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Digital Violence in Affective-Sexual Relationships among Spanish University Students

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Abstract

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have brought about new forms of contact and interpersonal relationships, as well as a new space in which to deploy digital violence in the form of abuse, harassment, intimidation and behaviours of control and coercion through electronic media. This research analyses whether ICTs are the cause of a new form of digital violence and studies the prevalence of this digital violence exercised through screens among university couples. Applying a quantitative methodology, a two-stage random cluster sampling of 528 ($M_{Age} = 24.29$; $SD = 21.41$; 69.5 % female) Spanish university students was carried out. As a research instrument, we used the Digital Violence Questionnaire (DVQ), created for the detection, measurement and analysis of digital violence within affective-sexual relationships, which is composed of seven factors and a total of 55 variables presented in 30 items. The main results by factors were: factor 1, "Cyberstalking of the other", 10.89 %; factor 2, "Coercive Control", 11.72 %; factor 3, "Emotional Abuse", 18.37 %; factor 4, "Denigration", 6.86 %; factor 5, "First person Cyberstalking", 10.58 %; factor 6, "Isolation", 14.51 %; factor 7, "Domination" 20.02 %. Thus, the results show a slight tolerance towards digital violence among Spanish students, with a low prevalence where women have the highest percentages. Despite this, it is concluded that, taking into account the impact that electronic media have on younger populations in their social interactions and interpersonal relationships, the educational and university context should be the object of the creation of different awareness, prevention and specific training programmes against this digital violence.

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1. Introduction

As stated by Paullet and Chawdhry (2020), the growth and use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in society have brought numerous benefits, as well as a large number of detriments (Cabello, 2013), mainly for the youth population as the predominant sector in digital consumption. The growing number of investigations in the field of digital violence evidences the notable increase in cases in which abuse and harassment occurring among users of virtual spaces are reported and denounced, giving rise to an emerging social and public health problem (Jaén et al., 2017). Research conducted around the world on young people and university students, aged between 18 and 30 years approximately, have detected digital violence among their interpersonal relationships, finding significant variability among the results. For example, Spitzberg (2002) concluded that at least half of the young victims who claimed to have suffered situations of abuse and harassment through electronic media had identified their partner as the perpetrator. For their part, Strawhun et al. (2013) also reported that 20.5 % of their surveyed subjects were victims of cyberstalking, while Dreßing et al. (2014) reported a prevalence of 6.5 %. For Berry and Bainbridge (2017), it was 20 and 34 % of respondents who had experienced cyberstalking. More recently, Maran and Begotti (2019) found that 46 % of their respondents had been victims of cyberstalking. In addition, DeKeseredy et al. (2019) reported that 35 % of respondents had been victims of technology-enabled stalking.

As can be seen, two deductions can be found from this brief review. First, most studies name the object of study at hand as "cyberbullying" or "cyberstalking" in its English translation (Marcum, Higgings, 2021; Strawhun et al., 2013). Thus, these concepts go through the continuous overlapping of the definitions provided in each of the allusions to harassment, abuse, coercion and cyber control behaviours, indicating that they are essentially the same type of cybercrime despite the different terms. However, it is detected that both terms, "cyberbullying" or "cyberstalking", leave out other conducts and behaviours in the phenomenon that happens due to the interaction between users through electronic media (Montero-Fernández et al., 2022). Thus, the digital violence referred to here and concerning affective-sexual relationships, involves not only cyberstalking but also coercion and coercion, intimidation, domination, threat, surveillance and control between the members of a couple, among other forms of manifestation. Secondly, following Kaur et al. (2021), these studies suggest a clear lack of consensus on the prevalence of cyberstalking. Related to the first assessment, a controversy in the results and a lack of consensus is identified due to the diversity of terminologies to name such digital violence and the conceptualization of some of its manifestations in the form of cyberstalking or cyber harassment as a distinct phenomenon (Dhillon, Smith, 2019; Fissel, 2018; Spitzberg, 2017).

In terms of addressing typologies on digital violence, only a few studies have attempted to classify the different forms of digital violence that an individual can perpetrate or experience (Maran, Begotti, 2019), such as intimate partner harassment (Marcum et al., 2017; Montero-Fernández et al. 2022; Smoker and March, 2017; Woodlock, 2017). One of the studies establishes a double classification with face-to-face psychological violence, first, based on insults, threats and publication of materials that seek to denigrate or threaten the victim; and, second, with control through electronic media (Calvete et al., 2019). The work of Darvell et al. (2011) distinguishes four types of abuse in digital violence: electronic hostility, which deals with the publication or sending of threatening and insulting messages in digital spaces; intrusiveness, referring to control, change of passwords and creation of false profiles; electronic humiliation, concerning the publication of photos or information to humiliate the victim; and electronic exclusion, on the elimination, exclusion or blocking in social networks. Coinciding with the typology of digital violence established in the work of Montero-Fernández et al. (2022), the present research is based on cyberstalking, coercive control, emotional abuse, denigration, isolation and domination.

Alluding to the prevalence and expression of digital violence analysed in previous research, one of the most studied manifestations of digital violence are the behaviours of control or surveillance of the partner or ex-partner in digital spaces (Brown, Hegarty, 2018). Likewise, a study with a Mexican adolescent population (between 12 and 19 years of age) is cited, where up to 25 % of the sample claims to have been exposed to abusive behaviours in the partner through electronic media (Jaén et al., 2017). Other manifestations of digital violence include following and monitoring

a partner (Lyndon et al., 2011); sending threatening or rude emails and messages (Hinduja, Patchin, 2011); and posting humiliating photographs (Hinduja, Patchin, 2011; Lyndon et al., 2011). With respect to the risk factors for cyber-perpetration and cyber-victimization, jealousy towards the other partner is one of the main causes of these controlling behaviours (Rey-Anacona et al., 2014). Likewise, previous victimization of having been bullied was found to be an important variable in the recidivism towards suffering this violence again (Holmes et al., 2022). Analysing the circumstances of the global pandemic due to COVID-19 and its confinement, the work of Caurcel-Cara and Crisol-Moya (2022) detected a decrease in cyber-victimization resulting in 8 % among university students. It should be noted that, in long-distance relationships, social networks were used more to monitor the partner (Billedo et al., 2015). However, age, maturity and stability of the relationship are a factor in the decrease of aggression and abuse in technological spaces (Rodriguez, Rodriguez, 2016). At the same time, it should be pointed out that both boys and girls exercise these online aggressions and abuses towards their partners (Piquer et al., 2017). In the study by Borrajo and Gámez (2015), analysing the various forms of control and surveillance in the couple that occur in social networks, it is deduced that the prevalence of these behaviours among young Spanish adults is 75 % for perpetration and 82 % for victimization. It is interesting to note that, in turn, an academic debate has been opened regarding the possibility of considering digital violence, and its manifestations, as a subset of traditional violence or perhaps an extension due to comparable consequences. This academic debate and its relevant discussions can be linked to the discrepancies manifested in the different contexts and social interactions in which this violence unfolds, taking into account the anonymous and controlling nature granted by the use of technological devices (Gómez-Tabares, Correa-Duque, 2022). In the words of Muñiz and Fonseca (2017), this digital violence can be considered, in many cases, a precursor of physical violence and, in others, a reflection of a type of violence that transcends screens. In this sense, this paper proposes the hypothesis that violence exercised through telematic media will result in a new form of violence not directly related to traditional violence outside the screens, since digital violence may manifest itself as an isolated phenomenon in many cases and/or complement traditional violence.

On the other hand, other previous studies have shown that many young women admit to engaging in these abusive behaviours on their partners, although in most cases they are not identified as abusive (Muñoz et al., 2011). Consequently, this tolerance, legitimization and normalization of online aggression and abuse allows its practice and reproduction within the relational dynamics of the young couple (Borrajo, Gámez, 2015). Following González-Gijón and Soriano-Díaz (2021), today's society demands that the young population be aware of this social problem and be able to identify it. For this reason, this research pursues the study of digital violence through the Digital Violence Questionnaire (DVQ), an instrument devised as a strategy to measure the existence, typology and prevalence of digital violence in affective-sexual relationships with the ultimate goal of preventing it in the target population.

The present research proposes as object of study the digital violence that happens through the use of ICT and all its electronic devices of common use within the affective-sexual relationships of the university population. In accordance with the object of study, the main objective of the research is to study the detection and prevalence of digital violence, exercised through screens, among university couples. It also seeks to refute the hypothesis by analysing whether ICTs are the cause of a new form of violence or are simply a new alternative way to deploy the traditional violence already observed.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

This study was carried out at the University of Huelva (Spain), starting in the 2017/2018 academic year and concluding the fieldwork in the 2018/2019 academic year. The student population of this university, in the 2017/2018 academic year amounted to about 11251 subjects. Using the total student body as the population data, with a confidence level of 95 % and assuming a sampling error of 4.17 %, a sample of 528 students was obtained. Of this total number, 69.5 % were female (367) and 30.5 % were male (160). The mean age was 24.29 years, with a standard deviation of 21.41 years. Regarding nationality and place of birth, 50.6% of the sample was from Huelva (267). Describing by Spanish provinces, 25.5 % were from Seville (124), 6.8 % were from Cadiz, 1.2 % were from Granada (6), 1.2 % were from Malaga (6), 1.3 % were from Jaen (7), 3.2 % were from Cordoba (17), 0.8 % were from the Canary Islands (4), 3.5 % were from Badajoz (18), 0.8 %

were from Cáceres (4), 1.3 % were from Madrid (7), 0.4 % were from Valencia (2) and the rest of the sample with 0.2 % of presence belonged to Murcia (1), Zaragoza (1), La Coruña (1), Ávila (1), Oviedo (1), Vizcaya (1) and Toledo (1). The last 2 % of the sample was of foreign origin, with 9 people from Brazil, Colombia, Ukraine, Italy, France, Armenia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Western Sahara among the nationalities represented.

This student body at the University of Huelva came from academic disciplines including: Double Degree in Translation and Interpretation and Humanities (1.3 %), Physical Activity and Sports Sciences (13.3 %), Master's Degree in Educommunication (1.9 %), Industrial Chemical Engineering (0.8 %), Psychology (10.6 %), Primary Education (12.5 %), Early Childhood Education (12.1 %), Social Education (2.1 %), Social Work (12.9 %), Computer Engineering (0.2 %), Industrial Engineering (0.2 %), History (0.4 %), Hispanic Philology (0.8 %), English Studies (2.5 %), English Philology (0.2 %), Double degree in English Studies and Hispanic Philology (1.1%), Cultural Management (2.5 %), Tourism (3.4 %), MAES Master's Degree (University Master's Degree in Teaching in Compulsory Secondary Education and Baccalaureate, Vocational Training and Language Teaching) (20.5 %), Doctorate (0.6 %) and other Master's Degree studies (0.4 %) unspecified.

2.2. Instrument

In accordance with the description of the DVQ instrument, the first part studies the sociodemographic and relational variables in courtship, preserving the anonymity of the questionnaire. Among these variables are the type of family in which the subject lives, socioeconomic level, point of view of religion, educational level of the reference family figures, number of romantic relationships and their duration, sexual orientation, type of romantic relationship, frequency of contacts and expectations for the future of the relationship. These sociodemographic and relational data in courtship were collected from multiple-choice and closed-ended questions. The second part consists of seven factors of digital violence with a total of 55 variables presented in the form of 30 items with a Likert-type response format. The premises of the questionnaire are written in infinitive to facilitate the double possibility of response in its majority (you to your partner, your partner to you), allowing the measurement of perpetration and victimization in the prevalence of digital violence, in addition to identifying whether aggressions and abusive behaviours are bidirectional in nature.

2.3. Procedure

Following the work of Montero and León (2007), this research proposes a quantitative methodology in a descriptive study of populations through surveys with cross-sectional probabilistic samples. For this purpose, the DVQ (2022), an ad hoc questionnaire is used for the detection, measurement and analysis of digital violence within affective-sexual relationships.

To form the sample, a selection of the class-groups and the degrees that made up each of the faculties was carried out by means of a two-stage random cluster sampling. In the first stage of sampling, a random sample of degrees studied at the University of Huelva was selected and, in the second stage, a random sample was taken of the elements and class-groups, as well as of the subjects within each degree. The inclusion criteria were adjusted to university membership as students and the fact of having or having had an affective-sexual relationship of at least six months in such affective-sexual relationship.

With respect to the ethics of the research, an agreement was previously made with the subjects in which, through a participation sheet, the anonymous nature of the questionnaire was specified and the general lines of the study in question were explained, reminding them of their freedom at all times to abandon their participation. Thus, the aim is to make the potential subjects aware of their personal contribution and the importance of participating in the study, as well as to ensure that they give their express consent to what has been asked, without any confusion or ambiguity. Participants are reminded that the research area is of a very sensitive nature, which some participants may find distressing, so if they feel that they may be affected by any of the questions, they are asked not to respond or participate in the study.

2.4. Data analysis

The reliability of the scale was estimated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with a value of 0.945. The mean score and standard deviation of the subjects in the questionnaire is 80.05 and 21.41, respectively. Therefore, it is determined that the Digital Violence Questionnaire (DVQ) presents a high internal consistency resulting in a valid and reliable instrument, as well as suitable for the detection and prevention of digital violence. It is also mentioned that the sample distribution did not meet the normality assumption ($p = 0.000$), calculated through the

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, so non-parametric statistics were used. The data analysis of this work was carried out with SPSS version 15.

3. Results

Of the total sample (N = 528), 60.6 % (229 women and 91 men) said they were in a relationship. The duration of these relationships was from 6 months to 1 year for 12.5 %; from 1 year to 2 years for 22.4 %; from 2 to 3 years of relationship for 13 %; from 3 to 5 years for 23.7 %; from 5 to 10 years for 24%, from 10 years onwards 4.4 %. Regarding the type of relationship that the participants claimed to have, we find that 3.6 % maintained a sporadic relationship; 10.1 % were in a casual relationship, designated as a relationship with frequent contact but without commitment; 71.6 % were in a serious and/or stable relationship; and 13.8 % said they were in a relationship with a commitment to marriage or living together. Analysing these percentages in more detail by correlating the type of relationship and the sex of the person, we can see a tendency to designate relationships among girls as slightly more stable and serious than among the boys in the sample. Thus, 14.2 % of girls indicated that they were in a committed relationship compared to 13.3 % of boys; 74.2 % of girls were in a serious relationship compared to 67.7 % of boys. In casual relationships, boys scored higher with 15 % vs. 8.2 % of girls, and in sporadic relationships both sexes scored 3.3 %. Of these relationships, 12.7 % maintained direct, face-to-face contact with the partner more than once a day; 28.6% did so every day; 42.8 % saw each other two or three times a week; 5.3 % saw each other once a week; 4.5 % were together once every two weeks; and 4.7 % saw each other once a month or less.

Regarding sexual orientation, 5.4 % said they were homosexual (10 females and 17 males); 1.6 %, bisexual (6 females and 1 male) and 93 %, heterosexual (347 females and 142 males). In relation to their marital status, 96 % indicated that they were single (504), 3 % were married (14), 0.5 % were cohabiting (2) and another 0.5% were divorced (2). Regarding the type of family in which they had grown up, 82 % said they had grown up in a nuclear family (429), 0.7 % in an adoptive family (3), 12 % were in a single-parent family (62), 3 % in a reconstituted family (16), 2 % in an extended family (10) and only 0.3 % in a homoparental family (1). The majority of the respondents claimed to be in a medium socioeconomic bracket; 47.3% said they were in the upper-middle range (244), while another 49.8 % said they belonged to the lower-middle (257). The remaining 2.9 % of the sample did not answer this question. Regarding the importance of religion in their lives, 7.6 % considered it very important (40), 15.9 % found it quite important (84), 50.8 % stated that it was not very important (268) and for 25 % religion was non-existent in their lives (132). A final percentage of 0.7 % corresponded to missing values for this variable.

The main results of the factors were: factor 1, "Cyberstalking of the other", 10.89 %; factor 2, "Coercive Control", 11.72 %; factor 3, "Emotional Abuse", 18.37 %; factor 4, "Denigration", 6.86 %; factor 5, "First-person cyberstalking", 10.58 %; factor 6, "Isolation", 14.51 %; factor 7, "Domination" 20.02 %. The most salient results for each of the factors are presented below. Starting with factor one, called "Cyberstalking of the other (by the partner)" and referring to all those actions carried out by the other partner through some electronic device and involving supervision, extortion and control of activities and social contacts on the Internet, causing an annoying situation and/or harm to the person. This factor resulted in a percentage prevalence of digital violence of 10.89 %. In this factor, a negative and very majority tendency was recognised in the population studied towards supervision, extortion and control of activities and social contacts through electronic devices, causing an annoying and/or harmful situation in the partner, given that the percentages of the "never" option amounted to 70 and 80 % in the majority of the variables, for both boys and girls. However, one of the results in this factor should be highlighted, which deals with "insistently asking who you are talking to", represented in item one. It was appreciated that 20 % of the participants marked the "sometimes" option for this action, admitting that their partners had read the personal conversations of their corresponding partners three to five times in the affective-sexual relationship. The impact of direct contact with the partner shows the upward trend in this behaviour when the partners see each other every day and two or three days a week, according to the opinion of the sample participants about their partners, as can be seen in [Figure 1](#). Likewise, if the aforementioned "sometimes" responses are taken into account, 10.6 % of subjects considered religion "very important", 14.4 % "quite important", 54.8 % "not very important", and for 20.2 % religion was non-existent.

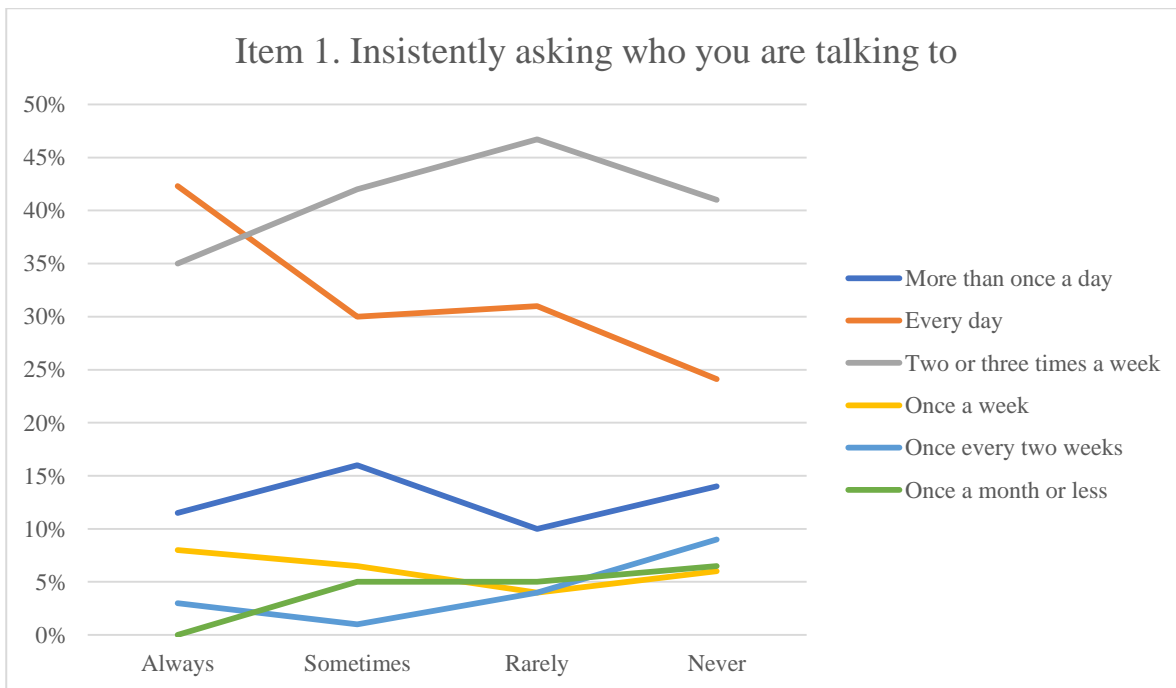


Fig. 1. Results of factor one correlated with the frequency of direct contact in the affective-sexual relationship

Continuing with factor one, the behaviour of "reading the partner's personal conversations" is highlighted in item six, where the girls indicated that 3.7 % of their partners did it "always", 9.9 % did it "sometimes"; 22 %, "rarely" and 64.5 % did it "never". As for the male participants about their partners, the percentages were also similar, with 1.3 % "always", 10.3 % "sometimes", 26.9 % "rarely" and 61.5 % "never".

In factor two, called "Coercive Control", consisting of control of the partner using intimidation and blackmail studies the following items, mostly negative percentages were found towards the prevalence of this digital violence. This factor resulted in a percentage of prevalence of digital violence of 11.72 %. However, it is worth highlighting item two, which deals with "checking the hours of connection and disconnection of the partner in their virtual spaces", where more than 20 % of boys and girls had also done it "sometimes" and almost 10 % had done it "always". Specifically, women admitted a slightly higher percentage when confirming this control of online activity by their partners in the "always" option. However, in all percentages for this item, males stated that these behaviours were performed more frequently by their partners than by themselves in the same affective-sexual relationship they were in. This same trend in males is seen in the analysis of items three and four.

Likewise, highlighting the analysis of "checking the hours of connection and disconnection of the partner in their virtual spaces", shown in item two of the questionnaire, it was also slightly appreciated how daily and frequent contact during the week created an upward trend towards this type of control of the partner, according to what the participants in the sample expressed about their partners. [Figure 2](#) below reflects these results, with their corresponding correlation with the frequency of direct contact with the partner. As was the case with factor one, it is slightly noticeable how daily and frequent contact during the week creates an upward trend towards carrying out what this second item expresses, according to the sample participants about their partners.

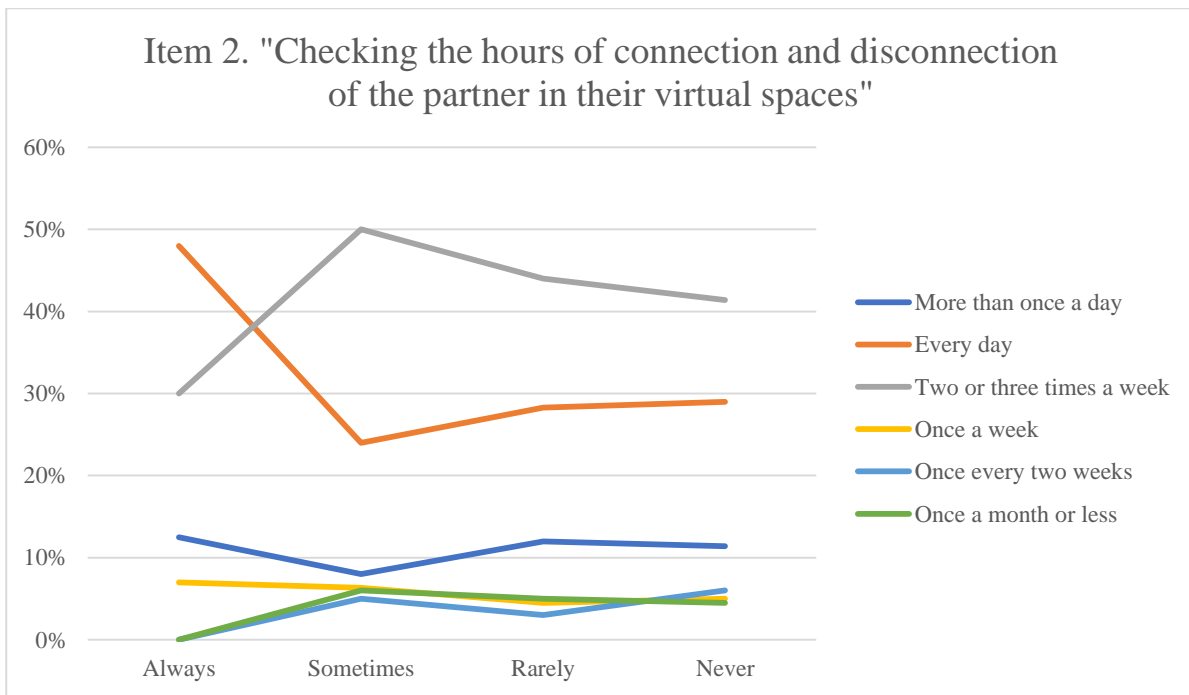


Fig. 2. Results of factor two correlated with the frequency of direct contact in the affective-sexual relationship

Analysing factor three, called "Emotional Abuse", involves humiliating and degrading attacks on the partner's self-esteem. This factor obtained a percentage prevalence of digital violence of 18.37 %. In this factor, the prevalence of 20 % to 30 % of "sometimes" was observed in items 13, 14, 20 and 23, designated by the participating subjects of the sample on behaviours related to humiliating and degrading attacks to the partner's self-esteem. Highlighting the behaviour of "taking their anger out on their partner if something does not go as desired" and represented in item 13 of the questionnaire, the girls admitted doing it in their relationships 20 % more times in the response of "sometimes" than the boys in the sample and is represented in the following Figure 3.

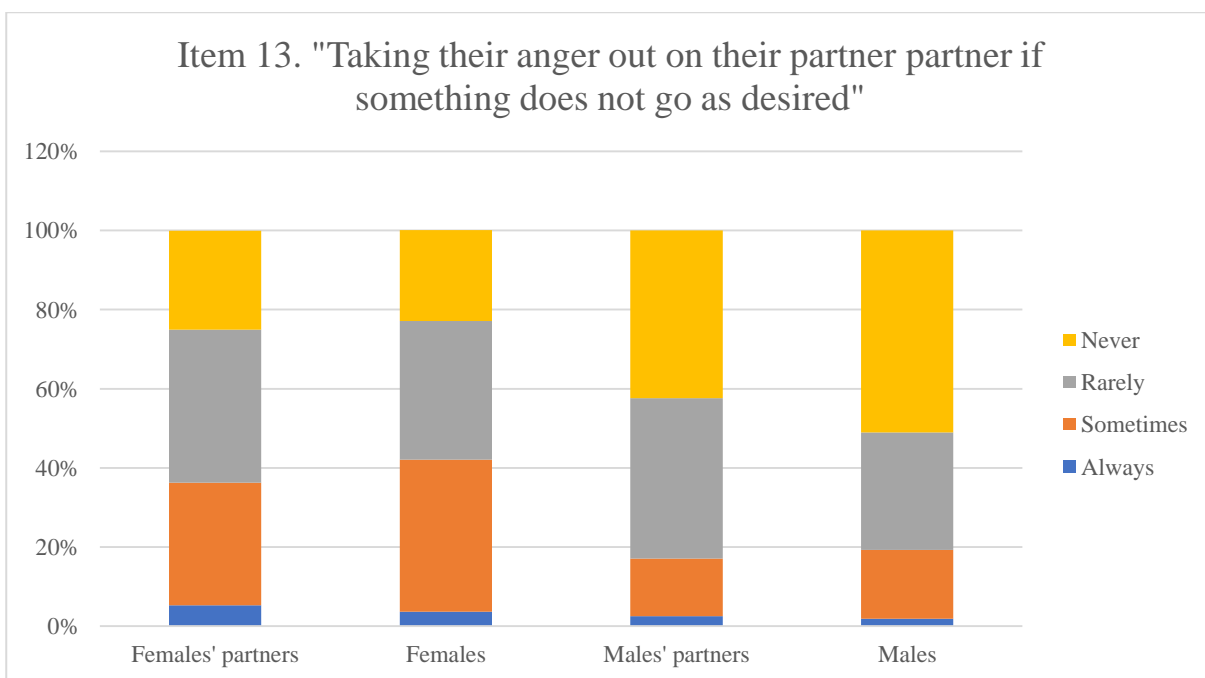


Fig. 3. Results of factor three of the DVQ questionnaire (Montero-Fernández et al., 2022)

It is also pertinent to address another of the behaviours studied in factor three, "yelling at one's partner", which is included in item 23 of the questionnaire. The girls recognised that their partners did it "always" in 2.3 %, "sometimes" in 22.9 %, "rarely" in 32.5 % and 42.4 % did it "never". At the same time, they admitted to doing it in their relationships in 2.8 % "always", 21.7 % "sometimes", 30.9 % "rarely" and 44.6 % "never". Boys said their partners yelled "always" in 1.9 %, 11.5 % "sometimes", 32.7 % "rarely" and 53.8 % had done it "never". However, boys confessed to doing it "always" by 3.2 %, "sometimes" by 11.4 %, "rarely" by 32.9 % and "never" by 52.5 %. "Leaving the partner alone or cutting off communication when there is an argument or after a fight" is another of the variables studied in factor three, represented in item 25. Females in the sample stated that their partners did it "always" in 6.1 %, 23.1 % "sometimes", 30.4 % "rarely" and 40.4 % "never". Males confessed that their partners "always" did it by 5.1 %, 13.9 % "sometimes", 25.3 % "rarely" and 55.7 % "never".

Factor four studies "Denigration", involving threats and intense verbal aggression and analysed from the perspective of the individual participant about his or her own actions within the couple relationship in most cases. This factor had a prevalence percentage of digital violence of 6.86 %. In many of the items of this factor it is reached, by the sample, 80 % and almost 90 % in the "never" option, indicating the low prevalence of these variables in the studied population. "Imposing prohibitions or rules unilaterally in the relationship" is one of the variables analysed in this factor four and is presented in item 15. Here, the females began by saying that they carried out this action "always" in 0.6 %, 5.2 % "sometimes", 14.9 % "rarely" and up to 79.4 % "never". The males in this item stated that in no case had they carried out this behaviour with the option of "never", only 3.9 % marked the option of "sometimes", 14.3% did so for "rarely" and a resounding 81.8 % said it was "never". Another item of this factor, item 20, on "blaming the partner for the bad things that happen", was analysed in factor three of "Emotional Abuse" from the perspective of the respondents about their partners. However, in this factor "Denigration" is analysed from the individual's own point of view, where very similar and slightly lower percentages are extracted in the consequent prevalence of the behaviour described in the item. According to the women's response, 0.6 % "always", 11.6 % "sometimes", 23.4 % "rarely" and 64.1 % "never". According to the male respondents, 1.9 % were "always", 5.2 % "sometimes", 20.1 % "rarely" and 72.7 % "never".

Moving on to factor five, called "First-person cyberstalking", which is parallel to factor one, since it studies some of the behaviours that occur through some electronic device and involve monitoring, supervision and control of the digital interactions of the couple, being carried out in first person by the respondents. This factor obtained a prevalence percentage of digital violence of 10.58 %. Thus, in the behaviour of "insistently asking who you are talking to" to answered in first person, and previously analysed in factor one with respect to the partner, it was appreciated that more girls confessed to having carried out this behaviour within their affective-sexual relationships. Girls in the sample reported doing it 2.2 % "always", 21.3 % "sometimes", 38.2 % "rarely" and 38.2 % "never". Boys admitted to doing it 1.9 % "always", 9.1 % "sometimes", 34.4 % "rarely" and 54.5% "never". The premise of "reading the partner's personal conversations", expressed in item six, is also exemplified, where, again, girls and boys again aligned their opinions considering that they did it "always" 1.7 % and 0.6 %, differed more in the option of "sometimes" with a confirmation of 6.6 % in girls and 2.6% in boys, 27.4 % and 26.6 % of "few times", and 64.4 % and 70.1 % of "never", both for girls and boys, respectively.

Coming to factor 6, designated as "Isolation", the avoidance of the partner during conflict and the denial of emotional availability or contact with the partner in a cold or punitive manner will be examined. This factor obtained a percentage prevalence of digital violence of 14.51 %. In this factor, the digital violence expressed in items 11 and 25 stands out, which deal with "blocking the partner or not communicating with the partner during or after an argument" and "leaving the partner alone or cutting off communication when there is an argument or after a fight", respectively. In both items, the prevalence of having performed this behaviour three to five times in the couple's relationship reaches 20 %. For item 11, the influence of the frequency of contact is also analysed, where no outstanding results are observed. However, the relationship of the results of this item with the expectation that the subjects have about their affective-sexual relationship is analysed in [Figure 4](#) below. In this graph, there is a significantly lower prevalence of acting by "blocking" the partner and cutting off communication with him/her in affective-sexual relationships where there is an idea of a future, whether marriage, cohabitation or living together. Continuing with the results of this item 11, when this question of blocking the partner was asked in the first person, the slightly

higher percentage for girls than for boys is striking. Girls admitted to doing it "always" by 3.4 %, 16.4 % of "sometimes", 21.8 % of "rarely" and 58.5 % of "never". Boys claimed 4.5 % it was "always", 12.2 % it was "sometimes", 15.4 % it was "rarely" and 67.9 % it was "never".

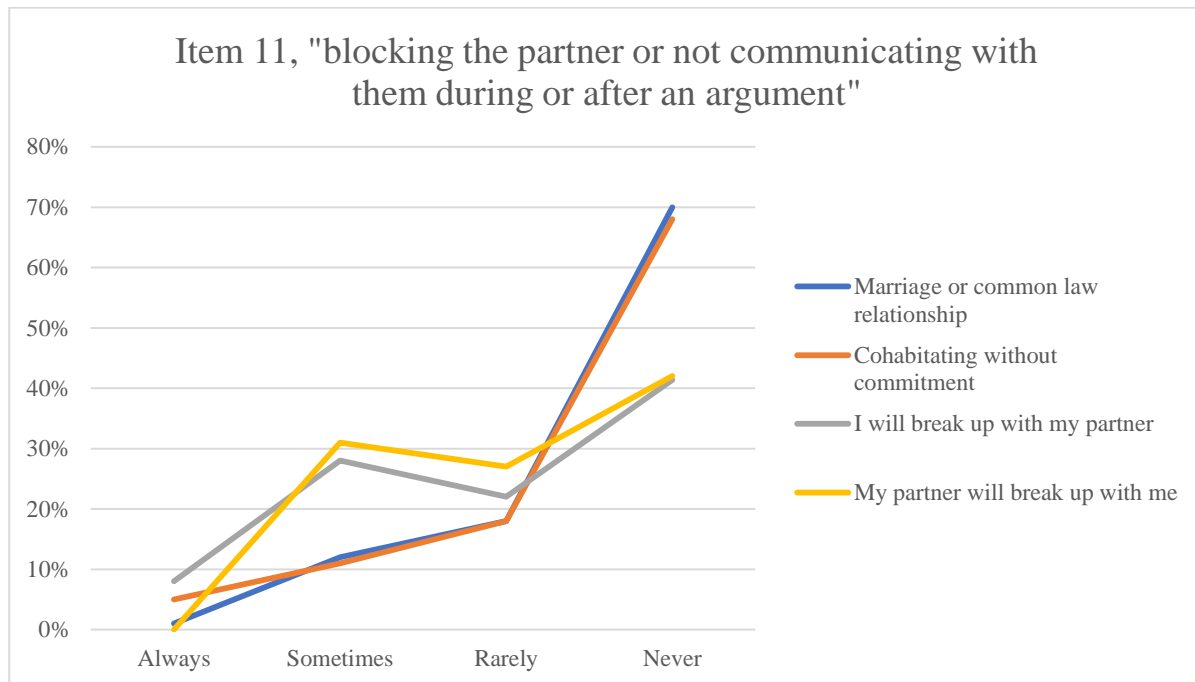


Fig. 4. Results factor six correlated with the expectation of the future in the affective-sexual relationship

The last item of this factor six, item 25, investigates the premise and action of "leaving the partner alone or cutting off communication when there is an argument or after a fight", also analysed in factor three, referring to the partners of the participating subjects and closely related to item 11. In the present factor, the consideration of the actions that the participants themselves admit to is analysed. Thus, the girls confirmed that they had manifested this behaviour "always" in 4 %, 22.3 % "sometimes", 31.1 % "rarely" and 42.7 % "never". As for the boys, they reported having engaged in this behaviour "always" in 2.6 % of the cases, 17.3 % "sometimes", 19.9 % "rarely" and 60.3 % "never".

Factor seven, "Domination", studies the manipulation of the partner to decide what is believed to be best for him/her. This factor found a prevalence percentage of digital violence of 20.02 %. This factor focuses its analysis on the study of "trying to decide what is best for the partner, even if he/she does not agree", collected in item 19 of the questionnaire. It was striking that the female and male participants claimed, with a slightly higher percentage, to take sides in deciding what their partners should do without the latter's consent when asked in the first person about their own actions, in contrast to what social desirability would advocate about confessing their own behaviours in the affective-sexual relationships of which they are a part. The women participants considered that their partners performed this action "always" in 12.9 %, "sometimes" in 18.8 %, "rarely" in 26.9 % and 41.5 % did not do it "ever". However, women expressed that they themselves tried to decide what was best for their partners "always" in 14.5 %, "sometimes" in 21.9 %, "rarely" in 23.9 % and "never" in 39.8%. Males, in their case, were of the opinion that their partners performed this action "always" in 8.2 %, in 22.2 % it was "sometimes", in 32.9 % it was "rarely" and in 36.7 % it was "never". Respectively, for the same item and referring to their own actions, the percentages for males were 9.6 % for "always", 23.7 % for "sometimes", 25.6 % for "rarely" and 41 % for "never".

4. Discussion

The results of our research coincide with those of Spitzberg (2002) and Woodlock (2017), since in all cases the participants in this study recognise more cyberstalking in the attitudes and actions of their partners than in their own. Observing the prevalence found in this study, with a

Spanish sample, the results are quite similar to those found in the research by Strawhun et al. (2013) and DeKeseredy et al. (2019). In this way, it is observed that the entire sample exhibits, in a majority of cases, the absence of affirmation and acceptance of violence through screens in their affective-sexual relationships, as was also extracted from the studies by Caurcel-Cara and Crisol-Moya (2022).

Recalling Piquer et al. (2017), it should be pointed out that both boys and girls have exercised these online aggressions and abuses towards their partners. Highlighting the difference between women and men as one of the risk factors in cyber-perpetration and cyber-victimization in the cases studied and coinciding with the works of Kalaitzaki (2020), Smoker and March (2017), Strawhun et al. (2013), Van Baak and Hayes (2018), it is concluded that women in this Spanish sample exercise greater digital violence than in the cases of their male partners, given that they responded more affirmatively in almost all the items studied. In other words, women in this sample identify more cyberstalking than men in their own attitudes and actions. At the same time, men also detect this type of digital violence in a slightly higher percentage in their partners, mostly heterosexuals, within this sample.

Referring to nationalities and races, this research also does not find outstanding results in cyber-victimization and cyber-perpetration, agreeing with the studies of Navarro et al. (2016) and Smith-Darden et al. (2017). Mentioning the sentimental situation and marital status of the participants, no results are obtained that can be assessed and discussed with the finding of Reyns et al. (2011), about single people being 1.5 times more likely to be victims than people in a relationship, given that 96 % of this sample claimed to be single. As for the rest of the risk factors and variables previously analysed in studies on cyberstalking and others taken into account in this research, such as academic disciplines, the type of family they come from, the type of relationship, duration of the relationship, encounters with the partner, religion, etc., no relevant results are found to be highlighted in the findings of this research.

Reviewing the main objective of this research and after the analysis of the results, a low, but important, prevalence of digital violence in the population studied can be seen, which does not reach 20 %. It is interesting to highlight that the factor with the highest score was 7, "Domination" 20.02 %; followed by 3, "Emotional Abuse"; and 6, "Isolation". The lowest scoring factors were 4, "Denigration", with 6.86 %; 5, "First-person cyberstalking", with 10.58 %; and 1, "Cyberstalking of the other", 10.89 %. This shows that the new form of violence in the form of behaviours and attitudes of abuse, harassment and control through electronic media are these constructs that are part of the traditional conceptualization of violence. A confluence of behaviours of psychological violence popularly observed and judged in society can be seen, which make up the slight tolerance and normalization of digital violence among students at the University of Huelva. Thus, the hypothesis put forward in this work that digital violence constitutes a new form of violence not directly related to off-screen violence can be confirmed, which in turn demonstrates and justifies the extension of the simplistic concept of "cyberstalking" by the so-called digital violence.

It is concluded that, in the aim of this study, i.e. the analysis of new technologies and their impact on affective-sexual relationships among Spanish university students, this research shows the low but important presence of digital violence. A digital violence not identified as such by the sample surveyed, in many cases, as shown in the analysis of the results achieved. It is a violence that can manifest itself very easily among the young population, without the need to be linked to off-screen violence. However, taking into account the impact that electronic media has on the youngest populations in their social interactions and their first interpersonal relationships, the educational and university context should be the target of different programmes to raise awareness and prevent this digital violence. Thus, after analysis of the sample reality, it is possible to proceed to the creation of specific training programmes on digital violence through the design of discussion, reflection and analysis activities according to the characteristics of the context of its application.

It is also pertinent to mention some of the limitations encountered throughout this research. The access and selection of the university population at the University of Huelva, in the two-stage random cluster sampling, could have biased the sample by university disciplines in a less equitable manner. Likewise, an influence could be deduced of the university context, where the fieldwork was carried out, related to a tendency towards social desirability and less accurate response to the actions of the participating subjects. In the same way, one could allude to the impossibility of the analysis and comparison of races, nationalities and civil status due to the scarcity of representation in the sample obtained. As an example, due to the low representation in this sample of LGBTQ+, a paucity of data is detected for comparison with the studies of Chen et al. (2020), where it is

suggested that LGBTIQ+ populations are victimized at higher rates than non-LGBTIQ+ populations. However, despite the limitations that this study has presented, this research represents a further step forward in the arduous task of conceptualizing and determining digital violence, in all its terms, through a comprehensive analysis.

Finally, the proposals for future research will consider the correction of the limitations mentioned in the previous paragraph, as well as the ambiguity in the concept of cyberbullying itself as the object of this research. Further exploration of the risk factors in cyber-perpetration and cyber-victimisation of this phenomenon of digital violence is thus encouraged, in order to be able to act more effectively in the corresponding prevention and detection of digital violence.

5. Conclusion

According to the results presented, the tendency towards a negative response of disagreement with these premises related to online control and abuse behaviours and behaviours that young people show with their partners in affective-sexual relationships could be explained by a phenomenon of non-identification and legitimization of these practices, as well as a consequence of social desirability, pointing towards what is socially correct.

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