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Cyber Dating Violence: Prevalence and Correlates Among High School Students from Small Urban Areas in Quebec

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Background – Adolescents in a dating relationship can interact anytime using information and communication technologies. Yet, despite associated potential benefits, this availability of means to reach out to their partner may also exacerbate possible conflictual exchanges, including dating violence through technology. This study aimed to document the prevalence of cyber dating violence (CDV) victimization and perpetration among teenagers. It also explored self-esteem and psychological distress in participants having been perpetrators, victims, or perpetrator-victims, compared with those not having experienced CDV.

Methods – The sample comprised 190 teenagers from a small urban area who completed the *K10* psychological distress scale, the *Self-Description Questionnaire*, which measures self-esteem, and the *Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire*, which measures the prevalence of CDV victimization and perpetration.

Results – Our results suggest no gender difference in the prevalence of CDV victimization (35.8%), perpetration (33.0%), or the high co-occurrence rate of victimization and perpetration (27.2%) in the last 12 months. When age and gender were controlled for, cyber dating violence was found to be associated with low self-esteem and psychological distress in teenagers. Cyberperpetration was also associated with higher self-esteem.

Limitations – The cross-sectional design precludes any conclusion about the sequencing of the variables. Reliance on a convenience sample also represents a limitation of the study.

Conclusions – CDV is associated with low self-esteem and psychological distress in teenagers. Dating violence prevention programs should include issues related to CDV, considering its high prevalence, conceptual proximity to psychological violence, and relationship with psychological distress and low self esteem.

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