

DIGITAL SOCIAL NETWORKS: EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE IN INTIMITY AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN THE LIGHT OF COMPLEXITY

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ABSTRACT

Objective: this study aims to learn the perception of adolescents, who are immersed in the digital age, about intimate partner violence, from the perspective of the Paradigm of Complexity.

Method: a qualitative and strategic social research; 39 adolescents, males and females, attending high school in two state schools in a city in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, participated in the study. Data was collected through interviews and focus groups between October 2016 and April 2017 and analyzed in the light of the referred Paradigm.

Results: the results showed the following: acceptance of violence in intimate relationships among adolescents; persistence of taboos, myths and beliefs in society that were reproduced in the participants' reports; new forms of violence, relationships and notions engendered and updated by the digital age; prevalence of psychological violence among adolescents.

Conclusion: the study shows the association between love and violence out of jealousy and the control and power over the partner's social networks as a legitimate form of love in the daily life of intimate relationships, which are expressed in different ways. Failure to accept certain conditions is perceived as a form of cheating. The Paradigm of Complexity contributed in an indispensable way by offering an integral look on the theme and by providing greater clarity about the elements that make up the phenomenon in an articulated and contextualized way.

DESCRIPTORS: Intimate partner violence. Adolescent. School health. Qualitative research.

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REDES SOCIAIS DIGITAIS: EXPOSIÇÃO À VIOLÊNCIA NA INTIMIDADE ENTRE ADOLESCENTES À LUZ DA COMPLEXIDADE

RESUMO

Objetivo: o presente estudo visa conhecer a percepção de adolescentes, imersos na era digital, sobre a violência nos relacionamentos íntimos sob a perspectiva do Paradigma da Complexidade.

Método: abordagem qualitativa do tipo pesquisa social estratégica, e teve como participantes 39 adolescentes, de ambos os sexos, frequentadores do ensino médio de duas escolas estaduais de um município do interior do estado de São Paulo, Brasil. Os dados foram coletados utilizando entrevistas, grupos focais, no período compreendido entre outubro de 2016 a abril de 2017 sendo analisados à luz do referido Paradigma.

Resultados: os resultados indicaram: a aceitação da ocorrência de violência nos relacionamentos íntimos entre os adolescentes; persistência de tabus, mitos e crenças na sociedade e reproduzidos nos relatos dos participantes; novas formas de violência, relacionamento e noções engendradas e atualizadas pela era digital; prevalência de violência psicológica entre os adolescentes.

Conclusão: o estudo evidencia a associação entre amor e violência por ciúme, o controle e dominação das redes sociais do parceiro como forma de amor legitimadas no cotidiano das relações íntimas, sendo estas expressas de diversas formas. A não aceitação de determinadas condições é percebida como uma forma de traição. O Paradigma da Complexidade contribuiu de forma imprescindível para o desenvolvimento de um olhar integral sobre a temática, proporcionando maior clareza sobre os elementos que compõem o fenômeno de modo articulado e contextualizado.

DESCRITORES: Violência por parceiro íntimo. Adolescente. Saúde escolar. Pesquisa qualitativa.

REDES SOCIALES DIGITALES: EXPOSICIÓN A LA VIOLENCIA EN LAS RELACIONES ÍNTIMAS ENTRE ADOLESCENTES A LA LUZ DE LA COMPLEJIDAD

RESUMEN

Objetivo: el presente estudio pretende conocer la percepción de los adolescentes, inmersos en la era digital, sobre la violencia en las relaciones íntimas, desde la perspectiva del Paradigma de la Complejidad.

Método: enfoque cualitativo del tipo investigación social estratégica, que tuvo como participantes a 39 adolescentes, de ambos sexos, estudiantes secundarios en dos escuelas estatales de un municipio del interior del estado de San Pablo, Brasil. Los datos se recolectaron por medio de entrevistas y grupos focales en el período comprendido entre octubre de 2016 y abril de 2017, siendo analizados a la luz del mencionado Paradigma.

Resultados: los resultados indicaron lo siguiente: la aceptación de hechos de violencia en las relaciones íntimas entre; la persistencia de tabúes, mitos y creencias en la sociedad y reproducidos en los testimonios de los participantes; nuevas formas de violencia, vinculación y nociones engendradas y actualizadas por la era digital; y prevalencia de la violencia psicológica entre los adolescentes.

Conclusión: en el estudio se evidencia una asociación entre el amor y la violencia por celos, el control y la dominación de las redes sociales de la pareja como forma de amor legitimándolas en la vida diaria de las relaciones íntimas y manifestándose de diversas formas. No aceptar determinadas condiciones se percibe como una forma de traición. El Paradigma de la Complejidad contribuyó de manera imprescindible para lograr una perspectiva integral sobre la temática, proporcionando mayor claridad sobre los elementos que componen el fenómeno de un modo articulado y contextualizado.

DESCRIPTORES: Violencia ejercida por la pareja. Adolescente. Salud escolar. Investigación cualitativa.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, violence is identified and recognized as a social and public health problem, since it affects the health of the people involved.¹ Intimate partner violence or violence within an intimate relationship is understood as one that generates physical, sexual or psychological harm, appearing among acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors.²

To reflect on intimate partner violence among adolescents, this study considers the concept of adolescence proposed by the World Health Organization as a phase from childhood to adulthood, identified by changes and by physical, emotional, mental and social development, apart from personality structuring, corresponding to the age group of 10 to 19 years old.¹ Adolescence is the most vulnerable period for people to develop conflicts in intimate relationships due to several factors, including emotional immaturity, desire for independence, tendency to aggravate gender inequalities, as well as the consent of violence by the idealization of the partner and of romantic love.^{3,4} In this context, violence is accepted and manifested in different ways and is often interpreted as a form of love.³⁻⁵

The trivialization of acts of violence in intimate relationships is possibly due to the daily coexistence with such acts of the most diverse types, such as groping, touching, pinching, squeezing the arms, jealousy and the sexual act itself. These expressions are often not understood as a form of violence by adolescents, but they are romantic strategies governed by values of domination and subjugation.³

Adolescents who suffer some form of violence in intimate relationships tend to be indifferent or to normalize the event, as well as to accept, allow and/or reproduce violent behaviors in their future relationships.⁴⁻⁶

In the current digital age, adolescents present new challenges to educational, health and national security institutions, among others, since they constantly use technological devices for communication and entertainment, remaining connected and integrating technologies in their lives.⁷

Thus, the experience and presence of violence in intimate relationships disseminated among adolescents through access to Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) challenge the creation of models of comprehensive health care capable of favoring, in this peculiar moment of life, protagonism, autonomy and care for oneself and the other. To minimize this difficulty, it is necessary to understand how this public expresses itself and experiences the phenomenon of violence in intimate relationships in contemporary times.

Thus, this study aims to learn the perception of adolescents, who are immersed in the digital age, about violence in intimate relationships, from the perspective of the Paradigm of Complexity. Accordingly, this study shows how people in intimate relationships experience violence in the digital age, and may assist professionals in Primary Health Care in the inter-sectoral creation of violence prevention strategies.

The theme has great international relevance, both to improve intimate relationships among young people and to prevent conjugal violence.³ Furthermore, the investigation of the many expressions and manifestations of violence in intimate relationships is a way to support interaction/intervention works with the proposal to improve affective experiences, promote gender equity, and prevent violence between intimate partners.

METHOD

This is a qualitative and strategic social research since it aims to understand the individuals in their own contexts, where the social phenomena and the subjective aspects of social action take place.⁸ The study was carried out in two public schools in the city of Batatais (state of São Paulo), Brazil, with 39 adolescent students attending high school.

The inclusion criterion included adolescents regularly enrolled in and attending high school at the time of the research, who may or may not have or had an intimate relationship, regardless of their sexual orientation. The choice for juniors and seniors was proposed by the school board, enabling the internal organization of the institutions, an orientation respected by the researchers.

Data collection took place between October 2016 and April 2017, through focus groups (FGs) and semi-structured interviews, within the schools and in a private room. Both strategies used were moderated by the lead researcher. The researchers decided not to have observers, as it is a delicate issue, prioritizing the reliability of the data and considering that their presence could cause discomfort to the participants.

The FGs, also called dialog groups, provide the process of qualified speech and listening and the detailed recording of adolescents' perceptions, allowing, through interaction, for the capture and comparison of different and similar perceptions and shared experiences⁸. Four FGs were carried out. In each FG there were two activities and each session was attended by seven to eleven adolescents, lasting between 40 and 60 minutes. In the first activity, the theme was discussed through the presentation of printed figures that represented common situations among couples, such as couples hugging, love messages, a couple discussing, and social networks. A pre-established script guided the discussion and raised questions, namely: i) What is an (ideal) intimate relationship?; ii) Which behaviors are positive and which are harmful in an intimate relationship?; iii) What is violence?

In the second activity of the FG, the participants expressed their thoughts about violence and intimate relationships during adolescence, when the researcher gave the participants a script with affirmative phrases such as: i) The boyfriend/girlfriend has the right to control where his/her partner goes to or who he/she talks to; ii) Nobody should interfere in a couple fight; iii) People who are mistreated and do not ask for help do not care about their situation. The adolescents were invited to speak up when they expressed their beliefs, following the parameter established as 1- I do not agree; 2- I slightly agree (maybe); 3- I agree; and 4- I very much agree. Later, they were encouraged to talk more about their convictions.

Another strategy used to complement the FG in data collection was to conduct semi-structured interviews, which addressed issues related to the family nucleus, testimony of violence between the parents, and positive and negative love experiences. Fifteen interviews were conducted, with six male participants and nine female, with a mean duration of 20 to 35 minutes. The criteria for choosing the interviewees were the following: having participated in the FG, demonstrating free interest and standing out in some way during the FG, either by starting to report something, but not finishing it, giving up the report, demonstrating feeling uncomfortable with a question or with the report of another participant.

The interview script covered three guiding and open questions that showed a specific perspective of the participant on the phenomenon under study: i) What is dating or being in an intimate relationship for you?; ii) Can there be violence in an intimate relationship? How does it happen?; iii) Have you ever experienced any situation of violence?

To keep the participants' identities secret, the coding was adopted by associating the gender (H for men [*homem* in Portuguese]; M for women [*mulheres*, in Portuguese]) and the order of the FG (g1, g2,...), of the participants (p1, p2,...), and of the interviews (e1, e2,...), numbered according to the sequence in which they were carried out. The recordings of the FGs and interviews with the adolescents were authorized, under the guarantee of anonymity, and later transcribed in full. The data obtained showed redundancy and repetition after the 4th FG and 15th interview, which led to ending the inclusion of new participants in the study.

The combination of these data creation methods, their analysis and subsequent interpretation was guided by the Paradigm of Complexity.⁹ The Paradigm of Complexity emerged in search of understanding complex phenomena and considers the contradictions, instability, unpredictability

and uncontrollability of the phenomena, understanding them in constant transformation, always in the process of becoming and returning to be, dialectically; thus enabling the multidimensional, transdisciplinary, dynamic, and contextual approach to reality.¹⁰

The principles of Complex Thinking which support this paper are the Dialogical Principle, the Principle of Organizational Resource and the Hologrammatic Principle. The Dialogical Principle claims the combination and association of contradictory elements in the analysis of a given phenomenon, relating them at the same time as complementary and antagonistic, producing reorganization and complexity.⁹ The Principle of Organizational Resource conceives, unlike the cause-effect relationship, the non-linear process in causal relationships, which highlights products and effects as causes and producers of what produced them, that is, the individual is a product and producer of interactional processes.¹⁰ The Hologrammatic Principle recommends that the study of a phenomenon should provide the distinction between the parts and the verification of the whole, incorporating these parts, without them dissolving and losing their differences.⁹⁻¹⁰

Data was analyzed using the Paradigm of Complexity, following the script with three phases:⁸ i) Classification and organization of the information collected to obtain a view of the research as a whole and the perspective of specific issues related to the total of the researched. The reports were transcribed in full, listing the most mentioned, relevant and specific points to the phenomenon under study; ii) Organization of referential tables with the significant elements of the participants' answers, to provide an expanded look at the set of information that makes it possible to categorize them; and, iii) Summary of reports, understandings and ideas discussed that were implicated/understood through concepts, to establish relationships among the data by organizing them into categories.

The research work followed the rules for research involving human beings and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Ribeirão Preto Nursing College of the University of São Paulo.

RESULTS

39 adolescent students participated in the study; 25 (64.1%) were female and 14 (35.9%) were male between 15 and 18 years old, from high school (82.1% were juniors and 17.9%, seniors), who spontaneously accepted to participate in the study. Regarding sexual orientation, only one participant (2.5%) declared himself to be a homosexual and, due to this low percentage, it was decided that there would be no distinction in data collection in this sphere.

When the participants were asked about the occurrence of violence in the intimate relationship, passivity and acceptance were identified as common phenomena:

It's normal, because it's part of a relationship (p9/H-g3).

Pinching and cursing happen [...] (e13/M).

The explanations above indicate that, apparently, "normalizing" some manifestations of violence may be justified by the emotional state of the speaker.

Among the strategies adopted to ensure fidelity in the intimate relationship, acceptance was naturalized, tending to banalization:

Swearing, a little squeeze, pinching not too strong, it happens, right (p10/H-g1).

[...] when you are angry, it happens, everybody knows (p4/M-g3).

Sending a naked photo for any reasons whatsoever. This is just being shameless; women send them because they want to, there is no such thing as blackmail (p5/H-g1).

In this context, the idealization of love is seen as a justification for enduring or practicing some violence, even though some rules are established.

Like when you start dating, you create a bond, like you're one body. What you can do, you can; what you can't do, you can't (p6/M-g2).

That's because she likes him, and when the woman has feelings for the man, she tolerates anything. Not only women, men do it too when they are in love (p1/M-g1).

The reports also focused on the feeling of wanting to control the other and on expressing jealousy:

For my girlfriend to go somewhere, I have to know, if I don't, she won't go (p8/H-g3).

If you like someone, you'll be jealous, it's normal... I know that I am jealous, I try not to be obsessive. [...] But if the person is not jealous you think he/she doesn't love you, doesn't like you (p3/H-g4).

I dumped my girlfriend [...] There was a time when she asked me to take a picture to show her that I was going to take a shower, that I was in my room. She called all the time to find out where I was, what I was doing. Excessively emotional, you know, very loving, too loving, I couldn't take it anymore [...] (e2/H).

Therefore, knowing where the partner goes and authorizing him/her; being obsessive and acting without thinking; and gaining control through instruments such as smartphones would be demonstrations of love.

As shown in the report of e2/H, excessive instantaneous communication, when taken to the last consequences, was interpreted as an "excessively emotional" behavior, but that suggests her distrust, given the insistence on monitoring the boyfriend's daily habits. The ease of access to Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) via smartphones, and using them to share sounds, images and location through innumerable applications is a potential and new risk factor which can trigger, in addition to an instantaneous approach, also violence in the intimate relationship between the adolescents.

Given this, there is a systematization of the beliefs and notions found in the statements of the participants, illustrated in Figure 1. In short, it was found that the adolescents' relationships were built based on beliefs and common sense, propagated over time, constituting elements conducive to the acceptance/trivialization of some dimensions of violence since it is not recognized as such.

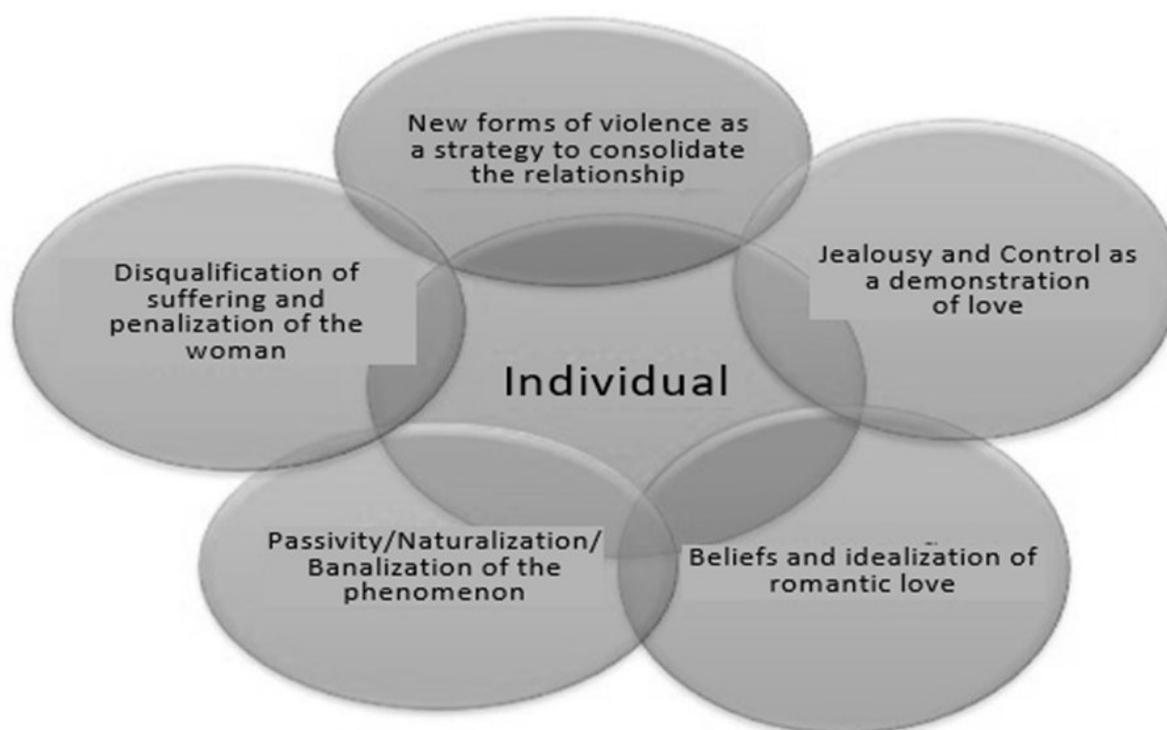


Figure 1 – Configuration of the existing elements in the adolescents' reports on the phenomenon of intimate partner violence, 2018.

Several factors such as lying, lack of trust, cheating, use of alcohol and drugs, social and economic issues, time, and digital social networks were identified as motivators for the occurrence of violence, the latter being the element most evidenced by the participants.

There is a surveillance action manifested when the partner wants to know the private information on the virtual social networks because, when the partner insists on getting the password of the smartphone and the social networks, there is an invasion of privacy, a manipulation strategy, the desire to control the messages, therefore, a manifestation of violence.

When you keep insisting it's like violence, right, because of the password... there are people who even break the (partner's) cell phones because of Facebook and WhatsApp messages... then I think (it's) violence, you're invading their personal space and taking away their privacy (e5/M).

What generates violence is jealousy because of cell phones, WhatsApp, Facebook and the Internet... all kinds of social networks that exist in life, because there is always something that one or the other doesn't like, or that someone does, then the person wants to "keep" controlling the other's cell phone, looking at the password and what the other does (p5/H-g4).

My ex lived in another city [...] we used to see each other on the weekends, the first thing he did when he visited me home was to ask me to see my cell phone. And that to me is the worst thing in a relationship (p5/M-g1).

In this relational dimension, digital social networks are characterized as a potential and new risk factor for triggering violence in intimate relationships between adolescents, being used as a channel to obtain knowledge-power and, therefore, control over the partner.

Not sharing the smartphone password and the access to social networks and wanting to maintain privacy is a reason for distrust and suspicion, but unrestricted access cannot be seen as violence, after all, there is a pact between them. Furthermore, there is an understanding of this desire for control as evidence of trust, which was one of the pillars of the relationships desired by many participants.

For me, no, it's not violence, it's normal, I have nothing to hide. I had to keep insisting a lot to have it, to be able to see his cell phone. I take his cell phone and see it and he also takes my cell phone and sees, our Facebook accounts are logged in, no password (p/M-g4).

I don't think it's violence [insisting], if the partner doesn't give the password, the person will start to suspect that there is something there, that he/she is talking to another person, that he/she is cheating (p3/M-g1).

You don't have to force them, you ask. If he doesn't want to give it to you, there is something there. I wait for him to sleep and I check his WhatsApp, without waking him up (p7/M-g3).

Thus, access to the social networks, unilateral or not, either by having the access or the cell phone password, was related to the occurrence of violence, manifested in different ways.

My boyfriend asked the password of my Facebook account and keeps checking my WhatsApp. I was supposed to have his too, but he totally refused to give it to me. I think he spends more time on my Facebook page than on his. We've been together for 2 years and 8 months and we fight for everything, everything. Sometimes he gets very stressed, then he starts punching the wall and I start laughing, laughing with fear. He's obsessive, he's sick. He scares me (p6/M-g4).

They want to control everything, even the cell phone... Then they get stressed, lose track of things, there's a guy here at school who hits his girlfriend because she accepted a man's request on Facebook or followed some guy on Instagram, and the girlfriend goes crazy when he likes another girl's photo and ends up attacking him too (p3/H-g4).

Although expressing jealousy within certain limits was considered by the adolescents as demonstrations of love, some were accompanied by frightening manifestations of violence that showed an obsessive, unhealthy love. The fragments express a new manifestation of violence in intimate relationships between adolescents: the reduction and control of privacy. This is manifested in the

insistence to obtain the cell phone password and to have access to the digital social networks, such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and many others, when seeking dominance over the partner's life.

The ideal of transparency in relationships, manifested by the need for unrestricted access to smartphones and social networks, paradoxically exposes the fragility of these same intimate relationships. The reports show the understanding that, in an intimate relationship, nothing can be hidden from the eyes of the partner; otherwise, it is considered a form of cheating.

Dating for me has to bring the two together because, otherwise, there is no point in dating if one is here and the other is there. They need to be together, and know about everything all the time [...] (P8/H-G2).

We always shared the account, because, as I see it, hiding something is cheating. Cheating is not only 'going out' with someone else [...] (p1/M-g1).

In this context, giving passwords for access to digital social networks to the partner has been interpreted as a new form of proof of love by the adolescents.

Yes, I've been asked for a proof of love: the Facebook and WhatsApp passwords, to see how many contacts I have, how many girls, what I was talking about and whom I was talking to (e2/H).

Because that's love right, you don't give your password if you don't love him, because he'll know everything about my life there, and if he loves me, he has to do the same (e14/M).

The password of an electronic device that allows access to the partner's digital social networks has become one of the main tools that enables a new form and a new channel for a subtle form of violence, and a new way of showing love in contemporary times.

One of the strategies used by the participants to deal with possible fights resulting from access to digital social networks was the creation of a common account in these media. It is assumed that this would not only be an alternative for the resolution of conflicts and mistrust, but also the manifestation of an established and desired contract, in which there is mutual permission, to have a mutual control of the partner, as illustrated by the following statements:

Yeah... when we started dating seriously, he and I created a Facebook account together, you know. Moreover, if I tell you that I think it's not okay, that's a lie, because I think it's much better this way. Because it's not fair for me, if he's doing this or that and not with me, you understand? So it was a solution for us so that we could have a social network, use it at will, do whatever we want, without having this problem of mistrust. We did it and it worked! (p8/M-g1).

We created our shared account on Facebook, because, like, I don't want my boyfriend to talk to another girl. I don't do it. I used to do it before, but not while I'm in a relationship. I only have male friends in the classroom, I have classmates, right? There is no such thing as to 'spend time' on the Facebook talking to other guys, he doesn't have such thing as female friends, right? (p5/M-g3).

The public x private relational dyad becomes evident with the creation of a shared profile between the partners, allowing for a certain control of the other and for the exclusion of intimate matters and friends of the opposite sex in this communication channel. In this scenario, different plots were created by the participants around the digital social networks today. The new configurations and strategies engendered by them are systematized in Figure 2.

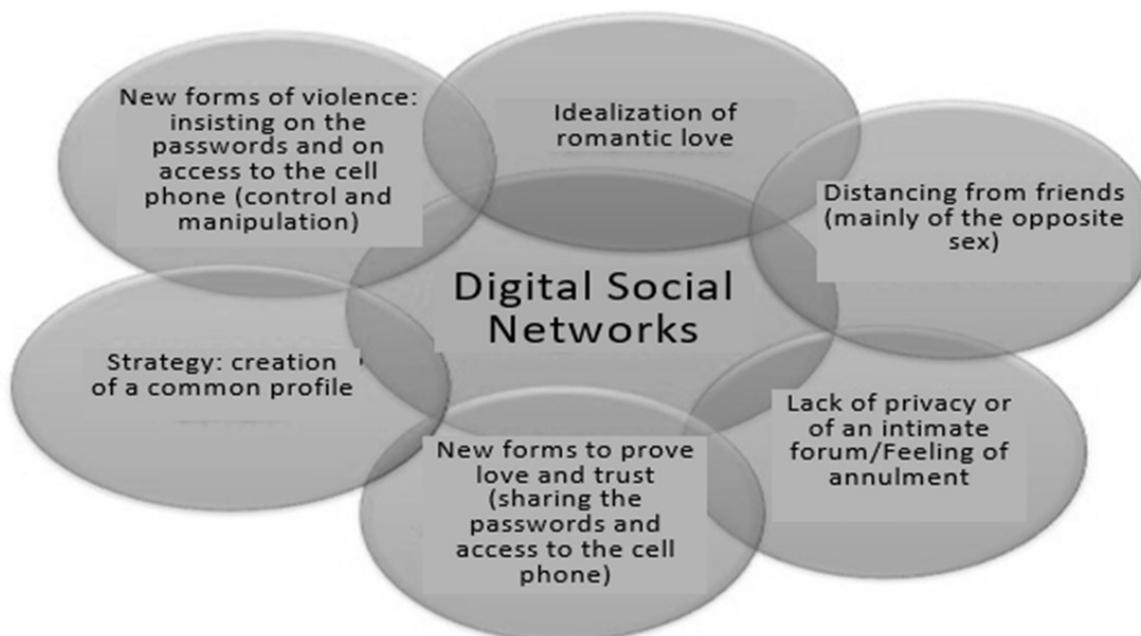


Figure 2 – New elements, configurations and strategies engendered by teenagers around the digital social networks, 2018.

DISCUSSION

The apprehension of the reports under the Dialogical Principle⁹ shows the relationship and the co-dependence that exists between affection and aggression. These factors complete each other and are also opposite in the relationships. This principle allows observing how the perpetrators of violence or the victims deal with the conflicts, uncertainties and instabilities in the relationship. Thus, the many aspects indicated by the adolescents converged into a common element, namely: the non-distinction between love and violence, with the control or domination of the partner being interpreted as being “excessively emotional” and too “loving”.

The same happens with the desire for control showed when granting the partner permission to go out or talk to friends, as a practice similar to love. These data confirm studies which found that adolescents associate acts of jealousy with love, and violence was considered an accepted act of love in affective relationships; thus, these adolescents show some difficulty in differentiating violent actions and expressions of love, which are merged in the perception of the adolescents.³⁻⁵

The demonstration of jealousy and the feeling of control were important elements in the development and establishment of intimate relationships among and by adolescents. Thus, the excessive control that can prevent quarrels or the jealousy exposed as a demonstration of care are paradoxical in the plot of intimate relationships. In the context of the materialization of the belief in romantic love, the ideal relationship, which should be preserved at all costs; the idea that the partner is the “half-orange”; and the belief that complete happiness lies in being together were subtly manifested in many reports. These data corroborate studies that explain how the myth of ideal love is the cultural mechanism and one of the main reasons for the acceptance of violence.^{3-5,11}

Under the light of the Principle of Organizational Resource, it was possible to see the perpetrator of violence and the victim as both products and producers of their interactional processes and of

society, in order to understand the interconnection that provides the characteristics of violence in intimate relationships. In this context, it is possible to notice the presence of the current paradox, characteristic of post-modernity, in the intimate relationships of these adolescents, in which there is a search for pleasure, of the hedonistic ethics, of individuality, of the networks of ephemeral relationships and liquid loves.¹² However, even in the face of these dissolutions and the desires for autonomy and freedom in their intimate relationships, they simultaneously reproduce behaviors in situations of violence based on traditional references, making the idealization of romantic love as present as in forty, fifty or sixty years ago.

This liquid modernity¹² exhibits the feelings and meanings attributed to violence by the adolescents in the study and their intimate relationships, namely: indifference, acceptance and naturalization. Therefore, many forms of violence have become invisible and, often, both the perpetrator and the victim were unaware of its manifestation and its meaning in the relationship or, when they were aware, they accepted it and allowed it. These findings support studies that highlight the naturalization of violence in the relationships of young Brazilians by demonstrating that adolescents who were assaulted by their partners found the assault normal or indifferent and hardly had feelings or thought about the aggression, which contributed to make the phenomenon invisible and banal.³⁻⁶

The Hologrammatic Principle favored a broader view of violence in intimate relationships between adolescents in its different dimensions. This principle makes it possible to analyze violence in its entirety, but broken down into different dimensions, without losing its specificities and connectivity. Therefore, in this study, despite the high rate of physical violence reported among the participants, verbal and psychological aggressions were the most frequent ones. These data are reinforced by studies which showed that the existence of verbal and physical violence came from cursing, jealousy, the desire to control the partner, cheating and gossip.^{3,11-13} The studies also revealed the connections between the different dimensions of violence (physical, verbal, psychological, financial and cyberviolence (social networks), acting together.

The main aspects present in the psychological violence among the participants of this study were *the use of the control itself*, when trying to dominate or monitor what the partner did and when insisting on accessing to their digital social networks, such attitudes being interpreted as actions of trust and loyalty; and *the emotional blackmail*, through jealousy and the belief in ideal love, which legitimized violence, justified thoughtless actions, and exempted the perpetrator of the violence acts from their responsibility.

With the advent of social and digital networks, new ideas and actions were created and updated in intimate relationships, according to the digital social context of the adolescents in the study, namely: i) a new form of relationship known as crush, which came from the term used in digital applications and social networks like *Facebook*[®], *Twitter*[®], *Instagram*[®] and *WhatsApp*[®] to designate a person who falls in love, has a “crush”, a passion, romance; ii) a new concept of “proof of love” that was turned into the consent of access to the password of the cell phone and digital applications, so that the partner can access the content; and, iii) new and different forms of violence, such as cyberviolence and the person’s insistence on having the password and accessing the partner’s cell phone and digital social networks. Thus, they result in manipulation, in control over the other, and in the absence of privacy of one (or both) of the partners, constituting a new modality to attain the emotional balance of the partner. It is noticed that male adolescents disqualify the woman’s suffering, and she is less valued and will always be judged, while the man who asks for and receives the nude picture, whether through emotional blackmail or not, will not be punished. In addition, the adolescents’ explanations showed the lack of understanding of this phenomenon as a form of violence.

This lifestyle, permeated by the consumption of digital/virtual technologies, conditions young people and adolescents to deviations from the cognitive-affective networks configured by quick

adaptation and fluidity, so these individuals not always have space to reflect on themselves and on their decisions.¹⁴ In the search for solutions to the problems and conflicts, adolescents are usually not creative and look for pre-existing strategies/alternatives.¹⁴

One of the strategies used by the study participants to deal with the digital social networks and possible quarrels/suspicious was the creation of a common account on the digital social networks. Thus, there is a refutation of the notion that each partner can have their own private life and their own friends, especially those of the opposite sex of the partner. This idea alluded to a veiled and unrecognized emotional violence by the adolescents, showed in the perpetuation and acceptance of the idea of distancing from friends. Thus, a mention is made of the concept that there is a contract for experiencing an intimate relationship, either to demarcate territory, or to ensure access and knowledge of the partner's life, as a guarantee of loyalty and fidelity.

In addition, the manifestation of this established contract is desired by both, which allows for a mutual control of themselves. Thus, the idea that there are matters of an intimate nature, particularly of one of them, ends up being left in the background and even considered unimportant. This leads to a cancellation mechanism that a large part of these adolescents undergo, mainly, to preserve the relationship.

The research found the phenomenon of violence materialized in different ways in the participants' intimate relationships, with both genders as authors and victims. It is known that gender violence goes beyond violence in the intimate relationship and that both genders suffer it although in a different way and in a different proportion, because for women the consequences are more mitigating and serious.³⁻⁶ Furthermore, diverse studies show that the authorship of violence by female adolescents is intensely associated with and is due to feelings of anger and revenge or self-defense in the face of the violence perpetrated by the partner.¹¹⁻¹³

The Paradigm of Complexity proposes to resort to the ideas, life practices, values, notions, and social and cultural concepts that have been emptied of their contents by modernity, through the Complex Thinking method and way of thinking, which leads to resignification and produces/gives new meanings to all these elements.⁹⁻¹⁰ In this way, adolescents would be able to devise new ways of resolving conflicts of violence, without being perpetrators of violence and without responding to the situation in the same way, but with strategies that enable new dialogs, new communication strategies, and the eradication of acts of violence. In the experience of health, education, urban security and social welfare professionals (and of the adolescents themselves), there is a multidisciplinary and social-reference search to develop a set of interactions that, within the adolescents' relationships and their relationships with society, offers new possibilities.

Diverse studies carried out with health professionals point to a lack of knowledge of the ethical and legal competences in caring for people who experience violence in intimate relationships, such as the lack of clarity about confidentiality, guidelines for appropriate practices and differentiation between police reporting and compulsory notification, and highlight care procedures with a biological perspective.¹⁵⁻¹⁶ There is a strong need for serious debates to: build a curriculum in basic and higher education in education and health courses, aware of the phenomenon among adolescents, their dimensions and severity; and to train and prepare teachers and nurses who deal with the phenomenon on a daily basis, so that they develop a comprehensive view of it and produce new knowledge and practices that are really capable of facing this situation.

This study was also marked by some limitations. As these are aspects of personal experience, there may be a tendency for responses that are considered by the participants to be more acceptable to society. Another limitation would be the reduced time for data construction, by means of interviews and FGs. Scenarios like the one at the school required negotiation with the teachers and the participants in case of possible delays.

CONCLUSION

The methods adopted in the qualitative research promoted a greater proximity to the research scenario and to the participants; and the previous contextualization, followed by the approach, resulted in respect for their singularities. Since the research theme has been eminently investigated with quantitative methodologies, significant gaps in knowledge are left open for an important and complex problem in the field of Public Health.

In view of this situation, the various aspects stated by the adolescents immersed in the digital age express the perception of love associated with violence, as they do not distinguish them. The perceptions of jealousy, control and domination of the partner's social networks as a form of love were legitimized in the day-to-day of intimate relationships and expressed in several ways, such as keeping distance from the family and friends, due to the lack of privacy accepted by one or both partners and through coercion to consent access to the partner's cell phone. Failure to accept these conditions is perceived as a form of cheating.

The presence of violence in intimate relationships among school adolescents manifests itself in a plural way: verbal and psychological violence being the predominant ones in the reports. Technology through the digital social networks was determinant for violence in intimacy among adolescents, denoting new forms of control and coercion. In view of this, this paper highlights the scarcity of research studies on digital platforms as elements and factors of exposure that influence the occurrence of intimate partner violence among the adolescents.

The emphasis on a critical health education model, with promotion of health and prevention of violence, the work of health teams in the schools, as well as partnerships with the civil society, are consistent with the perspective of combining levels of interventions, capable of empowering individuals to transform vulnerability factors that affect this population.

The three principles adopted from the Paradigm of Complexity presented some possibilities to overcome the simplifying and reductionist views, still very much in effect, about the phenomenon under study and justified the creation of an integrated perspective on the theme. This expansion can result, in addition to greater clarity about the elements that make up the phenomenon of violence in its interdependence and interconnectivity, in the inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary development of coping strategies in an articulated and contextualized way.

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NOTES

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