

Cyberbullying among adolescents and its effect on their Internet use

Experiencias de ciberacoso en adolescentes y sus efectos en el uso de internet

Experiências de cyberbullying em adolescentes e os seus efeitos na utilização da Internet

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyse the impact of cyberbullying on the online behaviour of adolescents. To this end, the starting point is an analysis of the results of a survey on digital media use, risk perception, and competence involving Spanish youth from 12-18 years of age (n=865). In a second phase, the data were analysed in depth using a qualitative study based on two discussion groups, one male and one female, with ten participants each, aged 15 to 18. The most significant results show that cyberbullying is a widespread practice on social networks, and although differences have not been detected with regard to Internet access and digital skills, cyberbullying



has a different impact on the online behaviour of girls, and it places them in a position of greater vulnerability. Girls feel less protected, which leads them to impose prevention and self-censorship strategies. The result is a limited ability to participate online. This study highlights the need to promote media literacy that will raise awareness about the harm caused by cyberbullying, reduce the forms and prevalence of this abuse, and reinforce female trust in the Internet.

Keywords: The Internet; young people; adolescents; gender; cyberbullying; social networks

Resumen

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo analizar el impacto de experiencias de ciberacoso en el comportamiento online de los adolescentes. Para ello se parte del análisis de los resultados de una encuesta sobre uso de medios digitales, percepción de riesgo y competencias hecha a jóvenes españoles de 12 a 18 años (n=865). En una segunda fase se ha profundizado en los datos con un estudio cualitativo basado en dos grupos de discusión, uno masculino y otro femenino, de diez participantes cada uno, de 15 a 18 años. Los resultados más significativos son que el ciberacoso es una práctica extendida en las redes sociales y que a pesar de que no hay diferencias en el acceso a la red y en habilidades digitales, las experiencias de ciberacoso impactan en el comportamiento online de las chicas de manera diferente y las sitúa en una posición de mayor vulnerabilidad. Las chicas experimentan un mayor sentimiento de desprotección que les conduce a establecer estrategias de prevención y autocensura, que se manifiestan limitando su capacidad de participación en la red. Este estudio destaca la necesidad de potenciar una alfabetización mediática que sensibilice sobre el daño que ocasiona el ciberacoso, reduzca las formas y prevalencia de estos abusos y refuerce la confianza de las chicas en la red.

Palabras clave: Internet; jóvenes; adolescentes; género; ciberacoso; redes sociales

Resumo

Esta investigação visa analisar as características da digitalização dos jovens e examinar em profundidade as consequências de experiências problemáticas na utilização da Internet. Para tal, começa com a análise dos resultados de um inquérito sobre a utilização de meios digitais, percepção de risco e competências feito a jovens espanhóis entre os 12 e 18 anos de idade (n=865). Numa segunda fase, os dados foram aprofundados com um estudo qualitativo baseado em dois grupos de discussão, um masculino e um feminino, de dez participantes de 15 a 18 anos de idade cada um. Os resultados mais significativos são que o cyberbullying é uma prática generalizada nas redes sociais e que apesar do facto de não haver diferenças no acesso à rede e às competências digitais, as experiências de cyberbullying têm um impacto diferente no comportamento online das raparigas e colocam-nas numa posição mais vulnerável. As raparigas experimentam um maior sentimento de desprotecção que as leva a estabelecer estratégias de prevenção e auto-censura, que se manifestam através da limitação da sua capacidade de participar na rede. Este estudo salienta a necessidade de promover a literacia mediática para aumentar a sensibilização para os danos causados pelo cyber-bullying, reduzir as formas e prevalência destes abusos e reforçar a confiança das raparigas na web.

Palavras-chave: Internet; juventude; adolescentes; género; cyberbullying; redes sociais

1. Introduction

The omnipresent nature of digital technology in the lives of adolescents has made them the group with the highest level of vulnerability regarding the use of ICT (Ramos-Soler et al., 2018), a reality that has led scientists to focus their research on clarifying the effects and risks that the use of digital tools and services have on their lives (Catalina et al., 2014; Alfaro González, et al., 2015; Arab and Díaz, 2015; Hernández Fernández and Alcoceba Hernando, 2015; Haddon and Mante-Meijer, 2016; Sánchez Reche, et al., 2016; Rodríguez-Álvarez et al., 2017; Giménez et al., 2017; Orosco Fabián and Pomasunco Huaytalla, 2020).

While social networks have become a fundamental tool for the socialisation of adolescents (Rodríguez García and Magdalena Benedito, 2016; Del Prete and Redon Pantoja, 2020), teenagers also establish links with strangers through these networks, are exposed to inappropriate content such as pornography and violence, and must confront discriminatory behaviour and hate speech (Cabo Isasi and García Juanatey, 2017).

Among the dangers related to online communication, the most common are cyber-aggression and cyber-victimisation. In these situations, an internet user either engages in or suffers from aggression, depending on the case, in the digital environment (Corcoran et al., 2015). From the point of view of adolescents and young people, Facebook, WhatsApp, Ask.fm, and Instagram are the digital environments in which more violence is perpetrated (Donoso Vázquez, et al., 2016). Moreover, cyberbullying, sexting, and grooming are some of the specific risks they face when they connect to social networks, which increases the pressure they feel, "in addition to the serious consequences that can occur with bullying" (Díaz-Aguado, 2013: 10).

1.1 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can be defined as intentional, verbal, physical, or psychological violence among minors (Lee and Stapinski, 2012; Navarro, et al., 2013; Kowalski, et al., 2014; Fernández-Montalvo et al., 2015; Franco and Ghanayim, 2019), which is fomented by hyperconnectivity through mobile phones (Garrido-Lora et al., 2016, Instituto Nacional de Estadística [INE], 2021). "We're not talking about pranks [...] Instead, this is a serious violation of children's rights that requires protective responses and intervention by public authorities" (Sastre, 2016, p. 75). Internet bullying is a proven fact to which we must add the impunity that safeguards this type of aggression (Donoso-Vázquez and Rebollo-Catalán, 2018).

In addition, minors are concerned about the range of online risks they may encounter while *surfing* the Internet, and the subtle nature of the circumstances that can lead to such risks, whether or not exposure to them is deliberate or accidental. Moreover, they worry about the proliferation of violent images as well (Livingstone, et al., 2014). The work

carried out by Jiménez, Garmendia and Casado del Río (2018) states that 12% of minors acknowledge having suffered cyberbullying, either through instant messaging (53%), social networks (4%), or in chat rooms (4%). This study also confirms that girls (35%) are more exposed than boys (29%).

Other approaches have focused on studying cyber-victimisation from different perspectives, one of which is the harm it causes to adolescents with regard to low self-esteem and depression (Jackson, et al., 2010; Alvites Huamaní, 2019). Other perspectives include the factors that might predict bullying, such as the family or school environment (Ortega-Barón et al., 2016), as well as the profile of the cyberbully who, in many cases, feels reinforced by his or her peer group (Yahner, et al., 2015; Romera, et al., 2016).

Regarding the profile of the victims, authors such as De la Villa Moral and Suarez (2016), as well as Lereya, Samara and Wolke (2013), point out that minors with fewer social skills or with a conflictive family environment are exposed to more situations of vulnerability (García-Jiménez et al., 2022). Other research links the amount of time spent online to problematic use of digital services (Carbonel, et al., 2012; Lee and Stapinski, 2012).

1.2 Problematic internet use among adolescents

Several studies have found differences in problematic use of digital online tools and services, and their consequences for adolescents. Research by Villa Moral and Suárez (2016), which focuses on Internet and mobile phone use, highlights the lack of skills to handle adverse or stressful situations, and it confirms that girls have more problematic experiences than boys because of their emotional and communicative use of mobile phones.

The work by Mascheroni et al. (2015) on the construction of adolescent identity on social networks shows that girls are more subject to peer influence and the pressure of a specifically-defined, aesthetic model. They point to gender differences with regard to the consequences of self-presentation and confirm that boys tend to punish girls who display themselves in a way that is less inhibited.

Several studies have focused on analysing the prevalence of cyberbullying by disaggregating data according to gender, yet the results are inconsistent (Donoso Vázquez et al., 2018). Álvarez-García et al. (2017) point out that verbal cyber-aggression and online exclusion are more widespread, and that no significant gender differences have been detected. However, other research has confirmed a trend that shows girls to be in a situation of greater vulnerability (Calmaestra Villén, 2011; Buelga and Pons, 2012; Beckman et al., 2013).

Another study identifies gender differences according to the type of aggression. Dueñas et al. (2016) have concluded that boys post content that is explicitly discriminatory toward ethnic groups and cultural minorities, whereas girls use more indirect, subtle, discriminatory strategies related to socio-cultural situations and physical appearance.

There is also concern about the threat to equality on the web. Sexual gender stereotypes and symbolic violence “are embedded in the roots that support the pillars of society at school, at home, [...] on television, on the radio, in colours, and in life itself” (Flores and Browne, 2017, p. 158), and they spread online.

It is vitally important to study the effects of cyberbullying on adolescents (Banyard & Cross, 2008), as well as the foundations of violent online behaviour in order to “detect and recognise the extent to which bullying on the internet among minors is based on discrimination against females” (Tajahuerce et al., 2018, p. 1847). Along these lines, the European Union report on gender equality in the media (2017/2210) (European Parliament, 2018) states that one in ten women have suffered some form of cyber-violence since the age of 15 in Europe. Similarly, the National Strategy for the Eradication of Violence against Women 2013-2016 (Ministry of Health, Social Services, and Equality, 2013) highlights that “young women are more vulnerable to the harmful effects of cyber-bullying due to the unequal social consideration and valuation to which behaviours are subjected” (2013, p. 90).

1.3 Objectives

The main objective of the research herein is to analyse the impact of cyberbullying on the online behaviour of adolescents.

In the first phase, which is quantitative, the specific objective is to analyse the digitisation of young people in relation to their utilisation of devices, frequency of use, variety of uses, risk perception, and competence.

In the second phase, which is qualitative, the aim is to answer the following questions:

- What are the main risks involved in the digitisation of teenagers?
- Are there gender differences in the profiles of perpetrators and victims?
- What are the differences between boys and girls in terms of the various forms of cyber-aggression?
- Do these experiences of cyber-violence have diverse consequences for adolescent online behaviour?

The hypotheses to be verified are the following: a) the risky online experiences of boys and girls are different, and in the case of girls, such risks have negative consequences for their use of the Internet; b) females feel more vulnerable to online attacks.

2. Materials and methods

In the first phase of the research, a survey was carried out with minors attending school in the Autonomous Region of Madrid, using a stratified, multistage sample according to clusters based on educational year and type of school (private/subsidised, or public). The income level of the school district is a segmentation attribute of the public schools. The sample reached a total of 667 cases (865 unweighted). The margin of error is 3.87% with a confidence level of 95.5%, and with the most unfavourable option being P=Q=50% (n= 865). A total of 60.7% of the sample are boys (525), and nearly 40% are girls (340). The data were processed using SPSS. Both a descriptive analysis and contingency tables were applied using gender as the dependent variable to assess its relationship with other variables. The level of statistical validity was set at $\chi^2 < 0.05$.

In the qualitative study, two focus groups were organised: one for females and one for males. The choice of methodology was determined by the nature of this phase of the research: a study of the risky experiences on the Internet that aims to understand the processes experienced by interactive audiences in their relationship with the digital medium (Callejo, 2001).

The sample universe is composed of adolescents in Madrid between 15 and 18 years of age. The sample consists of 20 minors; 10 boys and 10 girls. For the groups, the research team prepared a discussion guide based on the objectives.

The participants in the groups were selected in a professional way and the adequacy of the sample was guaranteed through SACC, the ANEIMO Quality Recruitment System. This system guarantees that the people who participate in qualitative studies of any company associated with ANEIMO fulfil the requisite of not having participated in another project of similar characteristics with any of these companies within a pre-set, minimum period of time.

Selection criteria: 1. All the minors were either between 15 and 16 years of age, or between 17 and 18 years of age, on the date when the focus groups were carried out, without exception, and there were 50% in each group. 2. All participants have active social media accounts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, etc.). 3. All the participants use social media on a daily basis and generate content (posting, commenting, sharing, and uploading photos).

The focus groups lasted around 100 minutes. They were moderated by an expert, and there were two note takers. The sessions were recorded in audio and video, transcribed, and analysed.

3. Analysis and results

3.1. Characteristics of digitisation among adolescents

3.1.1. Devices, frequency, and digital skills

Internet access is nearly equal for boys and girls; 82.4% of the boys and 79.1% of the girls use the Internet every day. Moreover, there are no significant statistical differences in the type of device used for access. The most common device is the mobile phone (88.2%). Only the video console is used more by the boys; 56.4% for boys compared to 12.6% for girls. Digital skills are also similar. There are no significant differences in the use of email, chats, social networks, video calls, word processing, or presentation programmes, nor differences in the skills used to watch videos, download apps, use geolocation applications, or utilise content management systems. The only significant differences found in favour of boys are skills for downloading films, playing online games, and creating web pages. These differences can be explained by the fact that boys have online interests that are different from those of girls. In terms of skills in improving online safety, there are no significant differences in priority actions such as blocking messages, changing security profiles, or deleting logs. Boys are slightly more proficient in specific actions such as blocking ads or spam and in changing content filter preferences.

3.1.2. Uses

Although no major differences have been found in access or digital skills, there are significant differences in how the Internet is used, according to gender. Girls are more likely to use the Internet for interpersonal communication or self-expression. The two most common communication-related activities are instant messaging (64.9%) and social network use (41.8%), both of which are significantly more common among girls: 70.3% use instant messaging very often compared to 59.4% of the boys; moreover, 48.5% of the girls use social networks compared to 35% of the boys. Video calls are commonly used by 22.1% of the girls compared to 14.6% of the boys. Girls also tend to share their own content such as photos more than boys; 44.7% do so very often or often, compared to 28.3% for boys.

If we look at activities related to accessing information, boys are more likely to consume news about current affairs: 35.7% of the boys do so very often or often, compared to 21.5% of the girls; and girls tend to access health information; 11.8% of the girls do so very often compared to 5.9% of the boys.

Girls use the internet more often to access accommodation or travel services, and to take photos or edit them. This latter activity is consistent with the fact that girls upload more personal photos or videos of themselves than boys (32.1% upload many compared to 17.1% of the boys), and of friends and acquaintances as well. Boys are more likely to access sites to play online games or download apps.

In short, boys and girls use the Internet differently. Girls use the Internet more to communicate with others and are more likely to create and share their own content, upload photos, and interact. They have a higher average number of contacts on social networks than boys (25.6% of females have more than 500 contacts and nearly 50% of males have less than 200). Boys use the Internet more for playing games and accessing information.

3.1.3. Risk perception

Even though both girls and boys are aware of Internet risks, girls have a higher perception of risk than boys in terms of accessing sexual or violent content, receiving offensive messages, sending photos without permission, bullying, impersonation, or blackmail (see Table 1).

Table 1.: Inter-gender differences in risk perception

Factors	Adolescents	Male (A)	Female (B)
Accessing unreliable information	89.3	87	91.5 a
Waste of time	47.6	46.7	48.5
“Access to content, photos, or videos that are ‘bad, sexual, or violent’”	90.8	86.5	95.0 A
Getting a computer virus	94.2	92.4	95.9 a
Receiving spam	84.2	82.5	85.9
Receiving offensive personal messages	88	83.9	92.1 A
One person impersonating another	96.2	94.2	98.2 A
“Loss of privacy when information, photos, or videos are sent to third parties”	91.1	88.7	93.5 A
Lack of social acceptance (isolation)	63	58.9	67.1 A
Being bullied by people one knows or by strangers	90.2	84.2	96.2 A
Suffering blackmail	88.9	85.8	92.1 A

Source: Prepared by the authors. Calculated using SPSS. Chi-square test.

Once they have experienced a risky situation, girls are more likely to tell their parents or friends, with significant differences compared to boys. It is interesting to note that 68.9% of young people would not confide in their teachers.

The figure of 82.6% of the girls would never get together with strangers. Girls are more cautious when it comes to socialising online: 77.8% socialise mainly with people they

already know and 22.9% of the boys do so with people they have met on the Internet, compared to 14.4% of the girls.

3.2. Risky experiences and their impact on online behaviour

As the quantitative data show, both boys and girls have a high perception of online risk.

Boys mentioned insults, aggressiveness, impersonation, creation of fake accounts, and bullying, whereas girls especially pointed to cyberbullying, offensive comments, and the proliferation of fake identities. Girls were most concerned about privacy and security in relation to the content they shared, which was not a concern among boys.

Of all the perceived risks, both groups pointed to cyberbullying as a widespread, frequent practice. As for the profile of the aggressor, boys perceive girls as more peaceful and reserved, with the tendency to avoid conflict. They also believe bullies are usually males. Girls, on the other hand, state that there are no gender differences in relation to the number of aggressors, yet they say there are differences in the forms of aggression used. They believe that girls perpetrate more psychological, malicious cyberbullying, with a higher level of awareness and capability for harm than boys, whom they consider to be more oblivious and mainly motivated because they believe it is entertaining or fun. With regard to the victim's profile, both genders consider it to be equal in terms of prevalence, although regarding both groups, one of the participants argued that there is more cyberbullying against girls.

P (G1): *"We're more spiteful. Boys do it for a laugh".*

Mi (G1): *"Bullies sometimes do it unconsciously because they themselves have suffered in the past. They don't realise that they leave you traumatised. Some people even commit suicide. They pick on someone. They feel superior, and they enjoy it. They're just not aware".*

Ma (G2): *"The girls tend to avoid controversy more than us. We're more likely to really get into it. They're more reserved".*

Mi (G1): *"There are so many cases (of cyberbullying) ... I've seen just as many boys as girls. I think it's 50/50".*

Both girls and boys say that they are subject to cyberbullying. However, both groups consider females to be more vulnerable due to the possibility of being targeted for criticism with regard to their bodies or physical appearance, or about the exposure of their physical image, in addition to harassment of a sexual nature. They believe that girls are more affected by diverse types of cyberbullying.

Mi (G1): *"If you call a boy 'fat', it doesn't bother him, but girls care more about their physical appearance. Some girls have a strong personality and they're not bothered by these comments, but some aren't as strong, and they really feel hurt by these things".*

G (G2): *"(On cyberbullying) It affects girls more. I only saw this one case (of the girl who uploaded a photo and was verbally attacked). I can't really compare, but I've been told bad things, and I just brush it off. But in general, it affects girls more".*

(G2): *"This girl was doing stupid things in a swimming pool and she uploaded a photo. Then people started calling her things you normally say when someone does stupid things like that. She was wearing a bikini, and two or three guys started calling her names. Things like 'slut'. So she deleted the photo".*

When faced with cyberbullying of a sexual nature, one of the female participants said that she refused to go to the police because she thought it was excessive. The discourse reveals a sense of helplessness and a lack of resources in dealing with this type of situation. The participants also experience feelings of guilt when evaluating their own reaction to cyberbullying.

Another difference between male and female victims of cyberbullying is the blaming mechanism of female victims based on their physical appearance and the clothes they wear. One female participant explicitly pointed out that males justify cyberbullying by saying, "Look at the way she dresses", when referring to a certain girl.

However, it should also be noted that girls themselves have partially duplicated this logic. Some participants have mentioned expressions such as, "She asked for it", or "You expose yourself", when talking about other girls who post content on social networks and then suffer insults.

In none of these stories did participants show empathy for the victims, nor did they defend the right to share photos without being insulted, regardless of the physical appearance or clothing.

Lu (G1): *"On Instagram, some girls post pictures, and they're asking for it... I follow a girl who shows photos of herself in a bra, or without a bra but covering herself, and then she says things like, 'one more'. Sometimes they upload things as if they're defending something, but you're really exposing yourself".*

E (G1): *"Men justify (cyberbullying) by saying, 'Look at how she dresses'".*

3.2.1 Consequences of online behaviour

Risky online experiences have different consequences for the online behaviour of boys and girls. While boys are more confident and comfortable with their digital skills, girls are more insecure and distrustful. Girls evaluate the way they use the Internet, reflect on what they are going to publish, and once published, they experience feelings of concern that the content may cause them harm.

Both boys and girls show a notable lack of interest and scepticism regarding the use of digital tools for social or political participation, and in the case of females, this is exacerbated by the perception that social networks are a hostile environment for the expression of ideas, and a space that is conducive to useless bickering and controversy.

The consequence of cyberbullying experienced by the girls themselves, as well as other females, limits their ability to participate on the Internet, because as they have stated, they do not want to expose themselves to cyber-violence, sexual cyber-bullying, and other forms of hatred. The discourse of the females denotes fear, prevention, and self-control, which is reinforced by the feeling that they might lose control over the content they post, so they increasingly restrict their online participation.

Mi (G1): *"I don't like it, because when you express yourself, it might bother someone else; I prefer not to give my opinion, because I know someone is going to respond. When they make sexist comments, I don't like it, but I don't say anything. It makes me feel uneasy".*

Ma (G1): *"I try to be careful. In your circle of friends, most of them usually think the same as you, but I know that some friends think differently on certain issues, and I never talk about those things because I know it will start an argument, and it can affect your friendship. It has never happened to me because I never expose myself to it".*

4. Discussion and conclusions

The results of this research confirm that bullying among minors in the digital environment is common, frequent, and widespread in the discourse of adolescents. It is not something rare or unusual for them. Instead, it is seen as something inherent to being present in the digital environment. Both females and males experience cyberbullying either as victims, witnesses, or aggressors, yet the research herein shows the way in which important aspects of online bullying, such as the type of bullying experienced, the intensity, and its effect on adolescents varies according to gender, and indicates that females are more vulnerable than males.

Despite the fact that digital skills and access to the Internet is equal between young men and women, as confirmed by some studies (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2016), according to Álvarez-García et al. (2017), not only are the experiences of online cyberbullying different between the genders, but adolescents themselves, both girls and boys, perceive that females are more vulnerable and exposed, not only to sexual cyberbullying, but to other forms of verbal cyber-aggression and exclusion as well.

According to the study herein, there are several reasons why females are a more vulnerable online group, which is in line with the conclusions of García-Jiménez et al. (2022), who state that girls are more unprotected than boys. On the one hand, girls are more likely to use communication services in which they interact with others, share content and photos of their own making, and express themselves, which implies greater exposure on the Internet. This coincides with a study by Mascheroni et al. (2015), which states that the use of photographs and self-portraits is a practice that females carry out more often than boys. Females make greater use of social media for communication and emotion, specifically through the mobile phone, which implies greater involvement and makes them an easier target for online aggression. They are also more affected by such attacks.

On the other hand, gender stereotypes that put pressure on males and females in distinct ways are widespread on the Internet, which can foment inequality, and could be the reason behind certain cyberbullying behaviour, as stated by the work of Tajahuerce et al. (2018).

Similar to what has been found in European research, the stereotype in Spain that exalts female beauty permeates the imagination of adolescents and affects them directly in their experiences on the Internet. Women are expected to respond to prevailing standards of beauty, and this contributes to the physical image of women being the focus of aggression, which causes significant harm to them and adds to the pressure they already feel to conform to those standards, as noted in the research by Mascheroni et al. (2015).

Along the same lines, in the discourse of both boys and girls, it is clear that unlike boys, girls have to be careful not to show too much of their bodies, or not to display them in a way that is too suggestive, a reality that manifests itself in blaming women for experiencing cyberbullying of a sexual nature because of their physical appearance or clothing. According to the boys' discourse, bullying is justified on this basis. This idea in the imaginary of adolescents in this study means that the discourse is not very empathetic toward female victims, who end up being blamed for the aggression. In this way, the Internet appears to spread gender stereotypes that may be at the root of some types of cyberbullying.

Abuse has different consequences for the online behaviour of adolescents. While boys are more confident and relaxed, the vulnerability of girls makes them more insecure and distrustful. Consequently, the female group uses prevention strategies that involve limiting their participation on the Internet. The ways they use social networks are accompanied by a heightened sense of fear that results in self-censorship, which limits their freedom to act

and express themselves online. This situation also occurs in the case of their digital political behaviour which, even though it is scarce, duplicates similar patterns in which girls also put self-limits on their own participation due to the fear of receiving harsh criticism (Vázquez-Barrio et al., 2020).

In general terms, although differences between boys and girls have been noted, it is interesting to contrast the risk perceived by girls in comparison to their strong participation in social networks, given the pervasiveness of this service in the lives of minors with which, through “meanings, signifiers, messages, and content” (Renés Arellano et al., 2020, p. 288), they contextualise and construct their assessment of reality.

This indicates a dissonance that requires delving more deeply into the need among minors to be present on social networks that goes beyond the negative perception they have of such spaces, as well as their own adverse experiences of risk, and even the possibility of converting these spaces from something that currently has a negative connotation into platforms of peaceful coexistence, openness, and equality. To this end, it is important to change the conformist attitude among minors, and instead promote admonition and condemnation, among other strategies, because the current reality will lead to a lack of empathy with victims and a paucity of support from one’s own peer group, and the result could be a failure to denounce these kinds of situations.

Author contributions

Teresa Torrecillas-Lacave: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Validation and Writing-review & editing. **Tamara Vázquez-Barrio:** Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Validation and Writing-review & editing. **Rebeca Suárez-Álvarez:** Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Project administration, Resources, Software, Visualization and Writing-original draft.

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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