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Gender violence and social networks in adolescents. The case of the province of Malaga

Esther Mena-Rodriguez* & Leticia-Concepción Velasco-Martínez

**Universidad de Málaga, Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación, Bulevard Louis Pasteur s/n. Malaga-E-29071, Spain*

Abstract

Gender violence and the violence exerted on social networks are particularly current issues of interest for both the scientific community and the media. When both types of violence are present during adolescence, a more specific area of study arises that is circumscribed to cyberbullying exerted and suffered by adolescents on the Internet. This work is part of a larger project carried out in secondary schools in Spain, with special focus on Andalusia (financed by BBVA, 2014-2016). The case here presented is the one for the province of Malaga. The educational community of Malaga is of a peculiar and heterogeneous nature that combines a large foreign section of the population that was the result of tourism (since the seventies in the past century) with other migratory phenomena that are shared with other regions of Spain. The purpose of the study was to show the prevalence of gender violence among adolescent students in the 15-17-year age bracket from the province of Malaga, and to identify the predictive factors of occasional and frequent violence on social networks. A survey was designed and validated that was applied in electronic format to a random sample of public schools in Malaga (n=282). The sample size allowed us to work with an error of ± 0.06 (confidence level of 95%). The results and conclusions identify predictive factors of occasional and frequent violence, and suggest improvements to be made in action guidelines and protocols, as well as in the action to foster awareness among adolescents and the general public in regard to these issues.

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34-952-136-636; fax: +34-952-132-575.

E-mail address: emena@uma.es

1. Introduction

Gender violence and the violence exerted on social networks are particularly current issues of interest for both the scientific community, public opinion and the media. Gender violence, on the one hand, is a growing phenomenon in many countries around the world and requires special attention by scientists and those responsible for decision making within public administrations. The classical and at the same time current work on the subject is that of Dunne, Humphreys & Leach (2006) which shows the relevance of this issue for schools. In Spain, Oliver, Soler & Flecha (2009) examined the problem and offered various strategies for prevention from a diachronic approach. On the other hand, the violence exerted on social networks is another topic of current serious concern for scientists and society. Cyberbullying, as it is known, is being examined from different perspectives. Together with the latest reviews on the subject (Chisholm, 2014; Bauman & Bellmore, 2015; Wittaker & Kowalsky, 2014), the analyses focusing on specific topics must be taken into consideration, such as psychological impact (Schenk & Fremouw, 2012), or the comparison with direct bullying, outside social networks (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2014).

When both of these problems are present during adolescence, we find a more specific field of study that is circumscribed to gender-based violence exerted and suffered by adolescents on the web. This topic has not been as amply addressed as the problems that give rise to it, but it is nonetheless relevant (Perry, 2008).

The work presented in this article is part of a larger project conducted at secondary schools throughout Spain, giving special attention to Andalusia (financed by the BBVA Foundation, 2014-2016). This article presents the case of the province of Malaga. The educational community of Malaga is of a peculiar and heterogeneous nature. This province combines a large foreign section of the population that was the result of tourism (since the seventies in the past century) with other migratory phenomena that are more common in other regions of Spain and Europe. According to official data ("INEbase / Demografía y población / Padrón. Población por municipios", 2016), the province of Malaga was inhabited by 246886 foreign nationals (15.17% of total population). These same sources report that Malaga is one of the few Spanish provinces where immigration has been growing despite the crisis. The largest group of foreigners is British (22.63%), followed by Moroccans (12.32%) and Romanians (5.77%). The fourth and fifth places are occupied by citizens from the European Union, Italians (4.52%) and Germans (4.36%), although immigrants whose numbers have increased the most in the last few years are those from Ukraine (3.47%) and Russia (2.26%). Thus, there is great geographical and cultural diversity in Malaga school environments that have singular characteristics when compared to those of Spain and Europe.

The general objective of the research was to determine the prevalence of gender violence among adolescent students in the 15-17-year age bracket in the province of Malaga, and to identify predictive factors of occasional and frequent violence on social networks. To do so, a survey was designed and validated that was applied in electronic format to a random sample of public schools in Malaga (n=284). The results and conclusions identify predictive factors for occasional and frequent violence, and suggest improvements to be made in action guidelines and protocols, as well as in the action to foster awareness among adolescents and the general public in regard to gender violence exerted on social networks by and on adolescents.

2. Objectives

The general objective of the research was to determine the prevalence of gender violence among adolescent students in the 15-17-year age bracket in the province of Malaga, and to identify predictive factors of occasional and frequent violence on social networks. In this study, that focused on the sex variable and on the province of Malaga, the objectives related to the analysis of the differences in perception, consideration and action regarding gender violence on social networks. Thus, the following objectives were identified with respect to adolescents in the 15-17-year age bracket from the province of Malaga:

1. To analyze the different behavior by sex on social networks.
2. To actually identify possible differences between the sexes in regard to the perception of risk on the Internet.
3. To undertake the differential study by sex of violent actions considered as such by adolescents.
4. To determine perceived and/or experienced situations of violence by adolescents as a function of the sex variable.
5. To globally evaluate gender violence on the Internet by sex.

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