environment that fosters the sharing of information between young people and adults. PEW Centers (2008) shows that parents use new forms of connection to increase the potential associated with family socialization. It seems that new mobile devices and their platforms enter the home and provide sup- port for the development of relationships useful for the growth and development of children's identity (boyd, 2014). While Turkle (2012) claims that the growing develop- ment of technology leads to living together but alone, on the other hand Raine and Wellman (2014) speak of networked families to indicate that digital devices, media, and platforms facilitate the connection between family members.

What happens inside the educational institutions? Unfortunately, research in our ter- ritory started late (Guarini et al., 2009), especially compared to that of the European and international levels which we have traced back to the 2000s (Menesini et al., 2012).

The international literature review suggests that young people are using social media platforms for self-directed learning that is largely independent from schooling (Green- how & Askari, 2017; Rutledge, Dennen, & Bagdy, 2019). This gap must be overcome. Media education interventions in schools, aimed at directing young users toward conscious and appropriate use of such media tools, appear to be of fundamental importance in teams of cyberviolence prevention.

They are facing a great challenge as the question of cyberviolence prevention foresees learning practices that cannot be reduced to mere education but require incorporated participation, flexibility and convergence of socio-cultural scenarios (Taddeo & Tirocchi, 2014).

Therefore, this paper poses the following research questions:
- RQ1 What knowledge and experience do young people have of the 'new' cyberviolence phenomenon, also in terms of digital platforms use?
- RQ1a Does gender (referring to females) increase cyberviolence risks?
- RQ2 Are schools and families still institutions able to face cyberviolence risks young people are exposed to? How do they do it and what are the major differences between the two?

Methodology

Given the picture presented in the previous paragraphs, we decided to investigate the phenomenon of cyber violence in the lives of young Italians, setting two main objectives: one is cognitive and related to the analysis of cyber violence, the other regards sugges- tions related to educational policies. The intent was to start collecting national data on the phenomenon of cyberviolence among young people, understand whether and how well they were familiar they were with the different forms of online violence, explore the experiences they have had

regarding the phenomenon, see what help networks were activated in case of need, and trying to suppose what measures can be adopted (at the national level) to prevent and contain the phenomenon.

We therefore promoted a research project entitled 'Cyberviolence and social aspects of online violence'. The project was coordinated by the University of Macerata and col- leagues from four other universities participated: Bologna, Rome 'La Sapienza', Salerno, Turin, and a technical partner from to the third sector, the Observatory of Gender of the city of Macerata.

In line with the international research carried out on the topic, and given its sen- sitivity, we decided to carry out an anonymous survey, distributing the questionnaire through an online link. The research involved young people born between 1995 and 2002. The reason we choose this target was because children are often involved in awareness-raising projects, some promoted by The Ministry of Education, on the topic of online violence. After high school, public occasions to raise awareness on the issue seem to be few a far between, despite the rapid increase of phenomena of online violence which often has dramatic effects on the lives of citizens (females in particular).

We chose to investigate this age group also with the intention to design suggestions for future projects and policies in terms of prevention and protection.

The survey was conducted from February 2021 to May 2021.

The sample was based on non-probability method, and we used a 'snowball sampling' (Clark et al., 2021). We start by administering the questionnaires at the Universities involved in the research and other Italian universities where we presented the research and our colleagues were open to participate.

Table 1. Main socio-personal characteristics of respondents.

Age	n	%	Area of residence	n	%	Schooling	n	%
27	155	6.6	North-West	429	18.1	Secondary school	76	3.2
26	150	6.3	North-East	336	14.2	High school	1907	80.7
25	220	9.3	Center	603	25.5	Bachelor's degree	342	14.5
24	250	10.6	South	919	38.9	Master's degree	30	1.3
23	460	19.5	Islands	78	3.3	master's degree	7	0.3
22	578	24.4		2365	100.0		2362	100.0
21	398	16.8						
20	154	6.5						
	2365	100.0						

Even the Gender Observatory association, thanks to their involvement in a project about cyberviolence, facilitated the process. Each student was then asked to share the questionnaire link with friends, classmates, and acquaintances. The only requirement was the participants' age (19–26 years old). Finally, we collected 2365 valid questionnaires.

The questionnaire contains 6 parts: (1) personal data; (2) knowledge of cyberviolence and its various expressions; (3) the use of social networks and the risks associated with online violence; (4) cyberviolence and social groups; (5) cyberviolence experiences; (6) aids and tools to counter cyberviolence.

In the questionnaire we adopted a large definition and description of cyberviolence that includes all these aspects: cyberbullying; cyber harassment; cyberstalking; flaming; hate speech: impersonation; detection and deception; exclusion; malicious code; sexting; revenge porn; self-injurious challenge; vamping.

Table 1 summarizes the main socio-demographic variables of the sample.

The sample is mostly made up of female respondents and the reasons for this are manifold: typically, girls are more responsive to surveys and particularly with respect to this research topic; girls attend university classes more than their male colleagues. We therefore decided not

to proceed with statistical weighting techniques to ensure that the sample could express the characteristics of the method used to select it (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021).

The average age of the respondents has been 22, and 98% are Italian citizens. Eighty point 6 percet have a secondary school diploma, 14.5% already have a degree. The respondents are mostly students even if 22.9% describe themselves as student/worker; only 3.1% work, this figure does not depend only on the average age but in also on the channels chosen to disseminate the questionnaire.

For the time being we have decided to only apply descriptive statistics and the data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows, version 20.0.0 (IBM SPSS Statistics 20. United States).

Analysis

Cyber violence: are young people familiar with this phenomenon?

Ninty-six point eight percent of respondents had heard of cyberviolence. The best-known form is cyber bullying (99.2% of the sample), followed by impersonation (93.4%), cyberstalking (92.9%) and revenge porn (90.7%). The least known dimensions/forms of cyber- violence to young people are cyber harassment (24.1%) and malicious code (10%).

Regarding the familiarity with the dimensions of the phenomenon, there are no sig- nificant differences with respect to the gender variable. The types of acts the respondents consider the worst by are revenge porn (49.3%), cyber bullying (14%) and self-harming challenges (13.45). In this case, there are significant gender differences: boys believe cyber bullying is worse, while girls believe revenge porn and self-harming challenges are worse. In terms of danger, the highest values corresponding to 'very dangerous' are recorded for revenge porn (79.6%), self-harming challenges (76.85%) and cyber bullying (60.8%). Girls rate revenge porn and self-harming challenges as more dangerous (76.8%), cyber bullying even reports 20 percentage points of difference between girls (64.6%) and boys (44.5%).

Digital platforms and cyberviolence risks

Now let us look at the social networks and digital platforms that are mostly used by our respondents and try to understand what the dangerous aspects related to acts of violence that these tools can hide are.

WhatsApp is used on a daily basis (98.9%). As for social networks, the most used one is Instagram (daily use 92.1%), while Facebook is used daily by only 46.6%. YouTube is also used daily (39.6%), while Tik-Tok (typically considered the social network of young people) is used daily by only 25.9% of respondents. The gender variable is relevant above all for the use of YouTube, and males use it daily much more than females (71.7% vs. 32%).

The respondents, both males and females, use digital platforms and social networks a lot, especially to communicate, to chat (57.5%) and to talk (41.6%), to look for infor- mation (31.8%) and to follow profiles of famous people (20.8%) and groups and associ- ations that are considered relevant (15.4%).

The data therefore seem to confirm that young people's use of online platforms is of a relational type where social networks represent tools that support the social life of young people today and allow them to develop a continuum between online and offiine relation- ality. In fact, very few individuals use these tools to meet new people online or to publish posts and promote themselves.

Social networks are considered extremely dangerous by young people for three reasons: the impossibility to block the circulation of photos, videos and posts (74.9%), the violation of privacy (62%) and the possibility of identity theft (60.9%). In all cases, it is females who perceive a higher risk than males and for each item there is a difference of more than 10 percentage points.

As for the profile of the victim of cyberviolence, the respondents believe that both males and females may be involved and that the riskiest age is between 14 and 19. Having a homosexual LGBTQ+ orientation is perceived, especially by girls, as a high-risk element. On the other hand, boys to a much greater extent than girls, believe that an over- weight girl represents a high-risk target for online violence.

Ninety-one point four percent of respondents consider cyberviolence unacceptable, but there are more than 15 percentage points of difference between girls and boys. It should be noted that boys, to a much greater extent than girls, also believe that in some situations cyberviolence is an inevitable phenomenon.

Online violence: young people's experience

Twenty-seven point six percent of the respondents have witnessed cyberviolence on occasion, 21.5% sometimes, 10% have witnessed cyberviolence on many occasions. In these cases, 41.9% reported the incident, and 25% helped the victim. Regarding these dimensions, there are no gender differences.

Forty-six percent of respondents are very afraid, 26.3% extremely afraid of becoming the victim of online violence by an anonymous and invisible attacker. These figures show a huge gender difference for which girls are much more scared than boys are.

Among the respondents, some have been victims of exclusion (18.1%), of cyber bully- ing (14.1%), sexting (12.9%) and hate speech (12.2%). In this case the gender differences are significant: exclusion and cyber bullying concern girls in a small percentage, sexting affects girls almost twice as much as boys, while hate speech concerned boys in a higher percentage than girls.

About 30% declare that they are still a victim of cyberviolence today, 24% declare that they have been a victim of online violence in the last six months.

Aid and tools to combat online violence

Let us now analyze the help that our respondents asked for in cases of cyberviolence and which tools they believe are the most useful when it comes to helping the victims and in terms of prevention.

We will focus on the role families and schools play in terms of helping young people and what role they think these traditional institutions should have regarding the preven- tion and containment of the online violence phenomena.

Boys and girls believe that the most useful interventions to combat cyberviolence are equally important: the creation of a law that protects victims of cyberviolence (82.8%) and targeted education for young people so that they can help friends in cases of violence (82.7%). Teaching young people how to use social networks and digital platforms in gen- eral, and the defense tools that can be activated online is also considered very important (80.2%). The tools deemed less useful are the promotion of shocking social advertising campaigns on the subject (15.9%) and the creation of a specific helpline social networks (10.8%).

What is the role that young people attribute to the family in the event of violence? Ninety-one point nine percent of respondents live with at least one member of the family of origin, 4.1% with peers, 2.1% with a partner and only 1.4% live alone (Figure 1).

Let us now analyze the educational qualifications and professions of the respondents' parents.

Re-aggregating the variables into three classes, we can say that 49.6% of mothers have an average educational qualification, 30.1% have a low educational qualification and 20.2% have a degree or higher. As for the professional position, 28.2% of mothers are homemakers, 20% work as clerks, 13.7% have blue-collar jobs.

In line with national trends, fathers have, on average, a lower educational qualification than mothers do. In fact, 45.7% have a high school diploma, 34.4% have a middle-school diploma. 38.1% have a low educational qualification, 45.7% have an average qualification and only 16.2% are highly qualified.
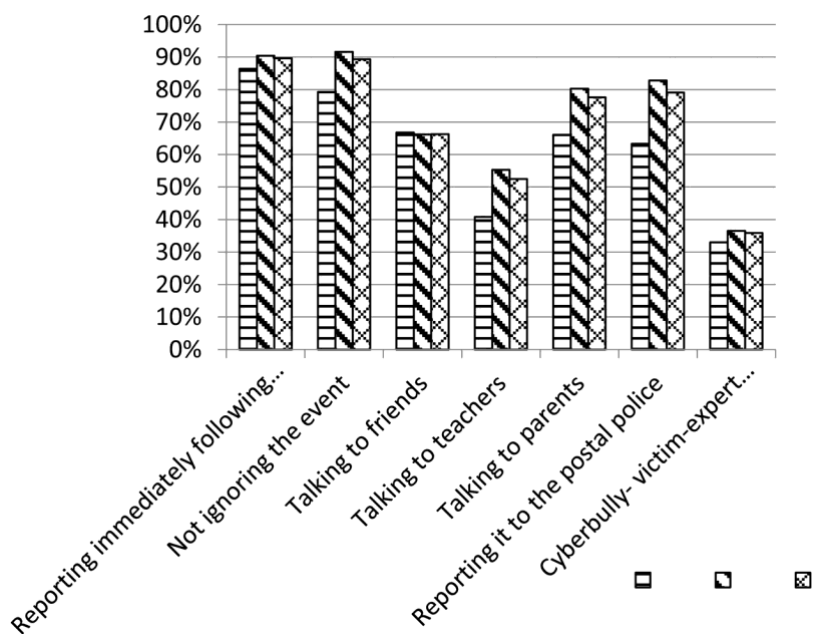

Figure 1. Usefulness of the actions in case of cyberviolence (type of answer: very useful value).

However, if we look at their occupation, the scenario is the opposite as compared to the mothers: 24.3% have a blue-collar job, 19.3% are clerks, 10.4% are entrepreneurs or hold a managerial position.

Regarding the adult figures in the family, we asked our respondents whether and to what extent they considered it might be useful to train parents on the risks associated with online violence. Parent training is considered very useful by 71.8% of respondents, while teacher training is considered very useful by 60.2% of respondents.

If we observe this variable with respect to gender, it is always the girls who find, to a much greater extent than the boys, the various solutions very useful. Overall, boys seem to have less faith regarding the usefulness of the indicated interventions. Regarding the training and empowerment of parents, there is a gender difference, but it is still more contained than in other cases. Respondents were then asked which concrete actions they deem useful in terms of helping victims of cyberviolence. The two most useful aspects concern the reporting of the event: first of all, the importance of not keeping everything inside and telling someone (89.6%) and not ignoring what happened by trivializing it (89.3%), the importance of reporting it to the police and (79.1%) and talking about it with parents (77.6%). In all these cases, the data show a significant gender difference: girls consider reporting the incident to be very useful, much more than boys do. A very interesting element is talking to the fact of talking about it with friends. In this case, the percentage of boys and girls who consider this aspect very useful is

the same (66%). The aspect the respondents see as absolutely less useful, especially the boys, concerns the encounters between cyber bullies, victims and experts (19.2%) (Figure 2).
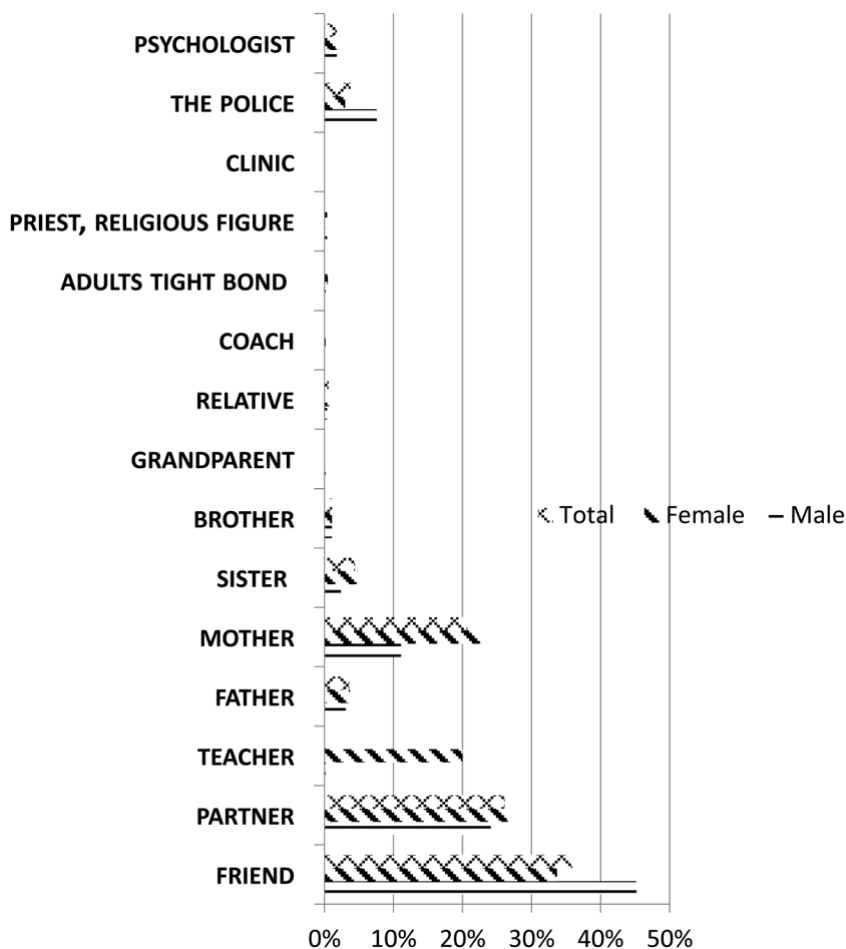

Figure 2. Who would you turn to for concrete help in case of cyberviolence (type of answer: yes, of course).

Exploring risk and protective factors
Let us now analyze the variables regarding the request for help by a victim of cybervio- lence. Respondents stated that they would immediately tell a friend (35.9%), their partner (26.1%) and their parent (24.3%), more often their mother than their father (20.7% vs. 3.6%).

As far as family members are concerned, sisters also seem to represent a greater refer- ence point than brothers (4.4% vs. 1.1%). If we analyze the responses related to concrete help in cases of online violence, most young people would turn to their partner (70.4%), a friend (65.2%) and their mother (62.7%).

Only 49% of respondents would turn to the father. Analyzing the role of other family members, 40% of respondents would turn to their sister, while 33.4% to the brother.

Outside the family unit, 9.1% of the respondents would turn to their grandparents 10.9% to other relatives.

Boys would usually ask friends for help (71.5% vs. 63.7% of girls), while the partner is the main reference especially for girls (71.5% vs. 65.9%).

Girls also turn to their mothers more than boys do (66.2% girls vs. 48.1% of boys). With respect to the fathers, there are smaller differences between girls and boys, but also in this case more girls (50.6%) would turn to their fathers for help.

The data referring to siblings are interesting. The sisters are a point of reference especially for girls. Boys mostly turn to their brothers for help, instead of their sisters, while girls turn to both. For this reason, gender differences are more contained when it comes to asking brothers for help than asking sisters.

Finally, we asked ourselves if the parents' educational qualifications, considered as a proxy variable of family cultural capital, could provide further data to understand the characteristics of the family network in case of need. This variable does not seem to dis- criminate in a significant way the responses and orientations of boys and girls.

However, we can underline that with respect to the variable regarding the father as a reference point in the event of cyberviolence, the percentage referring to the average response (49%) increases by a few percentage points if the father has a high level of education.

However, the father would never be contacted for help by 19.4% of respondents and by 22.2% of those who have a father with a low educational qualification.

A similar trend is also observed for mothers: 62.7% would ask her for concrete help, but this value drops to 59.5% for those who have a mother with a low educational qua- lification. Ten point five percent of the total respondents and 15% of those whose mother has a low educational qualification would never turn to her for help.

We can affirm that the variable regarding the educational qualification of the parents has a limited significance regarding the choice to turn to their mother or father for help in case of violence.

The data show us that parents, and the family network, are still a reference for young people with respect to the online risks and problems associated with cyberviolence. The female figures seem to be identified as the main interlocutors.

Family ties constitute an important point of reference, alongside friends and peers. However, targeted training remains necessary for everyone, both with respect to the use of digital platforms and with respect to the dimensions and risks related to the forms of violence that can emerge online (Figure 3).

Institutional and educational network: an intergenerational and gendered reading

Our sample belongs to the Generation Z whose members are also defined as true digital native as they were born and raised in an almost completely digitalized and hyper-connected world. They live in a world full of new communication opportunities but also full of emerging problems connected to forms of online violence (Weinstein & Selman, 2016).

Most of them were born in 2000: they have a secondary school diploma (80.6% have it, while only 14.5% are graduates) and are about to step into adulthood. Young men and women who still feel the fresh out of high school and who are entering into the world of university and/or work. 22,9% of them are either university students and workers.

Figure 3. Who would you turn to for concrete help in case of cyberviolence (type of answer: yes, of course).

Maintain only this sentence:22,9% of these young men and women are either university students and workers.

Gender wise, there are significant differences both in the experience of cyberviolence and in its identification, and with respect to requests for help. Concerning the victimiza- tion phenomenon, females more than males tend to be at risk (35.5% against 1.11%) (Table 2).

Table 2. More victims of violence.

	N	%
Males	155	6.6
Females	150	6.3
Males and Females	220	9.3
Missing data	1	0%
	2365	100.0

This confirms the growing concern even at a European level regarding the spread of virtual violence against women and girls, that falls into the macro category group of cyberviolence. The European Institute for Gender Equality has recently carried out a desk-based search to explore the existing studies on these phenomena.2 In Italy this trend has already emerged from some empirical research that shows that girls are more at risk, as they use their smartphones for intense online communication and social relations (Mainardi et al., 2013). That was confirmed by our interviewees who said that they have been victims of online gender violence: cyber stalking (males 7.1% and females 10.4%) and sexting (males 8.2% and females 14.0%). Cyber stalking refers to stalking car- ried out through emails, messages, text messages (or online messages) or through the Internet. Acts that can be serious and that cause a strong sense of fear and insecurity. As already highlighted, girls declare to be extremely afraid (26.3%) and to be very afraid (46%) of becoming victims of online violence. Some surveys, such as the 2014 FRA sur- vey, state that young women are more often than men victims of both online as well as real-life violence,3 or vice versa. Real-life victims often become cyberspace victims too which amplifies the psychological effects on the victim and her fear.4

Several authors highlight that compared to traditional bullying, girls are more

involved in forms of cyber bullying, both in the role of victim and bully, because of their extensive use of social networks (Slonje, Smith, & Frisen, 2013), and that resizes the variable of gender digital divide. In fact, while the gender gap remains marked with respect to female employment roles in key sectors of digital IT, especially advanced ones, girls possess functional digital skills such as the acquisition of information and knowledge online, and media interaction for the purpose of social relations. Cybervio- lence and cyber bullying are concepts all of our respondents were familiar with (respect- ively from 96.8% and 99.2%). The data is distributed equally in this case between males and females.

Interesting data emerged on the type of harassment and/or offense in which young people claim to have been involved. Participating as a spectator is statistically equiv- alent ('yes, sometimes' for 26.9% of males and 25.6% of females) while having posted offensive content aimed at a person is about double in the male sample (8.5% com- pared to 4.9%) and triple if the contents referred to a group of people (11.8% com- pared to 4%).

The respondents think that riskiest age group in terms of cyberviolence is 14–19 (52% are extremely affected and 38% are affected a lot). In fact, in their opinion, the phenomenon develops progressively starting from the age of 11, then becomes central and conditions their late adolescence and finally fades and becomes less dangerous right after high school. A trend that probably follows the educational growth that allows young people to strengthen the so-called life skills necessary to face the most difficult experiences of adolescent life.

According to various studies, schools represent very fertile ground for harassment and abuse among children, where offline and online exchanges feed on one another and connect the virtual and real space. In fact, social media today play an essential role in the life of adolescents online, providing them with a place of communication in which their tech- nology-supported interactions support and complete the real interactions and face-to- face meetings.

The educational institution, which is not neutral with respect to violence, plays a cen- tral role in terms of prevention strategies. The international literature suggests that the school as a

community must manage this complex problem and their actions must be wide-ranging and diversified. In the last ten years prevention programmes have been developed (Palladino et al., 2016) to contrast forms of cyberviolence achieving several objectives. Among these: the definition of an anti-bullying school policy that fosters posi- tive social relations, implementing specific teacher training to better combat the manifes- tations of the phenomenon, intervening in the school environment to make it safer and more peaceful and increase pro-social responses, boosting life-skills education in the classroom. These are some of the aims that international and national programs have set in some educational institutions.

Therefore, the question of the school's ability to keep up with the implementation of these programs becomes central. Furthermore, the school must know how to act taking into account the new forms of cognitive learning following the spread and use of digital technologies.

The new digital socialization refers to the socialization learned in social reality through traditional educational methods in a continuum that generates re-socialization imposed by the digital world. The emerging problem concerns the backwardness, perceived by young people, of the school system, with respect to the use of social media and the digital skills of the adults working in it. According to our study, teachers are not someone to ask for support in cases of exposure to or experience of violence. This problem has to be addressed as the school environment is the most affected by these phenomena (Table 3). Moreover, according to the sample the teachers who are cyber bullying representatives should be highly trained on this issue (60.2% consider it useful and 34.3% more useful). They also affirm that both the teachers and the parents should be informed through ad hoc awareness campaigns on the topic (useful for 64.2% and very useful for 33%). The teachers are therefore seen as support figures: according to 52% of our sample, the victims must talk about it with their teacher. The request for their training is therefore seen as necessary to keep up with the complex dynamics of the phenom- enon. There are several actions that schools can take to reduce the likelihood of cyber bullying. First, all staff need to be educated about the problem (Brown et al., 2006; Campbell, 2005; Willard, 2006).

Table 3. If you were to suffer cyberviolence, would you ask for help from a teacher?

Table 3. If you were to suffer cyberviolence, would you ask for help from a teacher?

	N	%
Never	949	40.1
Maybe	1162	49.2
Sure	254	10.7
	2365	100.0

The difficulty Italian schools have in terms of keeping up with the new technological literacy, inevitably effects the way young people see them. This gap must and can be closed.

It is necessary to rethink the teaching tools, the relationship between teachers and stu- dents, how to organize the lessons and encourage de-institutionalized learning opportu- nities that are added as resources for school education (Balzola, 2020).

Any action to prevent and protect from cyberviolence phenomenon must include the competence of adults of reference must have concerning the new digital socialization of adolescents in the virtual relationship spaces.

Conclusions: from a digital literacy to a digital citizenship education throughout an educational community

The data presented above clearly show that in case of online violence and need of con- crete help, the peers (friends and partners) are the first ones young people turn to. The family (in particular the female figures, mothers and sisters) remains a go-to social insti- tution when in need of concrete help. Teachers and lecturers play a less important role. These data, when combined with the cyberviolence awareness data and the actions that young people deem most necessary in cases of cyberviolence, clearly show a lack of adequate awareness regarding cyberviolence and lack of adequate tools to counter it

by all actors involved, including young people.

What needs to be done and how, so that traditional institutions dedicated to socializa- tion, education and training, deemed useful by young people, can continue to fulfill their role, while keeping in mind the fact that the pervasiveness of the digital media has trans- formed the way we relate to each other by making us depend on platforms in all areas of our lives?

The digital literacy (Gilster, 1997) – that is the ability to understand and use infor- mation from a variety of digital resources – promoted and implemented in schools, has made it possible to work above all on internet and computer related technical skills. These skills have been developed in the last decade through activities focusing on the cor- rect access practices and conscious use of network technologies (Koltay, 2011; Sonck et al., 2011).

The progressive awareness and knowledge of the characteristics and dimensions of the platform society (van Dijck et al., 2018; Srnicek, 2017) inevitably focus on the (complex) relationship between:

- global technological architectures;
- the power relationships (and therefore the inequalities) that are generated by the datification processes;
- the impact these new configurations have on citizens' rights and on responsible par- ticipation in a democratic life (Marinelli, 2021)

Classroom learning will continue to be based on the acquisition of skills in a formal and traditional way (top-down) but it will have to be accompanied by a digital modality as well as an informal one which is already in use (bottom-up). The need for integration between knowledge, skills, roles, and information in different contexts is becoming

increasingly important (Novak, 2002) for the learning process to become trans-media (Livingstone, 2004).

In formal education, inserting 'popular culture, media and/or new technologies into the communications, language and literacy curriculum have a positive effect on the motivation and engagement of children in learning' (Marsh et al., 2005, p. 6).

Transmedia Literacy is a set of skills, practices, values, strategies that come also from media contexts external to the school environment,5 in which young people act daily as prosumers (producers and consumers: Ritzer et al., 2012). Complex and diversified con- tents are generated and shared. In this new learning model, the teachers no longer rep- resent authoritative figures who possess only traditional and formal knowledge – they become facilitators and/or cultural translators.

Recently, the actions to combat cyberviolence focus on the implementation of strategies based on teacher training and on the acquisition of a greater awareness of the problem and its consequences,6 through educational programs.

We believe that digital citizenship education (Frau-Meigs, O'Neill, Soriani, & Tomé, 2017; Marinelli, 2021) can represent the new theoretical framework for educational and training programs, that have not been created solely for students, but for young people in general and

above all for parents, teachers and educators. Creating educational programs for the latter is certainly the most difficult challenge.

The MIUR (2018) (Italian Ministry for Education, University and Research) syllabus explicitly addresses the creation of digital Civic Education curricula, with focus on trans- versal skills such as the development of a critical thinking and the need for responsible action.

Today, the issue of responsibility can be described in terms of sustainability and there- fore be seen and implemented within the 17 UN Sustainable Development goals framework.

Thanks to this approach, new media education is completely incorporated in this civic education approach aware of a double phenomenon: the technologies have become a part of our daily lives and we need to be educated and trained on how to use them responsibly and therefore sustainably.

Notes

1.   Social media platform means any medium whereby content (including, but not limited to images, videos, messages and sound files) is broadcast to, or capable of being broadcast to, the general public or a significant section of the general public. It includes (but is not limited to) Youtube, Facebook, Twitter and also any 'blog' or other type of web journal: https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/social-media-platform.

2.
        https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/ti_pubpdf_mh0417543itn_pdfweb_ 20171026164002.pdf (Last consultation 05/09/22).

3.   Violence against Women: An European Union Wide Survey. Main Results. https://fra.euro-   pa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf.

4.   EIGE   2017,   Cyberviolence   against   Women   and   Girls: https://eige.europa.eu/publications/ cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls?lang=lt.

5.   http://transmedialiteracy.upf.edu/sites/default/files/files/TL_whit_it.pdf.

6.   https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Other-Resources/School-Safety/Safe-and
-Supportive-Learning/Anti-Harassment-Intimidation-and-Bullying-Resource/Educator-s
-Guide-Cyber-Safety.pdf.aspx, 10/12/2017.

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