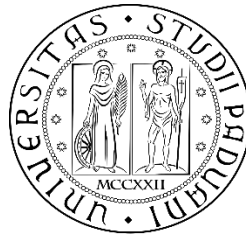# UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, LAW, AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Master's degree in Human Rights and Multi-level Governance

TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN ITALY

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PREVENTING ABUSIVE BEHAVIOURS IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

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ACRONYMS

CE Citizenship Education

CSE Comprehensive Sex Education

CVAWG Cyber violence against women and girls

DFV Technology facilitated forms of domestic and family violence

EAVA European Added Value Assessment

EIGE European Institute for Gender Equality

FRA European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

GREVIO Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

GBV Gender-based violence

IBSA Image-based sexual abuse

ICTs Information and Communication Technologies

IoT Internet of Things

IPCS Intimate Partner Cyberstalking

IPV Intimate partner violence

ML Media Literacy

NCII Non-consensual intimate image

NSES National Sexuality Education Standards

OTDV Online teen dating violence

PTSD Post-traumatic stress disorder

SEL Social and Emotional Learning

TAR Technology facilitated abuse in relationships

TFCC Technology facilitated coercive control

TFEU Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

TFGBV Technology-facilitated gender-based violence

TFIPV Technology-facilitated intimate partner violence

TVD Teen dating violence

TFSV Technology-facilitated sexual violence

ABSTRACT

This thesis develops around the phenomenon of technology-facilitated intimate partner violence, by offering a theoretical, conceptual, and contextual framework to better understand its prevalence, impact, causes, and consequences, with a specific focus on Italy. Technology-facilitated intimate partner violence (TFIPV) is a specific form of intimate partner violence perpetrated within the context of dating or an intimate relationship by current or former partners through the use of ICT means. Although TFIPV research has been increasing and developing in recent years, not much is known about the scope and magnitude of this issue, especially due to its nature that transcends temporal and geographical boundaries. After a general introduction and analysis of the phenomenon, firstly by placing it within the broader framework of online GBV, the second part of this research will focus specifically on the Italian national context. A literature review of some already existing Italian studies will be presented, to show the state-of-art of research on the issue. Finally, the third part will reflect on the role of education in preventing TFIPV, particularly by presenting some prevention programs, as well as a number of interviews with experts in the field, to stress the need to educate people, especially young people, on what constitutes a healthy and respectful relationship and what betrays a dysfunctional, problematic and toxic one.

Keywords: TFIPV, online GBV, Italy, OTDV, education, prevention programs, cyberstalking, controlling behaviours

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence is an old yet modern type of crime, which has been spreading in the latest years also in the digital environment due to the increase in the use of digital technologies, creating a new category of GBV, called online gender-based violence. The continuing changes in interpersonal relations due also to technological progress further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences are contributing to the spreading and diversification of GBV, becoming also more complex and more difficult to tackle. The increased domestic violence against women and girls witnessed during the pandemic and the periods of lockdowns is spilling into the online space, turning the lifeline of the internet into a hostile space, not only for women and girls but also for other vulnerable groups and minorities such LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, ethnic minorities etc., giving rise to new categories of online GBV, namely *"technology-facilitated intimate partner violence"* (TFIPV) and *"online teen dating violence"* (OTDV), when these abuses involve young people and teenagers.

GBV–whether physical or online, whether occurring within an intimate relationship or outside– is a threat to the basic human rights of people. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are among the factors that have contributed to amplifying and normalising GBV, enabling the perpetration of violence on a scale previously unknown. Research[1] to date shows that one in three women will have experienced a form of violence in her lifetime, and despite the relatively new and growing phenomenon of internet connectivity, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that one in ten women have experienced some form of cyber violence since the age of 15[2].

Over the years, many academic and policy publications have been focusing on the offline phenomenon of GBV, its root causes, consequences, and societal concerns. Yet, in more recent years, a growing corpus of academic literature and research has begun to emerge, addressing online GBV and more specific phenomena such as

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[1]World Health Organization, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council (2013), Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence
[2]European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014), Violence against women: an EU-wide survey – Main results. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-surveymain-results-report

TFIPV. Reference is often made to the socio-cultural contexts in which online GBV occurs, to its connection with its offline version, to the various forms and shapes it can take, and to the possible perpetrators and group targets. Online GBV, including TFIPV, is an emerging, complex, and evolving phenomenon, so even researchers and policymakers struggle to agree and understand what online GBV effectively is. This research aims to explore the phenomenon of TFIPV with a specific focus on the Italian national context, also by considering its prevalence and impact among young population groups (OTDV), in order to be able to understand its main features, and how it constitutes a worrying emerging phenomenon that needs to be taken seriously by adopting effective prevention strategies. This research also intends to investigate what affectivity/relationship education actually means nowadays and what these types of abusive behaviors mean on a societal level.

My interest in this topic arose thanks to the *"MenABLE"* (*Empower Man-power against gender-based violence online*[3]) project, for which I had the opportunity to collaborate and contribute during my curricular research internship at the "*European Schoolnet*" organization, based in Brussels. This educational project, co-funded by the European Commission, aims to prevent and fight against online GBV, with a particular focus on children and young people. From an educational point of view, young people need to be equipped for meaningful and open dialogue, peer-to-peer discussion, and inclusive participation to explore and reflect upon their own views and experiences on these topics, avoiding victimization, victim blaming, and stigmatization. Therefore, the ultimate aim of this research is to investigate the role of education and in particular of certain educational and cultural projects and initiatives in preventing and combating the phenomenon of TFIPV.

For the purpose of this study, the first chapter will attempt to analyze the phenomenon of TFIPV (including OTDV), firstly by placing it within the broader framework of online GBV. In trying to capture the full complexity of the phenomenon, the chapter will explore the definitions and academic discussions on the topic, its key features, its nature and prevalence, its main categories, risks, causes, and consequences. Secondly, the second chapter will give a more anecdotal

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[3]Available at http://www.eun.org/projects/detail?articleId=9861943

account of how this all translates into the Italian national context. Some statistics and data will be presented and analyzed in order to better understand the prevalence of TFIPV in Italy, also by considering the already existing Italian legislative and political framework targeting online GBV. Subsequently, a literature review of already existing studies and research on TFIPV within the Italian context will be provided. Finally, the final chapter will reflect on the role and importance of education in preventing and fighting against TFIPV, particularly by presenting some already existing prevention programs targeting young people, to investigate their actual effectiveness as prevention tools. This conclusive chapter also contains some interviews with experts in the field.

This research work allowed me to come to the following conclusions, namely that TFIPV prevention programs, especially school-based ones, although effective in the immediate-to-medium term in preventing abusive behaviours within intimate relationships, by increasing knowledge and awareness and changing attitudes and values towards violence, they turn out to be futile if they are not coupled with prior affectivity/relationship education within the family environment. During the primary socialization process, in fact, children tend to internalize their parents' values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours, including in the romantic, affective, and relational spheres. Therefore, for TFIPV prevention strategies to be effective, a solid and lasting collaboration and cooperation between the worlds of schools, families, institutions, the community, and the technology industry is strongly encouraged.

From a methodological point of view, a number of online databases such as ResearchGate, Google Scholar, Galileo Discovery, and PudMed have been consulted to identify relevant documents and academic papers. This corpus was complemented with relevant Recommendations, Declarations, Reports, Guidelines, and Factsheets from European institutions, bodie,s and organisations such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Institute for Gender Equality, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, European Schoolnet, other international organizations such as the GREVIO, the Human Rights Council, the Council of Europe, and some NGOs and Research Centres involved in these

issues, such as Amnesty International and Save the Children (IT), the Centre for International Governance Innovation and the Cyberbullying Research Centre. Resources and documents were also integrated from a landscape review of relevant policies, laws, data, statistics, and practices of the Italian national context, particularly, but of other countries as well.

CHAPTER 1 - TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AS A FORM OF ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

1.1 The phenomenon of online gender-based violence

The wall between the physical and virtual worlds has fallen. Due to progress and always more connected life, it has become a current habit to seek or transfer social relations in the virtual world[4]. Therefore, as Internet access increases across the globe, so too are incidents of online gender-based violence (GBV). As the World Wide Web Foundation underlines, a pandemic of online GBV has emerged during the Covid-19 and lockdown periods. The increased domestic violence against women witnessed during the crisis is spilling into the online space, turning the lifeline of the internet into a hostile space.[5] The use of ICTs for the facilitation of sexual violence and harassment is an increasingly significant and widespread phenomenon. Research to date shows that victim-survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) are tracked by their abusive partners who use technology to monitor their movements and communication[6]. A European Union survey conducted in 2014 found that 1 in 10 women in the EU report having experienced cyber-harassment since the age of 15 (including having received unwanted, offensive sexually explicit emails or SMS messages, or offensive, inappropriate advances on social networking sites[7]). The same research suggests that up to 90% of "*revenge porn*" victims are female and that this number is increasing.[8] Additionally, many journalists, human rights defenders, and politicians face daily death or rape threats just for speaking out about equality issues or for simply being a woman in a leadership role. These attacks, together with other violent forms of online GBV, create many safety concerns, involve great invasions of privacy, and can have significant financial costs for those targeted[9]. One of the most serious consequences

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[4]Grignoli D., (2022), Rethinking violence against women from real to online teen violence, Sociology, and Social Work Review, *International Society for projects in Education and Research,* vol. 6(2), pp. 20-36
[5]Brudvig, I., Chair, C., van der Wilk, A., (2020), Covid-19 and increasing domestic violence against women: The pandemic of online gender-based violence, World Wide Web Foundation
[6]Dunn, S., (2020), Supporting a Safer Internet Paper No. 1 Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An Overview, Centre for International Governance Innovation
[7] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. (2014), Violence Against Women: An EU-wide Survey, *Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union*, p. 104
[8]Ibidem
[9]Dunn, S., (2020)

of online GBV, is the silencing of women's and LGBTQ+ people's voices in digital spaces, by making it unsafe and unwelcoming for them to express themselves freely in the digital world[10]. As reported by the European Institute for Gender Equality, 51% of young women refrain from engaging in online debates after witnessing or directly being victims of online abuse. Particularly, women of colour and non-binary people are experiencing an increased risk of online GBV[11]. This first chapter focuses specifically on online GBV: at present, this is an area that is under-researched and mistakenly considered as a phenomenon wholly separate from "real world" violence[12]. But online GBV can (and should) be considered an extension of GBV in the more traditionally understood sense since it is caused by the same social norms and structural discriminations and inequality as "offline" societies[13]. Firstly, the chapter will compare several relevant definitions of online GBV, from an academic, international, and EU policy and law perspective, before exploring what is known about its specific nature, its risks, causes, and consequences. Subsequently, key elements of continuity between offline and online GBV will be presented, by identifying the different forms and categories of online GBV and the main persons at risk of being targeted with this form of violence. Finally, it will also try to investigate and explore the more specific phenomenon of "*technology-facilitated intimate partner violence"*, its different facets, and its prevalence, with a final specific focus on the abuse in teenage couples (the so-called "*online teen dating violence*").

1.1.1   Defining online GBV

...in the research literature and at the international level

As with offline GBV, a variety of online GBV definitions exist. From a content point of view, these definitions typically relate to the same key features that characterize offline GBV, but they also include some new and innovative aspects.

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[10]Ibidem

[11]World Wide Web Foundation, (2021), The impact of online gender-based violence on women in public life, available at https://webfoundation.org/2020/11/the-impact-of-online-gender-based-violence-on-women-in-public-life/

[12]EuroMed Rights, (2021), Spaces of violence and resistance: women's rights in the digital world the scenario in the MENA region, available at https://euromedrights.org/publication/spaces-of-violence-and-resistance/

[13]Ibidem

Furthermore, most of the common terminology comes from diverse theoretical perspectives and has different meanings in different countries and regions[14].

Firstly, as Ging and Siapera underline «there is a range of different terminologies used to describe this phenomenon, including gendered cyberhate, technology-facilitated violence, tech-related violence, online abuse, hate speech online, digital violence, networked harassment, cyberbullying, cyberharassment, online violence against women, and online misogyny.»[15] For instance, the Centre for International Governance Innovation uses the term *"technology-facilitated gender-based violence"* (TFGBV) to describe «a modern form of gender-based violence that utilizes digital technologies to cause harms. […] Like other forms of gender-based violence, TFGBV is rooted in discriminatory beliefs and institutions that reinforce sexist gender norms. It intersects with racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and other discriminatory systems in many of its manifestations.[16]» For other scholars, online GBV is a term that also includes «the use of telecommunications systems to control current or former intimate partners; stalking and harassment through telecommunications tools and on social media platforms; and exposing personal information (doxing) or abusive content (e.g., the non-consensual sharing of sexualized images or videos of women and girls) through content hosts and social media platforms.[17]»

From a more international perspective, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences, in its 2018 Report states that online GBV consists of «any act of gender-based violence against women that is committed, assisted or aggravated in part or fully by the use of ICT, such as mobile phones and smartphones, the Internet, social media platforms or email, against a woman because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately.[18]» Moreover, it underlines that «there are many new emerging forms of violence against women

[14]Kelmendi, K. (2013), Violence against Women: Methodological and Ethical Issues. *Psychology, 4,* pp.559-565

[15]Ging D., & Siapera E., (2018) Special issue on online misogyny, *Feminist Media Studies*, 18:4, pp. 515-524

[16]Dunn, S., (2020)

[17]Suzor, N., Dragiewicz, M., Harris, B., Gillett, R., Burgess, J., & Van Geelen, T., (2019) Human rights by design: The responsibilities of social media platforms to address gender-based violence online. *Policy and Internet*, *11*(1), pp. 84-103

[18]Human Rights Council, (2018), Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective

with ICT-related names, such as "doxing", "sextortion" and "trolling"[19]», and that «some forms of violence against women carry the prefix "online", such as online mobbing, online stalking, and online harassment. New forms of violence have also developed, such as the non-consensual distribution of intimate content ("revenge porn").[20]» Whereas, the Cybercrime Convention Committee of the Council of Europe uses the term *"cyberviolence"* to describe acts that involve «the use of computer systems to cause, facilitate, or threaten violence against individuals that results in, or is likely to result in [...] harm or suffering and may include the exploitation of the individual's circumstances, characteristics or vulnerabilities.[21]» Finally, the GREVIO, in its General Recommendation No.1, analyses the digital dimension of violence against women which «encompasses a wide range of acts online or through technology that are part of the continuum of violence that women and girls experience for reasons related to their gender, including in the domestic sphere, in that it is a legitimate and equally harmful manifestation of the gender-based violence experienced by women and girls offline.[22]» Precisely, GREVIO's understanding of the concept of violence against women in its digital dimension encompasses both "online aspects" —such as activities performed online and data/information available on the internet, including internet intermediaries on the surface web and the dark as well —and "technology-facilitated activities", which are carried out with the use of technology and communication equipment, including hardware and software, aimed at causing harmful consequences to women and girls.[23]

... In the EU law and policies

The concept of online GBV has also become a topic of discussion and analysis at the European level. For instance, the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men speaks about "cyberviolence against women", by defying it as «an act of gender-based violence perpetrated directly or indirectly through information and communication technologies that results in, or is likely to result in,

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[19]Ibidem
[20]Ibidem
[21]Council of Europe, Cybercrime portal, Cyberviolence webpage, available at
https://www.coe.int/en/web/cyberviolence
[22]GREVIO, (2021), General Recommendation No.1 on the digital dimension of violence against women
[23]Ibidem

physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts whether occurring in public or private life, or hindrances to the use of their fundamental rights and freedoms.[24]» It is a type of violence which «is not limited to but includes violations of privacy, stalking, harassment, gender-based hate speech, personal content sharing without consent, image-based sexual abuse, hacking, identity theft, and direct violence. [25] » Furthermore, in 2021 the European Parliament adopted the "European added value assessment" (EAVA)[26], which complements its own initiative legislative resolution on "Combating Gender-based Violence: Cyber Violence" (2020/2035(INL)[27], based on Article 225 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), requesting the Commission to submit proposals on combating GBV and cyberviolence and on adding GBV as a new area of crime listed in Article 83(1) of the TFEU, respectively. In the EAVA, the Parliament highlights that «gender-based cyber violence is an evolving issue, due to the changes in technology and behaviour which sum with the complexity of the problematic of GBV.[28]» Indeed, it underlines that «although there is a broad understanding of what gender-based cyber violence is and what it constitutes, there is no distinct definition, at either EU or national level.[29]»

Subsequently, the European Commission responded to Parliament's requests through a proposal for a directive on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which was adopted on 8 March 2022[30]. The proposed directive is based on six practical outcomes, which include uniform, consent-based definitions of rape, the criminalisation of specific forms of cyber-violence – namely, cyber-stalking, cyber-harassment, non-consensual sharing of

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[24]European Commission Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, (2020), Opinion on combatting online violence against women
[25]Ibidem
[26]European Parliament, (2021), Combating gender-based violence: Cyber violence, European added value assessment, available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU(2021)662621
[27]European Parliament resolution of 14 December 2021 with recommendations to the Commission on combating gender-based violence: cyberviolence (2020/2035(INL)), available at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021IP0489&qid=1660224302543
[28]European Parliament, (2021), Combating gender-based violence: Cyber violence, European added value assessment
[29]Ibidem
[30]European Commission, Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating violence against women and domestic violence, COM(2022) 105 final, 2022/0066 (COD), 8 March 2022, available at https://commission.europa.eu/select-language?destination=/node/9

intimate images and cyber incitement to hatred and violence – safer reporting procedures, more respect for the victim's privacy, more clarity around compensation and risk assessments for offenders. In this way, victims of cyber-violence would also be entitled to adequate support, including advice on how to seek legal help and how to remove online content[31].

In addition, other EU organizations, institutes, and projects have been focusing on and working on the phenomenon of online GBV by creating their own definitions of the phenomenon. For instance, online violence or cyber violence is identified by the CYBERSAFE project as «an umbrella term for all forms of violence or harassment that happen with the use of digital devices.[32]» Moreover, as many other sources affirm, this EU-funded project proves that «girls (and women) are more likely than boys (and men) to be victims of severe forms of online violence, in particular forms that have a sexual element, and the impact on their lives can be very traumatic.[33]» Whereas the intersectional aspect of online GBV is taken into consideration by the EIGE, which underlines that "cyber violence against women and girls" (CVAWG) also includes «a range of different forms of violence perpetrated by ICT means on the grounds of gender or a combination of gender and other factors (e.g. race, age, disability, sexuality, profession or personal beliefs).[34]» Specifically, according to the EIGE, «all acts of CVAWG can: start online and continue offline such as in the workplace, at school or at home; or start offline and continue online across different platforms such as social media, emails or instant messaging apps; be perpetrated by a person or group of people who are anonymous and/or unknown to the victim; or be perpetrated by a person or group of people who are known to the victim such as an (ex) intimate partner, a schoolmate or co-worker.[35]»

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[31]European Commission, (2022), Violence against women and domestic violence — 6 ways our new proposal will make a difference, available at https://europeancommission.medium.com/violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence-ways-new-eu-proposal-will-make-a-difference-786699dbb751
[32]Cybersafe, (2021), Guide for workshop facilitators, available at https://www.stoponlineviolence.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CYBERSAFE-Guide-for-workshop-facilitators_FINAL-with-design.pdf
[33]Ibidem
[34]EIGE, European Institute for Gender Equality, (2022), Cyber Violence against Women and Girls, Key Terms and Concepts, available at https://eige.europa.eu/publications/cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls-key-terms-and-concepts
[35]Ibidem

1.1.2 The nature of online GBV: from offline to online GBV

Nowadays, ICTs and new mass media – from emails, social media networks like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok to internet websites and blogs – are increasingly abused as an instrument for stigmatization, discrimination, exclusion, and incitement to hatred or for the perpetration of numerous forms of violence against certain individuals or groups. The boundaries between the physical world and the virtual world are increasingly blurred since we all live in a continuous interaction between online and offline reality. Hence, online GBV becomes a phenomenon that really transcends space-time boundaries, persists over time, becomes horizontal, viral, and with very strong impacts and consequences on victims[36]. However, cyberviolence is very often dismissed as an insignificant or minor virtual phenomenon, that is less dangerous and impactful to its victims, as harmful and violent digital acts do not always lead directly to visible physical harm. However, as pointed out in the previous paragraphs, online GBV is part of the continuum of offline GBV and represents yet another form of abuse and silencing embedded within existing gendered power structures. The violent acts and threats perpetrated through technology and taking place in the digital sphere are an integral part of the same violence that victims experience in the physical world, for reasons related to their gender[37]. As Henry and Powell highlight «ICTs are often celebrated as creating spaces for the construction of increasingly "flexible" or "fluid" identities that in turn suspend or subvert traditional gender dualisms, hierarchies, and power relations, yet at the same time, they may also create opportunities for the reconstruction and widespread dissemination of more traditional gender norms.[38]» Therefore, digital technologies do not merely facilitate or aggregate existing forms of GBV, discrimination, hatred, or misogyny, but also create new ones, and this is why the relationship between offline and online is often not straightforward[39]. While trolling, hate speech, sextortion, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, the manipulation of photos, cyberstalking, doxing, and hacking, may occur

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[36]Grignoli, D., Barba D., & D'Ambrosio M., (2022)
[37]EIGE, European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022, Cyber Violence against Women and Girls Key Terms and Concepts
[38]Henry, N., & Powell, A., (2015), Embodied Harms: Gender, Shame, and Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence. *Violence Against Women*, *21*(6), pp.758–779
[39]Ging D., & Siapera E., (2018)

exclusively online, they may also occur in connection with offline events, and they almost always have consequences or repercussions that are experienced both on- and offline[40]. For instance, the 2017 Amnesty International poll found that 41% of women who had experienced online abuse or harassment reported that, on at least one occasion, these experiences made them feel worried about their physical safety[41]. Indeed, between one-fifth and one-quarter of women who had experienced online abuse or harassment confessed it had included threats of physical or sexual assault[42]. Nevertheless, it is important to note that cyberviolence against males and boys, including online (sexual) harassment and cyberbullying, "trolling" "flaming" and the sharing of intimate images without consent, is an equally significant and growing problem that should not be neglected or denied.

As Henry and Powell highlight, the issue of online GBV is often framed as «an age-specific issue of vulnerability, linked to a moral panic over youth sexuality, namely, that young people, should be protected from online sexual predators and cyberbullies, and from themselves.[43]» However, «such conceptualizations fail to account for the newly emerging patterns of Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence (TFSV) and tend to divert attention from the gendered nature of these harms.[44]» Digital harms must be taken seriously as distinct and specific harms, especially when directly related to physical violence. New and appropriate legal frameworks or other remedies considering the nature, extent, and prevalence of these digital harms need to be further theorized, in order to take concrete action and protect victims[45]. There is a need for more intersectional work and approach, that considers how online GBV intersects with other forms of abuse (offline) such as racism, homophobia, classism, and ableism.

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[40]Ibidem

[41]Amnesty International, Amnesty reveals alarming impact of online abuse against women, November 20, 2017, available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2017/11/amnesty-reveals-alarming-impact-of-online-abuse-against-women/

[42]Ibidem

[43]Henry, N., & Powell, A. (2015)

[44]Ibidem

[45]Ibidem

1.2 Forms of online GBV: four different categories

Many definitions of online GBV presented in the previous paragraphs already list or provide some examples of different types of online GBV. Given the huge variety of typologies and subcategories in which the phenomenon can be declined, a similar approach to the Study on Cyberviolence conducted by the Cybercrime Convention Committee of the Council of Europe[46] has been taken to build a possible "online GBV classification model". Based on this Study, four main categories of online GBV are identified, namely: cyber harassment, image-based sexual abuse or non-consensual intimate image (NCII), ICT-related violations of privacy, and ICT-related hate crimes or cyberhate. Each of these categories contains and encompasses other more specific phenomena and subcategories, and some of them may obviously overlap or are almost synonymous and interchangeable. Besides, it is relevant to highlight that, as online GBV is an evolving issue, its categories and subcategories may also change in the course of time, mainly due to the continuing and rapid changes in technology, and new forms may emerge.

Cyber harassment

Cyber harassment is one of the broadest forms of online GBV. It can include unwanted sexually explicit emails, text (or online) messages; inappropriate or offensive advances on social networking websites or internet chat rooms; threats of physical and/or sexual violence by email, text (or online) messages; hate speech, meaning language that denigrates, insults, threatens or targets an individual based on his/her gender identity and other traits (such as sexual orientation or disability)[47]. According to the Cybercrime Convention Committee, cyber harassment «involves a persistent and repeated course of conduct targeted at a specific person that is designed to and that causes severe emotional distress and often the fear of physical harm.[48]». Harassers typically terrorize their victims by threatening violence. Cyber harassment can involve a brief incident, such as a single targeted racist,

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[46]Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY), (2018), Working Group on cyberbullying and other forms of online violence, especially against women and children (Council of Europe), Mapping study on cyberviolence with recommendations adopted by the T-CY on 9 July 2018, available at https://www.coe.int/en/web/cyberviolence/home/-/asset_publisher/ro0bVQCWKTCt/content/t-cy-mapping-study-on-cyberviolence-recommendations?inheritRedirect=false
[47]EIGE, European Institute for Gender Equality, (2017), Cyber violence against women and girls
[48]Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY), (2018)

homophobic, misogynist, or sexist comment or message, or a long-term organized attack[49].

One specific form of cyber harassment is online sexual harassment, which comprises «any form of online unwanted verbal or nonverbal conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular by creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.[50]» Online sexual harassment may consist of either virtual or face-to-face unwanted or unrequired interactions in public forums or chat rooms or through private communications via mobile phones, laptops, e-mail, social media, applications, or Internet sites using either verbal comments or graphic images or videos[51]. Online sexual harassment comprises also online sexual coercion and *"sextortion"*. While online sexual coercion entails the use of various ICT means −such as bribes, frightening emails, and viruses, − to elicit sexual cooperation or to achieve some sexual gains, by putting some kind of pressure on a victim[52], online sexual extortion (also known as "sextortion"), is «the act of using the threat of publishing sexual content (images, videos, deepfakes, sexual rumours) to menace, coerce or blackmail someone, either for more sexual content or for money, sometimes both.[53]» It typically occurs when an individual has, or claims to have, a sexual image or video of another person and uses it to coerce that person into doing something they do not want to do, such as sending additional sexual images, engaging in sexual activity or in human trafficking, receiving money or the continuation of a romantic relationship[54]. In fact, perpetrators are typically ex-partners who obtain images or videos during a prior relationship and aim to publicly shame and humiliate the victim, often in retaliation for ending a relationship[55]. The coercion may involve the threat to hurt the victim's family or friends if sexual activity is not undertaken, recorded or transmitted to the perpetrator[56]. These two

[49]Dunn, S., (2020)
[50]Human Rights Council, (2018), Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective
[51]Barak, A., (2005), Sexual harassment on the internet. *Social Science Computer Review,* 23, pp.77–92
[52]Ibidem
[53]GREVIO, (2021), General Recommendation No.1 on the digital dimension of violence against women
[54]Dunn, S., (2020)
[55]EIGE, European Institute for Gender Equality, (2022), Cyber Violence against Women and Girls Key Terms and Concepts
[56]Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY), (2018)

categories of cyber harassment clearly overlap with another category of online GBV, namely image-based sexual abuse, since sextortion, for instance, often entails the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, even if that distribution is only between the offender and the victim, rather than broad dissemination[57].

Because cyber harassment, including online sexual harassment, particularly targets women and girls, some authors have also used expressions such as "gender harassment" or "cyber harassment against women and girls". In fact, these unwelcome verbal or visual comments and remarks insult women and girls just because of their gender or because of a combination of gender and other factors (e.g. race, age, disability, profession, personal beliefs, or sexual orientation). To provide some evidence, the FRA 2014 survey shows that one in 10 women (11%) has faced at least one of the two forms of cyber harassment considered (namely, "unwanted sexually explicit emails or SMS messages" and "inappropriate advances on social networking websites"), since the age of 15, and one in 20 (5%) in the 12 months before the survey[58]. In addition, in November 2017, the findings of the Ipsos MORI online poll[59] commissioned by Amnesty International about women's experiences of abuse and harassment on social media platforms show that nearly a quarter (23%) of the women surveyed across eight countries said they had experienced online abuse or harassment at least once, including 21% of women polled in the UK and 1/3 (33%) of women polled in the US. In both countries, 59% of women who experienced abuse or harassment said the perpetrators were complete strangers[60].

Finally, cyber harassment also includes another quite widespread form of online GBV, which is "*cyberbullying*". Cyberbullying is bullying that is carried out repeatedly by ICT means or that takes place in digital settings, typically with the purpose of isolating, attacking or mocking a minor or group of minors. It may

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[57]Ibidem

[58]FRA, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, (2014), Violence against women: An EU-wide survey, Main results, available at http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report

[59]Available at https://medium.com/amnesty-insights/unsocial-media-the-real-toll-of-online-abuse-against-women-37134ddab3f4

[60]Amnesty International, (2018), Toxic Twitter, a toxic place for women, available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-3-2/

include any form of pressure, aggression, harassment, blackmail, insult, denigration, defamation, identity theft or illicit acquisition, treatment, online flaming, "outing", phishing, or dissemination of personal data[61]. Many different definitions of cyberbullying have been provided by different authors, which can be summarized broadly as «any behaviour performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicate hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others.[62]» However, children and young people are not the only victims of cyberbullying; the term includes even adults, particularly journalists. A recent Council of Europe study on "journalists under pressure[63]" shows that journalists in more than half of the 47 Member States have experienced cyberbullying during the last three years. Cyberbullying thus also impacts the freedom of speech and expression[64].

The scientific literature identifies four criteria that characterize cyberbullying and distinguish it from other harmless forms of online behaviour, such as cyber teasing or cyber arguing[65]. These are the following:

- the intent of the perpetrator to hurt the victim in some way, for instance, by causing him or her physical or psychological harm, intentional loss of reputation in society and/or at work, and/or destroy his/her family relations;
- the imbalance in power: typically, the perpetrator is physically and/or mentally stronger than the victim (either in actual size, age, physical strength, or social esteem);
- a recurrent behaviour and/or an ongoing process in which the victim is repeatedly abused;
- the non-consensual distribution of intimate images: perpetrators very often engage in the production and exchange of sexually explicit images, which

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[61]EIGE, European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022, Cyber Violence against Women and Girls Key Terms and Concepts
[62]Tokunaga R. S., (2010), Following you home from school: A critical review and synthesis of research on cyberbullying victimization. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(3), 278
[63]Clark, M., Grech, A., (2017), Journalists under Pressure. Unwarranted interference, fear and self-censorship in Europe, *Council of Europe Publishing*, Strasbourg, available at https://rm.coe.int/168070ad5d.
[64]Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY), (2018)
[65]Ibidem

can then be used for criminal activities such as online stalking or cyberstalking, sextortion, "revenge porn", and grooming[66].

To conclude, cyberbullying is a quite broad and comprehensive term that is very often used to embrace many other online phenomena such as trolling, the posting of misogynistic, sexist, denigrating messages/comments, identity theft or falsification, therefore, it may overlap with other categories or subcategories of online GBV, such as NCII or violations of privacy. There is not an obvious and neat distinction between these categories and in the academic literature there is no common agreement on when to use which terms. Moreover, it is worth remarking that not all forms of cyberbullying necessarily constitute a criminal offense, therefore, it is fundamental to distinguish between the different types of cyberbullying and the different roles individuals play in each act or context of cyberbullying[67].

Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)/non-consensual intimate image (NCII)
The second category of online GBV is "*image-based sexual abuse*" (IBSA), also referred to as *"non-consensual intimate image"* (NCII). The concept of IBSA was developed by UK scholars Claire McGlynn and Erika Rackley, who define it as «private sexual images that have been created and/or distributed without the consent of the person featured in them, as well as the threats to create and distribute these images.[68]» Very often, perpetrators manage to obtain sexually explicit images or videos during a relationship (or a previous intimate relationship), or hack or steal them from the victim's computer, social media accounts, or phone, to share them online[69]. Similarly, NCII, which is often problematically described as *"revenge porn"*, occurs when a person's sexual, private, and/or manipulated images are shared through ICT means (or are threatened to be shared through ICT means), with a wider than intended audience without the subject's consent[70]. Common motivations include sexualizing the victim, inflicting harm on the victim, seeking

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[66]Ibidem
[67]Ibidem
[68]McGlynn, C., and Rackley E., (2017), Image-Based Sexual Abuse, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies,* 37 (3), pp. 534–61
[69]GREVIO, (2021),
[70]Dunn, S., (2020)

revenge, seeking sexual gratification or monetary gain, or negatively affecting his/her life[71]. While partners or ex-partners are commonly the ones who take or distribute sexual images/videos without the victim's consent, perpetrators have also included a wide range of people, including family members, colleagues, friends, and strangers[72]. According to the EIGE, up to 90% of non-consensual pornography victims are women[73]. Additionally, of the women polled by IPSOS Mori for Amnesty International who experienced abuse or harassment on social media platforms, 10% in the USA and 8% in the UK said that their intimate images had been posted online without their consent[74].

Usually, the term "*sexting*" – which means the sending of private or sexual images via mobile phones, computers, online video chat (such as Skype), pictures/video sharing sites, and social media (such as Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram)[75] – is often used in relation to online sexual violence. The act of sending intimate pictures between two (young) people who know and trust each other is not illegal per se. As the EU project CYBERSAFE explains, adolescents experiment with relationships, love, and sex, both offline and online. On social media platforms, dating apps, and websites they make friends, flirt, date, and sometimes even exchange sexual or intimate messages[76]. Therefore, «it is important to recognize that this sexual exploration is usually part of the normal social, emotional and sexual development of young people and that online contact can contribute to their development in a positive way[77]». However, creating, sharing, sending, or posting sexually explicit images via the internet, can be very risky and problematic, and young people need to be made aware of the risks and consequences these practices may involve. Many cases of online GBV start with the innocent sharing of a private or intimate image/video, but they progressively escalate into very serious criminal offences,

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[71]EIGE, European Institute for Gender Equality, (2022), Cyber Violence against Women and Girls Key Terms and Concepts
[72]Dunn, S., (2020)
[73]EIGE, (2017), Cyber Violence is a growing threat, especially for women and girls. EIGE, available at https://eige.europa.eu/news/cyber-violence-growing-threat-especially-women-and-girls
[74]Amnesty International, 2018, Toxic Twitter, a toxic place for women, available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-3-2/
[75]Henry N, Powell A., (2015)
[76]Cybersafe, (2021), Guide for workshop facilitators
[77]Ibidem

such as NCII[78]. It is precisely the non-consensual aspect of these practices that makes them distinct from sexually explicit content online more broadly.

Therefore, IBSA and NCII are a category of online GBV that constitutes a real crime and violation, regulated and punished in several countries through criminal laws and procedures. For instance, in 2016, France adopted the Digital Republic Law[79], which entails a harsher sanctioning of those found guilty of revenge porn. Under the new legislation, perpetrators face a two-year prison sentence or a € 60 000 fine[80]. England and Wales have adopted several Acts in this respect too, such as the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 [81] which prohibits sharing or threatening to share, private sexual images of someone else without their consent, the Protection of Children Act 1978[82] and the Criminal Justice Act of 1988[83] which specifically address and condemn child pornography, the Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019 [84] which prohibits someone from operating equipment beneath the clothing of someone else to see or record genitals, buttocks, or underwear covering those areas. This phenomenon has been increasingly referred to as "*upskirting*" or "*downblousing*". In many countries, in fact, this practice is becoming an increasing trend: some voyeurs try to take pictures up a woman's skirt or down her shirt without her being aware of it. These images may be kept for personal use or shared on pornographic websites or other websites, to post publicly for other "creepers" to view and comment on.[85] These photos are also known as "*creepshots*".

Nowadays, new forms of NCII are emerging, thanks to rapid transformations and advances in technology. Indeed, new media technology allows for the manipulation of images and videos, making it appear as though people are engaging in sexual

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[78]Ibidem

[79]Available at https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/16380

[80]Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-), (2018)

[81]Available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/2/contents/enacted

[82] Available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1978/37

[83] Available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/33/contents

[84]Available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/2/contents/enacted

More broadly speaking, "*digital voyeurism*" is an umbrella term used to describe different forms of NCII abuse, which range from using hidden cameras to secretly take photos or videos of victims without their knowledge, downblousing, upskirting in public or private places, to sending unsolicited sexual images by using dating apps, message apps or texts, or by using Airdrop or Bluetooth, such as cyber flashing (EIGE, European Institute for Gender Equality, (2022), Cyber Violence against Women and Girls Key Terms and Concepts)

[85]Dunn, S., (2020)

activity, they never engaged in. This kind of media, also called *"manipulated"* or *"synthetic"* audio or visual sexual media, has been produced using artificial intelligence techniques for many reasons, including for sexual entertainment and profit, but they have also been used to harass women and purposely humiliate them or inflict harm and suffering[86]. A classic example of synthetic media is the so-called phenomenon of *"deepfakes"*. The GREVIO, in its General Recommendations No.1 on the digital dimension of violence against women defines them as «videos in which one face has been (seamlessly) replaced by another face, using algorithms and deep learning, and sound is manipulated, so as to create the illusion that another person's actions are being staged.[87]». Women and girls are usually the main victims of deepfakes, which mostly depict intimate pictures or sexual activities and are shared on platforms/adult entertainment websites, without consent for their creation and publication[88]. Deep-fake sex videos really exercise dominion and power over people's sexuality, exhibiting it to others without their consent[89].

ICT-related violations of privacy

The third category of online GBV comprises all those criminal offensive practices that involve some form of violation of privacy. Similarly to what has been explained above in reference to NCII, in most cases, these types of practices constitute a very serious crime and violation of fundamental rights (e.g right to privacy, right to personal liberty and integrity etc.,) in many countries around the world. ICT-related violations of privacy may include computer or mobile intrusions to obtain, steal, reveal or manipulate intimate data, the researching and broadcasting of personal data *("doxing")*, the theft of personal identity, personalisation, or acts such as *"cyberstalking"*[90]. Online stalking, also called cyberstalking is defined by UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, its causes, and consequences as «the repeated harassment of individuals, perpetrated by means of mobile phones or messaging applications, in the form of crank calls or private conversations on online

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[86]Ibidem
[87]GREVIO, (2021)
[88] EIGE, European Institute for Gender Equality, (2022), Cyber Violence against Women and Girls Key Terms and Concepts
[89]Dunn, S., (2020)
[90] Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY), (2018)

applications (such as WhatsApp) or in online chat groups.[91]». As Nicola Henry and Anastasia Powell underline in many of their research works, cyberstalking is basically an extension of offline forms of stalking, but in an electronic format. Indeed, they highlight that this practice, like conventional stalking, typically involves behaviours that are unwanted, repetitive, intrusive, threatening, and harassing[92]. Usually, these behaviours are repeated over time, undermining the victim's personal freedom and sense of safety and they cause a devastating state of discomfort, fear, anxiety, and alarm.

Thanks to the anonymity, ease, and efficiency of the Internet, online stalking can occur in a multitude of ways, like one user repeatedly sending unwanted, hostile, or threatening e-mails/instant messages to their victims. It can also involve the online impersonation of the victims, by stealing their accounts or login credentials, or the surveillance of a victim's location through a variety of technologies[93]. Similarly to what occurs with NCII, the development of new and sophisticated technologies, such as applications and software, has facilitated cyberstalking tactics. The most diffused and well-known examples are the so-called "*spyware*" or "*stalkerware*"; these are software, usually in the form of an app, downloaded onto a person's phone, computer, or any other personal digital device and used to track the activities of that device[94]. Usually, spyware is considered stalkerware in the context of domestic violence. Once stalkerware is installed on a digital device, data is gathered from it and sent to the person who installed it. This data could include very private, personal or sensitive information such as a person's GPS location, copies of their text messages or photos, or copies of everything they have typed into their device, including passwords, account credentials, etc[95]. "*Impersonation*", instead, occurs when abusers create fake online accounts of people they are impersonating to spread false information about them and damage their reputation. They may also attempt to ruin their personal and professional relationships or destroy their job prospects,

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[91]Human Rights Council, (2018),
[92]Henry, N., & Powell, A. (2018). Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence: A Literature Review of Empirical Research. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 19(2), pp. 195–208
[93]Marcum, C., D., Higgins, G., E., Ricketts, M., L., Juveniles and Cyber Stalking in the United States: An Analysis of Theoretical Predictors of Patterns of Online Perpetration. I*nternational Journal of Cyber Criminology*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 48
[94]GREVIO, (2021)
[95]Dunn, S., (2020)

by creating fake websites impersonating the victim or by sending fake messages from the victim's accounts or fake accounts[96]. In some other cases, perpetrators have used impersonation to trick women and girls into dangerous situations, such as human trafficking, forced prostitution, fake marriage, or fake school or work opportunities.[97] In order to tackle this abusive and increasing practice, as in the case of NCII, several countries have already adopted (cyber) stalking legislation. For instance, the specific offense of stalking was included in the German Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch), section 238 (Stalking)[98]. The provision in fact, expressively includes conduct by means of telecommunications (para. 1 no. 2) or by using personal data of a person (para. 1 no. 3). The same is true for section 176 (Child abuse) which also expressly covers conduct by means of telecommunications (para. 4 no. 3 and 4)[99]. Worth mentioning is also Article 172 ter of the Spanish Penal Code[100], which specifically punishes with a prison sentence of three months to two years or a fine of six to twenty-four months, perpetrators of stalking and cyberstalking, and Section 360a of the Slovakian Criminal Code[101], which prohibits and punishes stalking, even when it is perpetrated or facilitated by the use of electronic communication services.

ICT-related hate crime/cybercrime

The last category of online GBV comprises all ICT-related hate crimes and cyberhate. In the academic literature, cyberhate is generally defined as any digital act of «violence, hostility, and intimidation, directed towards people because of their identity or 'perceived' difference.[102]». In a broader sense, cybercrime is viewed as «any use of electronic communications technology to spread anti-Semitic, racist, bigoted, extremist or terrorist messages or information.[103]». In the

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[96]Ibidem
[97]Ibidem
[98]Available at http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/stgb/index.html
[99]Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY), (2018)
[100]Available at
https://www.mjusticia.gob.es/es/AreaTematica/DocumentacionPublicaciones/Documents/Criminal_Code_20 16.pdf
[101]Available at https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=&p_isn=72646&p_classification=01.04
[102]KhosraviNik, M. & Esposito, E., (2018), Online hate, digital discourse and critique: Exploring digitally mediated discursive practices of gender-based hostility. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, *14*(1), pp. 45-68
[103]Ibidem

popular discourse, the most common term used to describe and encompass all the different forms of ICT-related hate crimes is "online hate speech".

As far as its offline counterpart is concerned, no universally accepted definition of hate speech seems to exist presently. Rather, hate speech presents itself as a broad umbrella term, which covers many different types of hateful and harmful expressions, typically targeted at groups or classes of persons with certain characteristics[104]. Therefore, all forms of expression, which share, encourage, promote, or justify racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or every other form of hatred based on intolerance including aggressive nationalism, ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility toward minorities, migrants, or persons with disabilities, constitute hate speech[105]. Hate speech dehumanizes and encourages violence or hatred toward a person or a group of people based on an identifying feature. For this reason, intersecting identity factors can increase the likelihood that a person will be targeted by hate speech[106]. Hate language is characterized by its multi-offensiveness and risk of escalation since «the hater does not merely verbally attack the victim but the social category to which he or she belongs, instigating other users to do the same.[107]». The risk of escalation, on the other hand, consists of the social acceptance of discrimination or normalization of hate and violence, which also allows an increase in hate crimes[108].

Hate speech is a quite controversial topic, since it very often conflicts with other fundamental rights, such as the right to freedom of expression. Therefore, hate speech inevitably brings along questions about how absolute freedom of expression is, and how to achieve a balance between the right to freely express your opinion

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[104]Brown, A., (2017), What is Hate Speech? Part 2: Family Resemblances. *Law and Philosophy*, 36(5), 561-613.
Hate speech has been understood by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers as comprising "all types of expression that incite, promote, spread or justify violence, hatred or discrimination against a person or group of persons, or that denigrates them, by reason of their real or attributed personal characteristics or status such as race, colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation (Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on combating hate speech, adopted on 20 May 2022 at the 132nd Session of the Committee of Ministers)
[105]European Parliament, (2021), Combating gender-based violence: Cyber violence
[106]Dunn, S., (2020)
[107]Grignoli, D., Barba D., & D'Ambrosio M., (2022), Rethinking Violence against Women from Real to Online Teen violence. *Sociology and Social Work Review,* 6(2), 20-36
[108]Ibidem

and thoughts and the right to not be discriminated against[109]. But hate speech constitutes a specific type of expression, which might undermine safety, health, morals or reputation, and more generally speaking the human rights of others.

To date, hate speech has proliferated in the digital world, with white-supremacist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-LGBTQ+, and women-hating or misogynistic groups finding spaces to gather and promote their discriminatory belief[110]. Many hate speech campaigns are in fact efficiently organised, promoted, or advertised online, on social media, websites, gaming platforms and other channels. Social media platforms have been frequently criticized for profiting from these hate speech campaigns, in some cases, driving traffic to these through their algorithms[111]. The online environment is making it easier for people to express hate speech. Online hate groups, in fact, normally know very well how to use technology in their favour, anticipating and exceeding the authorities or the wider public. In Italy for instance, according to a study conducted by Amnesty International (Italia) [112], the repercussions of the Covid-19 Pandemic on economic, social, and cultural rights have generated a sort of "pandemic intolerance": 1 in 10 of the analysed comments were offensive, discriminatory and/or hate speech, while hate speech alone has increased by 40% in the country.

Hawdon et. al define online hate speech as a form of cyberviolence, which uses ICT to «advocate violence against, separation from, defamation of, deception about or hostility towards others.[113]» Online hate speech, because of its dissemination through computers, smartphones, and other digital devices may be expressed in the form of text, music, online radio broadcasts, or visual images or videos[114]. This harmful or threatening content usually targets a victim or a collective group simultaneously and may even involve multiple perpetrators, also by inducing other

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[109]Cammaerts, B., (2009), Radical pluralism and free speech in online public spaces: The case of North Belgian extreme right discourses. *International journal of cultural studies*, 12 (6), 555-575

[110]Ibidem

[111]Ibidem

[112]Available at https://www.amnesty.it/barometro-dellodio-intolleranza-pandemica/

[113]Hawdon J., Oksanen A., & Räsänen P., (2015), Online extremism and online hate: Exposure among adolescents and young adults in four nations. *Nordicom-Information*, 37(3-4), pp. 29-37

[114]Keipi, T., Näsi, M., Oksanen, A., & Räsänen, P., (2017), Online hate and harmful content: Cross-national perspectives, *Routledge,* London (UK)

users, directly or indirectly, to act against the target victim or groups[115]. Indeed, it is very hard to track hate speech material down, as it moves and is replicated across many different websites and platforms, and content can always be downloaded, shared, screenshotted, copied or even recorded. Cyberhate reinforces systemic inequalities and makes it difficult for certain groups or minorities to engage online.

Since women, girls, transgender and gender-non-conforming people have frequently been the target of online hate speech, mainly because of a combination of their identity factors or, more specifically, their gender, in the scientific literature some authors have employed terms like "gendered cyberhate" or "online gender-based hate speech[116]". Social media platforms and online chat fora such as 4chan and 8chan have been known to host groups that promote hatred against women and girls, such as the so-called *"incels"* (involuntary celibate). In several documented cases, hateful online rhetoric spread by the members of these groups has led to violence against women and girls in the physical world[117]. According to Nussbaum, much of the gender-based hate speech online is committed instrumentally to satisfy the needs of the hater. This objectification is frequently contingent on the reduction and debasement of the victim to bodily parts and physical appearance[118].

A typical and widespread form that cyberhate can take is *"flaming",* which is basically vitriolic content, denoted by explicit language and misogyny, including offensive or hostile messages, and insults, posted on social networks, forums or other platforms, normally to elicit a response from other online users[119]. Another broad general term that has frequently been used in the academic literature to describe the phenomenon of online hate speech, is "*e-bile*". The Australian author

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[115]Thiesmeyer, L., (1999), Racism on the Web: Its rhetoric and marketing. Ethics and Information Technology, 1(2); pp. 117-125.

[116]For instance, online gender-based hate speech is defined by the EIGE as «content posted and shared through ICT means that: a) is hateful towards women and/or girls because of their gender, or because of a combination of gender and other factors (e.g. race, age, disability, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, religion or profession); and/or b) spreads, incites, promotes or justifies hatred based on gender, or because of a combination of gender and other factors». It can also involve posting and sharing, through digital means, violent content that consists of portraying women and girls as sexual objects or targets of violent acts. This content can be sent privately or publicly and is often targeted at women in public-facing or leadership roles
(EIGE, European Institute for Gender Equality, (2022), Cyber Violence against Women and Girls Key Terms and Concepts)

[117]Ibidem

[118]Nussbaum, M. C., (2010), Objectification and Internet misogyny. The offensive Internet: Speech, privacy, and reputation, Cambridge, MA: *Harvard University Press,* pp. 68-90

[119]European Parliament, (2021), Combating gender-based violence: Cyber violence

and academic expert on misogyny, gender, and technology-facilitated violence, Emma A. Jane analyses the phenomenon of e-bile in many of her studies. She defines it as: «any text or speech act which relies on technology for communication and/or publication, and is perceived by a sender, receiver, or outside observer as involving hostility.[120]» It can occur in a wide range of contexts ranging from individual exchanges via private SMS or e-mail accounts, to wide publication via websites and social media platforms. It may also involve multiple interlocutors who may post anonymously, quasi-anonymously, rending authors identifiable[121]. E-bile may circulate in the form of written texts, images, and/or sounds, and may be directed to one specific person, or many. Moreover, according to the author, it should include «practices such as trolling, RIP trolling, cyberbullying, cyberviolence, cyberstalking, cyberhate, *"happy slapping*[122]", and certain types of hacking, as well as online speech acts evincing misogyny, homophobia, racism, religious prejudice, and cultural intolerance.[123]»

"Trolling" is another recurrent catch-all term used to describe everything from the posting of offensive, provocative, or inflammatory messages, images, videos, insults, sick jokes, and the creation of hashtags for the purpose of annoying, provoking or inciting violence toward victims, to threats of violence, rape and murder[124]. "*Trolls*" are usually anonymous, and they use false accounts or profiles to generate hate speech. According to the authors KhosraviNik and Esposito, «what seems to characterize trolling is the deliberate act of luring others into useless circular discussion, with the result of interfering with the positive and useful exchange of ideas in a given environment (such as an online forum), shifting the dialogue into a confusing, unsuccessful and unproductive exchange.[125]» And this is often achieved by posting senseless, confusing, foolish, and off-topic comments with the exclusive aim of provoking or fuelling an angry or upsetting response from

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[120]Jane M. A., (2012), "Your a Ugly, Whorish, Slut", *Feminist Media Studies,* 14:4, pp. 531-546.
[121]Ibidem
[122]The images or videos of a sexual assault are recorded and sometimes disseminated, resulting in an additional form of sexual violence against the victim-survivor. The phenomenon of filmed assault is commonly defined in the academic literature with the term "*happy slapping*". (Dunn, S., (2020))
[123]Jane M. A., (2012),
[124]KhosraviNik, M. & Esposito, E., (2018), Online hate, digital discourse and critique: Exploring digitally mediated discursive practices of gender-based hostility. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, *14*(1), pp. 45-68
[125]Ibidem

the target, enjoying the resulting hostility and conflict[126]. Other authors believe that trolling is a specific form of gendered abuse and symbolic violence since it is performed mainly in relation to or against women and girls. Therefore, they identify "*gender trolling*" as a distinct form of trolling, which more generally attempts to disrupt or hijack normal online interactions and communication practices, and to oust women and girls from participation in public forums of debate[127]. Usually, gender trolling tends to be more vicious, virulent, aggressive, threatening, pervasive, and enduring than generic trolling, since it very often involves rape threats, death threats or other fantasies of sexual violence[128]. Gender trolls have a different motivation, which is very often driven by misogynistic, sexist, anti-feminist, or chauvinist thoughts and ideas.

1.3 Risks, causes and consequences

1.3.1 Why gender-based? The importance of intersectionality

The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, in its Glossary of Gender-related Terms, defines *"intersectionality"* as «a tool for analysis, advocacy and policy development that addresses multiple discriminations and helps understand how different sets of identities impact on access to rights and opportunities.[129]» Intersectional analysis starts from the premise that people live multiple, layered identities derived from social relations, history and the operation of structures of power[130]. Therefore, intersectionality is a useful analytical tool for studying, understanding, and responding to these multiple identities, also by identifying the various ways in which gender or gender identity intersects with other individual features. It also aims at revealing how these intersections expose the different types

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[126]Lumsden, K., & Morgan, H., (2016), Cyber-Trolling as Symbolic Violence: Deconstructing Gendered Abuse Online, *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Violence,* Chapter 9
[127]Mantilla K., (2015), Gendertrolling: How Misogyny Went Viral. Westport, *Connecticut: Praeger*
[128]Ibidem
[129]Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, Glossary of Gender-related Terms, compiled by Josie Christodoulou, August 2005 and updated by Anna Zobnina, August 2009 Available at http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/AdvocacyEducationTools/genderglossary_migs_aug2005.pdf
[130]European Insitute for Gender Equality, Intersectionality Webpage https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1263

of identities to unique experiences of discrimination, disadvantage, oppression or privilege, that occur because of this combination of identities[131].

As previously mentioned in the research, women and girls are frequently targets of specific acts of online GBV, particularly of TFIPV, precisely because of their gender identity, or because of a combination of it and other identities. Therefore, an intersectional approach and model of operation will be needed to fully understand and tackle the issue of online GBV. The ability to capture and understand the interconnection within different variables which could cause more discrimination and disadvantage to a specific individual due to their gender identity, race, ethnicity, social status, political belief, and others could be very useful and effective in future policy regarding the issue. Therefore, scholars and the academic world in general, as well as legislators and policymakers, should be trained to know about its existence and its importance, also to be able to apply it effectively in policies.[132]

1.3.2 *Identify the main targets and persons at risk*

As the extensive previous research shows, women and girls, are the most affected by online GBV. Based on the FRA EU-wide survey, one in 10 women has experienced cyber-harassment since the age of 15[133]. This included having received unwanted and/or offensive sexually explicit emails or SMS messages, or offensive and/or inappropriate advances on social network platforms. The risk is highest among young women aged 18-29 years[134]. Moreover, according to EIGE, women are 27 times more likely to be harassed online than men[135].

However, emerging research shows that even transgender, non-binary and gender-nonconforming people, as well as men and boys who fall outside patriarchal norms of masculinity, such as gay men, are victims of many forms of online GBV. The FRA in its 2012 study found that LGBTQ+ people were harassed and threatened

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[131]Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, Glossary of Gender-related Terms

[132]Allen, A., (2022), An Intersectional Lens on Online Gender Based Violence and the Digital Services Act, VerfBlog, 11/01/2022, available at https://verfassungsblog.de/dsa-intersectional/

[133]European Agency of Fundamental Rights, (2014), Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Main results report, available at https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report

[134]UN WOMAN, (2022), Facts and figures: Ending violence against women, available at https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures

[135]Amnesty International, 2023

online because of their gender expression and sexual orientation[136]. Moreover, they were more likely to have their intimate images distributed without their consent. Another research conducted by the Witness Media Lab in 2016, showed that transgender people were attacked in public and that these attacks were even filmed and published online along with transphobic commentary[137]. Whereas the Data & Society Research Institute's study found that lesbian, gay or bisexual American internet users were more likely to be victims of NCII[138].

In addition to sexuality and gender identity, there are many other intersecting inequality factors, such as race, skin colour, and disability that may expose people to higher levels of online harassment and abuse, compared to white, heterosexual, cisgender and/or able-bodied individuals[139]. Lisa Nakamura (2013) has reported widespread sexism, racism and homophobia within the online gaming community, where discriminatory comments often combined racist, homophobic and sexist expressions[140]. Furthermore, a 2017 US study by the Pew Research Centre on online harassment found that 59% of black internet users said they had experienced online harassment compared with 41% of white users and 48% of Hispanic users, and 38% of black users also said they had been called offensive names[141].

Secondly, persons in abusive intimate partner relationships, especially women and girls living in a context of domestic violence, are more likely to experience some form of online GBV, at the hands of their (ex) intimate partners[142]. This specific form of online GBV will be further analysed and discussed in the following paragraphs.

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[136]European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, (2013), EU LGBT survey: European Union lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survey: Results at a glance. Vienna, Austria: Publications Office of the European Union, available at https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2013/eu-lgbt-survey-european-union-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-survey-results

[137]Witness Media Lab, (2016), Capturing Hate: Eyewitness Videos Provide New Source of Data on Prevalence of Transphobic Violence, October, available at www.issuelab.org/resources/25865/25865.pdf

[138]Lenhart A., Ybarra M., Zickuhr K., and Price-Feeney M., (2016), Online Harassment, Digital Abuse, and Cyberstalking in America. *New York, NY: Data & Society Research Institute*.

[139]Dunn, S., (2020)

[140]Nakamura, L., (2013), "'It's a nigger in here! Kill the nigger!' User-generated media campaigns against racism, sexism, and homophobia in digital games.", *International Encyclopaedia of Media Studies,* vol. VI: Media Studies Futures, pp. 1–15.

[141]Available at https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/07/25/1-in-4-black-americans-have-faced-online-harassment-because-of-their-race-or-ethnicity/

[142]Dunn, S., (2020)

Thirdly, women and girls in leadership positions, such as politicians, human rights defenders, bloggers and journalists, experience significantly higher levels of violence and harassment online, particularly if they speak out about equality issues or about topics traditionally dominated by men or once again if they possess any other intersecting inequality factors[143]. In this respect, by examining abusive tweets aimed at members of Parliament (MPs) in the UK over a particular time period, Amnesty International made an unpleasant discovery. It found that Diane Abbott, the only Black female MP, had received nearly half of all abusive tweets aimed at women MPs [144]. Moreover, a report by the Association for Progressive Communications found that prominent women bloggers, journalists and leaders are regularly the targets of online violence and abuse, especially when they work or are involved in those fields where men are traditionally considered more experienced and expert, such as gaming, politics and technology[145]. Women in politics have also been particularly subjected to online abuse. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, in one of its studies, showed that social media platforms, including Twitter, have become the number one place in which online violence against women parliamentarians is perpetrated[146]. This attempt to silence and exclude their voices represents yet another big challenge to women's participation and engagement in politics[147].

Finally, another primary group of victims of online GBV, in particular with respect to online sexual violence, is represented by children. New technologies have in fact increased the accessibility to children by persons looking to sexually abuse and exploit them, also by making commercial gains from their sexual exploitation easier [148]. In this sense, ICTs have often fuelled child pornography and child prostitution, also by facilitating the sharing and spreading of images and videos of sexual abuse, thus further reinforcing the long-lasting hurtful impact and trauma[149]. There are numerous reports that underline the scale of online sexual violence against children. For instance, the 2016 Annual Report of the UK Internet Watch

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[143]Ibidem
[144]Amnesty International, (2018)
[145]Availalble at https://www.giswatch.org/sites/default/files/violence_gisw13.pdf
[146]Available at http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/issuesbrief-e.pdf
[147]Amnesty International, (2018)
[148] Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY), (2018)
[149]Ibidem

Foundation, which was based on reports received from 16 portals worldwide, discovered that the number of domains hosting child sexual abuse imagery increased from 1,991 in 2015 to 2,415 in 2016, that is, by 21%[150]. Moreover, 57,335 out of 102,932 URLs reported contained child sexual abuse imagery, 455 newsgroups were confirmed as containing child sexual abuse imagery and 53% of children represented in images were assessed as aged 10 or younger[151].

1.3.3 From causes to consequences

As demonstrated in the previous paragraphs, the root causes of online GBV are many and strictly related to the same gender inequalities, power imbalance, discrimination, gender stereotypes, and sexism that characterize the phenomenon of GBV in general. This section will try to investigate some of the possible reasons why online GBV occurs, and why people engage in this form of violence. Secondly, the paragraph will attempt to summarise the main consequences that these different forms of online GBV may have on victims.

First, there are many reasons why people may engage in some forms of online GBV. There are some forms of online GBV that are particularly popular among young people, like cyberbullying, cyber harassment, trolling, or flaming. Young people, including children, may engage in these abusive activities, because of the peer pressure that they frequently feel. Cyberbullying and other forms of cyber abuse make them feel popular and get them approval and respect from their peers, especially when they are afraid of becoming victims themselves if they do not get involved. Some other forms of online GBV, like NCII, sextortion and doxing, are perpetrated because of revenge, for example, to shame or to get back at someone who broke up with you[152]. Among the possible triggering factors, there is also anonymity, which allows perpetrators to hide their identity, so people engage in things online, they would never do or say offline. Besides, many forms and categories of online GBV are very often normalized and not recognized as actual violence, and therefore, people may participate in these forms of violence just

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[150] Available at https://www.iwf.org.uk/media/phkhovou/iwf_report_2016.pdf
[151] Ibidem
[152] Cybersafe, (2021), Guide for workshop facilitators, available at https://www.stoponlineviolence.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CYBERSAFE-Guide-for-workshop-facilitators_FINAL-with-design-2.pdf

because they think it is funny, without being aware of the strong emotional, and sometimes even physical, impact their abusive behaviour have on the victims[153]. In addition, it is worth remembering that there are some psychological and educational/cultural causes that can put certain categories of people at greater risk of becoming potential perpetrators (or victims) of this form of abuse. For instance, (young) people who experienced or witnessed domestic, sexual, psychological, physical violence or abuse are more likely to commit violence themselves, also online. Many people have grown up in a social and cultural environment where GBV is normalised and even justified; they often have not been taught what a healthy, equal, and respectful relationship looks like or what the consequences of engaging in such abusive behaviours are[154].

Although common thinking mistakenly believes that online GBV, because of its nature, is less virulent and impactful than offline GBV, it is as damaging as its offline counterpart. The effects of online GBV are amplified by the viral character of distribution and sharing. What was once a private affair can now be instantly replicated and distributed to millions of users via the Internet[155]. Moreover, even if online GBV does not always cause physical harm, it can reach a wider audience, it often goes unpunished, and the evidence may stay online forever, further exacerbating the sufferings of people who experienced it. Therefore, victims of online GBV experience different forms of harm. The harms caused by online GBV are felt both at the individual and the systemic level. Individual people can have their privacy or personal space invaded, and their autonomy threatened, experience psychological and emotional harms, feel fearful, limit their freedom of expression, be silenced, and face reputational, professional and material consequences[156]. Yet, on a broader scale, this violence also has significant systemic impacts. It helps reinforce gender inequality and gender hierarchies and maintains discriminatory, patriarchal norms that limit people from living with freedom and fully realizing their human rights[157]. In research to date, some of the most recurring and commonly

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[153]Ibidem
[154]Ibidem
[155]Ibidem
[156]Dunn, S., (2020)
[157]Ibidem

reported forms of harm that people may experience online include physical, material, economic, psychological and emotional harm.

As far as these last ones are concerned, online GBV can take a serious mental toll on victims. In fact, this form of violence can be so pervasive, relentless, and widespread, that leaves victims in a constant state of fear, with no escape, since they can be always accessible or reachable through social media, texts or their digital devices[158]. Specific forms of online GBV like online (sexual) harassment, NCII, and stalking, especially when prolonged for a long time, have been known to cause severe mental health outcomes, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, self-inflicted harm, or even a combination of all of them[159]. In the survey conducted in 2020 by Plan International, for the surveyed young women and girls, emotional distress, anxiety and depression were the second most common effect of online GBV[160]. Whereas the Qualitative data collected by Samantha Bates (2016) show that women and girls who had their intimate images shared without their consent experienced similar forms of psychological distress as those who had been victims of sexual assault. They reported experiencing issues with trust, anxiety, depression, PTSD, suicidal ideation, and other mental health impacts[161]. Even the Amnesty International IPSOS MORI poll from 2017 reports that across all countries, 61% of those who said they had experienced some form of online abuse or harassment, confessed they had experienced lower self-esteem or loss of self-confidence as a result[162]. Indeed, more than half (55%) said they had experienced stress, anxiety, or panic attacks after experiencing these online abuses, with 63% reporting having experienced some sleeping disorders. Well over half (56%) said that online abuse or harassment had made them unable to concentrate for long periods of time[163]. In fact, the psychological and emotional impact of online GBV can seriously affect the victims'

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[158]Ibidem

[159]Ibidem

[160]Plan International, (2020), Free to be online? Girls' and young women's experiences of online harassment, available at https://plan-international.org/publications/free-to-be-online/

[161]Bates, S., (2016), Revenge Porn and Mental Health: A Qualitative Analysis of the Mental Health Effects of Revenge Porn on Female Survivors, *Feminist Criminology,* 12 (1): pp. 22–42.

[162]Available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2017/11/amnesty-reveals-alarming-impact-of online-abuse-against-women/

[163]Ging D., & Siapera E., (2018)

daily lives, by making it difficult for them to focus on school and work. And finally, around a quarter (24%) of those who experienced online abuse, confessed that it had made them fear not only for their personal safety but also for their family's safety[164]. Additional emotional impacts, both in the short and long term, may include humiliation, bullying, shaming, blaming, stigma, which can lead to diminished self-esteem, resignation, feelings of guilt and shame, anti-social behaviours, traumas, and re-traumatisation[165].

As previously explained, several forms of online GBV like for instance cyberstalking, doxing, and even NCII, involve invasions and violations of privacy. When people feel fearful about their private information being stolen or released by abusers, it limits their ability to express themselves in the digital sphere or save private content through digital means, negatively impacting their personal autonomy, freedom of expression and ability to define their personhood[166]. In fact, once personal information is released online, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to get it back. It may remain permanently online or stored on another person's device, increasing the risk of future privacy invasions or exposing the victim to a further risk of harassment, not only online, but even in the physical world[167].

Another very serious harm that many victims of online GBV experience is silencing. Online GBV silences the voices of victims, constraining them to self-censor and reducing or ending their participation in the digital sphere and leadership roles[168]. The systemic impact of this silencing implies further very negative consequences since it reinforces patriarchal gender roles and stereotypes and reduces online content related to equality and human rights. Multiple studies demonstrate that targets of online GBV reduce their time online, sometimes they even leave social media platforms entirely or completely change what they write or post to avoid abuse[169]. In this respect, Emma A. Jane speaks about a "*tyranny of silence",* which is typically associated with the phenomenon of e-bile and can be

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[164]Ibidem
[165]Cybersafe, (2021), Guide for workshop facilitators.
[166]Dunn, S., (2020)
[167]Ibidem
[168]Ibidem
[169]Ibidem

compared to that associated with offline sexual abuse[170]. She comments that «many female commentators report feeling reluctant to speak openly about receiving sexually explicit online vitriol, and hesitant to admit to finding such discourse unsettling. Speaking out, they say, risks accusations that they lack humour, are weak or thin-skinned, or are opposed to the principles of free speech.[171]» In the most extreme cases, in fact, female e-bile targets have withdrawn not only from the online environment but from the offline public sphere as well.

Finally, online GBV may lead to intentional or unintentional/secondary material consequences, such as problems at work or at school, financial losses, and reputational damage caused by the abuse[172]. For instance, in cases of NCII, many women and girls have lost their jobs or have been expelled from school because their intimate images or videos were diffused and shared on the internet without their consent. Additional significant financial costs may range from mental health or legal support to the necessity to buy new devices or change phone numbers, or even move to a different home because of the pervasive privacy invasion[173]

1.4 What is technology-facilitated intimate partner violence?

As has been demonstrated in the previous paragraphs, online GBV very often occurs within the dynamics of an intimate relationship. The term that the scientific literature has been using to define this specific subcategory of online GBV is *"technology-facilitated intimate partner violence"* (TFIPV). TFIPV is a form of intimate partner violence since it is perpetrated within the context of dating or an intimate relationship by current or former partners [174] . The new digital communications technology enables people to seek, commence, maintain, or end intimate or dating relationships in radically new and innovative ways but they can also be used for malicious purposes. The scholar Briggs is one among many scholars who noted a growing trend in the use of ICTs to control and abuse intimate

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[170]Jane M. A., (2012)
[171]Ibidem
[172]Dunn, S., (2020)
[173]Ibidem
[174]Rogers M., Fisher C., Ali P., Allmark, P., and Fontes, L., (2022), Technology-Facilitated Abuse in Intimate Relationships: A Scoping Review, Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, *SAGE Publications*

partners[175]. As the Internet and other ICTs, such as smartphones and social media, have become more widely available across the world, the occurrence and prevalence of IPV using those technologies has increased as well[176]. Examples may include incessant and persistent texting or calling, the use of surveillance apps or other tracking devices, hacking a current or former partner's social media account, as well as the distribution or sharing of intimate or private images on social media platforms or other online networks.

Since TFIPV research is increasing and developing only in recent years, not much is known about the scope and magnitude of this issue, especially due to its nature that transcends temporal and geographical boundaries[177]. Moreover, as it occurs with the broader issue of online GBV, many different terms and definitions exist to date to describe and examine the phenomenon of TFIPV, including *technology-facilitated intimate partner stalking, electronic dating aggression, cyber dating abuse, technology-facilitated coercive control (TFCC), technology-facilitated abuse in relationships (TAR), technology-facilitated domestic and family violence* and others. This huge variety of terminologies creates a great deal of confusion and contradictory findings among scholars and research, further hampering an in-depth understanding of the problem[178]. Indeed, the use of prefixes such as "digital" or "technology" to highlight the role of the technological artifact in sexual and/or intimate partner violence has raised some criticism among scholars, since it tends to the individuate technology as the main issue, rather than the broader structural causes of GBV, such as the broader context of gender inequality, which includes sexist and heterosexist social norms and the traditionally male-dominated digital media industry[179]. Douglas et al., for instance, argue that "*technology-facilitated forms of domestic and family violence" (DFV)* «should be understood as a form of coercive control that is inextricably tied to, rather than separate from, DFV and the

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[175]Briggs, C., (2018), An emerging trend in domestic violence: technology-facilitated abuse, *Australian Journal of Child and Family Health Nursing*, 15(1), p. 2
[176]Kim C, Ferraresso R., (2023), Examining Technology-Facilitated Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Journal Articles. *Trauma Violence Abuse,* 24(3): pp. 1325-1343.
[177]Ibidem
[178]Ibidem
[179]Henry, N., Flynn, A., & Powell, A., (2020), Technology-Facilitated Domestic and Sexual Violence: A Review. *Violence Against Women*, *26*(15–16), pp.1828–1854

broader cultural values and practices that engender it.[180]» Therefore, it would be preferable to avoid technologically deterministic approaches and instead consider and focus on the actual human agents in the perpetration of these types of abusive practices. Moreover, most of the literature to date focuses particularly or exclusively on specific age groups, mostly on adolescents, youth, or students[181].

To conclude, it is possible to affirm that TFIPV is part of the continuum of IPV that integrates the abusive behaviours that are facilitated by technology as well as those that are perpetrated as types of in-person IPV[182]. The nexus or co-occurrence of TFIPV with in-person experiences of sexual and domestic violence is also known as "*poly victimization*[183]". However, TFIPV's distinctiveness is given by the fact that it enables perpetrators to abuse their victims in new and more extensive ways by transcending temporal and physical boundaries, also limiting the victim/survivor's "space for action" to resist TFIPV and seek help and support[184].

1.4.1   The prevalence of the phenomenon

Even if much of the existing published quantitative and qualitative research on TFIPV is dominated by industrialized nations in the Global-North, such as the US, Australia or the UK, it is possible to affirm that to date TFIPV is quite a widespread and common phenomenon worldwide. However, due to the increased availability and development of both digital devices and technological capabilities, measuring its actual prevalence is particularly challenging if not impossible. Nevertheless, a number of studies have tried to capture the prevalence of this issue, by examining specific behaviours (e.g. cyberstalking, NCII) or a wider range of them across different age groups and variables. These studies examining TFIPV employ a vast

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[180]Douglass C. H., Wright C. J. C., Davis A. C., Lim M. S. C., (2018), Correlates of in-person and technology-facilitated sexual harassment from an online survey among young Australians. *Sexual Health*, 15, pp. 361-365.

[181]As Kim and Ferraresso report in their systematic review of journal articles dealing with this topic, most present studies recruited adolescents or college students to examine TFIPV, and only two of the 31 evaluated studies examined the phenomenon among adults (Kim C, Ferraresso R., (2023))

[182]Rogers M., Fisher C., Ali P., Allmark, P., and Fontes, L., (2022), Technology-Facilitated Abuse in Intimate Relationships: A Scoping Review, Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, *SAGE Publications*

[183]Bailey, J., Henry, N., & Flynn, A., (2021), Technology-facilitated violence and abuse: international perspectives and experiences, *The Emerald International Handbook of Technology-Facilitated Violence and Abuse,* 1st ed., pp. 1-17.

[184]Rogers M., Fisher C., Ali P., Allmark, P., and Fontes, L., (2022)

variety of different methods and measurements. This measurement discrepancy can result in widely varied prevalence rates between genders and make it difficult to fully understand the actual prevalence and impact of the phenomenon [185] . Furthermore, studies employ variable timeframes within which they counted experiences of TFIPV. While these abovementioned factors make cross-study comparisons difficult, the following paragraph aims to present a picture, as comprehensive, as possible regarding the prevalence of the TFIPV phenomenon.

Firstly, the Women's Aid 2017 UK-based survey found that 45% of domestic violence victims/survivors (n = 307) reported experiencing some form of abuse online during their relationship[186]. Additionally, 48% of the respondents reported experiencing harassment or abuse online from their ex-partner in the post-separation period, and 38% reported online stalking once their relationship was over[187]. Indeed, in the USA, Marganski and Melander (2018) discovered that 75% of the 540 college students who completed an online questionnaire confessed to having experienced technology-facilitated abuse perpetrated by a partner or former partner[188]. Another survey on non-consensual pornography conducted by the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative found that of the 361 victims identified, 63% confessed that the nude material was posted by an ex-partner[189]. Images publicized in this way typically result from a relationship breakdown. Whereas the Australian national research conducted by the eSafety Commissioner found that 63% of the 4122 women in the study experienced image-based abuse (e.g. NCII) perpetrated by their current partner (12%) or an ex-partner (13%)[190]. The study also reported that women are much more likely to experience image-based abuse at the hands of a

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[185]Afroditi P., Storey J., Duggan, M., and Virginia F., (2021), Technology-Facilitated Intimate Partner Violence: A multidisciplinary examination of prevalence, methods used by perpetrators and the impact of COVID-19. Home Office

[186]Laxton C., (2014), Women's Aid, Virtual World, Real Fear, Women's Aid report into online abuse, harassment and stalking, available at https://www.womensaid.org.uk/virtual-world-real-fear/

[187]Ibidem

[188]Marganski, A., & Melander, L. (2018), Intimate partner violence victimization in the cyber and real world: Examining the extent of cyber aggression experiences and its association with in-person dating violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 33(7), pp. 1071–1095

[189]Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, (2013), Non-Consensual Pornography (NCP) Research Results, available at Https://Www.Cybercivilrights.Org/Wp-Content/Uploads/2016/11/NCP-2013-Study-Research-Results-1.Pdf

[190]Office of the e-Safety Commissioner, (2017), Image-based abuse: National survey, summary report, available at https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-07/Imagebased-abuse-national-survey-summary-report-2017.pdf

former intimate partner than men, and they are more likely to experience cyberstalking or other threating behaviours than men (especially young women aged 18-34 years)[191]. Otherwise, in Ybarra et al. study (2019), women and men were equally likely to report experiencing some form of technology-facilitated violence from an intimate partner. They also found that 38% of respondents who were part of the LGBTQ+ community reported higher rates of abuse than heterosexuals (10%)[192].

The phenomenon of TFIPV is quite widespread also among adolescents and young people. Flach and Deslandes (2017) stated that young people can experience up to 23 different incidents of TFIPV in periods of less than 6 months[193].

As far as cyberstalking is concerned – which is probably the most common widespread form of TFIPV– based on a FRA 2014 survey, 5% of women in the EU have experienced one or more forms of cyberstalking since the age of 15, and 2% have experienced it in the 12 months preceding the survey[194]. Whereas a survey conducted by the US organization National Network to End Domestic Violence found that 97% of domestic violence programs reported that abusers use technology to stalk, harass, and control victims[195]. It also showed that 86% of domestic violence programs reported that victims are harassed through social media[196]. The already mentioned research on domestic online abuse conducted by Women's Aid also found a sort of correlation between domestic violence and cyberstalking, reporting that 85% of respondents said the abuse they received online from a partner or ex-partner was part of a pattern of abuse they also experienced offline. Furthermore, 50% of respondents stated that the online violence they experienced also involved direct threats to them or someone they personally knew[197].

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[191]Ibidem

[192]Ybarra M. L., Price-Feeney M., Lenhart A., Zickuhr K., (2017), Intimate partner digital abuse. *Data & Society Research Institute.*

[193]Flach RMD, Deslandes SF., (2017), Cyber dating abuse in affective and sexual relationships: a literature review., *Cad Saude Publica*, 27;33(7)

[194]FRA, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, (2014), Violence against women: An EU-wide survey, Main Results

[195]Available at https://nnedv.org/latest_update/combating-technology-facilitated-abuse/

[196]Ibidem

[197]Available at https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/online-safety/

Indeed, as proved by a few studies, with the spread of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the subsequent lockdown periods and restrictions, there has been an increase in the volume and intensity of TFIPV cases. The move to smart working and engagement in online leisure activities exacerbated the opportunities for perpetrators to harass, monitor and control their victims at home, also via ICTs means. For instance, Afroditi et. al. (2021) analyzed 555 reports of TFIPV reported to The Cyber Helpline, a national UK helpline for victims of online harm. They discovered that, from a total of pre-Covid 666 cases, 89 (13.4%) were TFIPV, compared to 3,815 post-COVID cases, 463 (12%) of which were TFIPV. This equates to a 472.8% increase in cases reported to the Helpline, and a 420.2% increase in TFIPV cases[198]. According to the researchers, «this suggests that the period of COVID-19 restrictions resulted in significantly more perpetration of online harm generally and TFIPV.[199]»

To conclude, although it is quite difficult to compare results across the existing studies owing to different methods, definitions, and sample sizes, and although there is little consistency in methods, instruments, and definitions, yet, broadly speaking, it is possible to affirm that online abuse within intimate relationships is a relatively common, growing and evolving phenomenon, which affects mostly and more pervasively women and girls.

1.4.2 The nature and the main forms of TFIPV

To fully understand the specific nature of TFIPV, it is worth remembering that these types of technology-facilitated abuses perpetrated within an intimate relationship reflect existing offline behaviours, including economic abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and physical violence, with heavier monitoring and control features. Overall, TFIPV is and should be considered and understood as an extension of IPV/domestic violence and hence, needs to be classified in typologies allied to offline abuse (e.g., sexual, psychological, emotional, physical abuse)[200]. Like offline IPV, also TFIPV is suggested to have wide-ranging impacts on victims, including depression, helplessness, worthlessness, decreased self-esteem, self-

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[198]Afroditi P., Storey J., Duggan, M., and Virginia F., (2021)
[199]Ibidem
[200]Ibidem

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harm, suicidal thoughts, exclusion, isolation, traumatisation, vulnerability, insecurity, shame, frustration, humiliation, fear. Further, most of the TFIPV impacts are thought to be gendered, with multiple studies suggesting that young women and girls may experience more harmful impacts than young men and boys[201].

As already emerge from the previous paragraphs there are many forms of cyberviolence that typically and particularly take place in the contexts of IPV or domestic violence, and cyberstalking is probably the most common one. Consequentially, the scientific literature has coined some new and more specific terms to refer to this practice, such as *"intimate partner (online) stalking"* and *"technology-facilitated coercive control"* (TFCC). As Stark and Woodlock argue, intimate partner stalking is a form of coercive control. The authors explain that «coercive control is a theoretical framework that encompasses physical abuse that occurs in domestic violence, but which also includes tactics not traditionally viewed as serious forms of abuse. These tactics include strategies to control and intimidate, such as isolation, surveillance, threats of violence, micromanagement of daily activities (e.g., regulation of showering and eating) and shaming.[202]» Some cyberstalkers text and phone repeatedly their partners or ex-partners, creating fear and anxiety in the victim that the harassment will never stop, or they even program automated email or chat services to send multiple messages throughout the day, ensuring a maximum level of disruption for victims at minimum effort for perpetrators[203]. Abusers usually demand an immediate response to texts and calls, or they ask their victims to send pictures to "prove" their whereabouts, and the failure to comply with these requests is met with threats of further violence, humiliation or punishment. Destroying victims' personal devices or switching off internet connection, are just some examples of common punishment for perceived victim's failures to comply with rules[204]. What characterizes intimate partner stalking is omnipresence: a sense of being ever-present in the victim's life.

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[201]Brown, C., & Hegarty, K., (2021), Development and validation of the TAR Scale: A measure of technology-facilitated abuse in relationships. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*.
[202]Woodlock, D., (2017), The Abuse of Technology in Domestic Violence and Stalking. *Violence Against Women*, *23*(5), pp. 584–602,
Stark, E. (2007), Coercive control: How men entrap women in personal life, *Oxford University Press*
[203]Yardley, E., (2021), Technology-Facilitated Domestic Abuse in Political Economy: A New Theoretical Framework. *Violence Against Women*, *27*(10), pp.1479–1498
[204]Ibidem

Moreover, being constantly under surveillance can make it difficult for victims to leave their abusive relationship safely, increasing the risk of escalation of violence. As Woodlock reports «although disenabling location tracking or removing GPS devices may appear simple solutions to this form of surveillance, doing so can often be dangerous for women because it can alert the perpetrator to the possibility that she is leaving the relationship.[205]» In fact, in the context of domestic violence, perpetrators typically use intimate partner (online) stalking to control the victim after their relationship is ended (or is about to end). However, cyberstalking behaviors occur frequently as part of the relationship before separation[206].

Omnipresence can also be "covert", and in this case, the perpetrator is clandestine and collects information about the victim without their knowledge. According to Yardley, "*covert omnipresence*" has a close link with gaslighting, which consists of «a range of tactics employed within coercive control which aims to make a survivor doubt themselves, their perceptions of events, and even their own sanity.[207]» The aim is to make the victim be seen as paranoid or excessively anxious/worried. A typical covert tactic consists of installing spyware on the victim's phone without consent, which enables access to texts, photo gallery, calendars, contacts, location, call recordings, stored files, documents, and internet search histories. Indeed, «some spyware enables remote control of devices, allowing apps to be blocked, restricting what users can search for online, limiting the number of hours a phone can be used, locking the device, or deleting all of its data, further enabling isolation.[208]». Victims may realize that spyware has been installed on their devices only when they start to notice that their stalker possesses too detailed information about their (online) activities and/or show up at places/locations they would not otherwise know about.

Intimate partner stalking is also linked to an increased risk of homicide. A 2002 study found that 68% of women experienced stalking within the 12 months prior to

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[205]Woodlock, D. (2017).
[206]Yardley, E. (2021).
[207]Ibidem
[208]Ibidem

an attempted or actual homicide[209]. It is statistically proven that, like Stark and other authors affirm, women and girls are the main victims of coercive control behaviours, and men and boys are the main perpetrators since it is a form of violence deeply rooted in systemic inequality, which affords men a sex-based privilege. But it is important to recognize that women and girls can assume abusive and controlling behaviours in intimate relationships too[210].

As far as the other term is concerned, Woodlock et al., propose the term *"technology facilitated coercive control"* «to encompass the technological and relational aspects of abuse in the specific context of coercive and controlling intimate relationships. [211] ». Their definition of TFCC is grounded in the understanding of the social problem of domestic violence or IPV as a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviours, often accompanied by the threat of violence.[212] Like cyberstalking, TFCC includes many offensive behaviours and practices such as harassment on social media platforms, online stalking, using GPS data, continuous sending of threatening SMS, accessing accounts or emails without permission, impersonating a partner, doxing or NCII[213].

"Doxing" is an online abusive practice that consists of publishing, manipulating or researching a victim's personal details and sensitive data online such as home address, contact details, photographs, personal legal name and the names of family members, without the victim's consent or against their will[214]. As the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its causes and consequences underlines, doxing «includes situations where personal information and data retrieved by a perpetrator is made public with malicious intent, clearly violating the right to privacy.[215]» Doxing has been perpetrated also in the context of IPV or domestic violence to intimidate a partner or an ex-partner by driving online harassment

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[209]McFarlane, J., Campbell, J. C., & Watson, K., (2002), Intimate partner stalking and femicide: Urgent implications for women's safety. Behavioral Sciences & the Law, 20, pp. 51-68.
[210]Ibidem
[211]Dragiewicz, M., Burgess, J., Matamoros-Fernández, A., Salter, M., Suzor, N., Woodlock, D., & Harris, B.A., (2018), Technology facilitated coercive control: domestic violence and the competing roles of digital media platforms. *Feminist Media Studies, 18*, pp. 609 – 625
[212]Ibidem
[213]Ibidem
[214]European Parliament, (2021), Combating gender-based violence: Cyber violence.
[215] Human Rights Council, (2018), Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective.

against them and making them fear that they may be harassed or harmed in person[216]. Moreover, since the publication or disclosure of personally identifiable information usually allows victims to be physically located, doxing can also be a precursor for violence or harassment in the physical world[217].

Furthermore, with the spreading of the so-called "Internet of Things (IoT) – a term used to encompass a great variety of devices that have the capability of communicating with each other (e.g. smart household appliances like Amazon's Alexa and Echo, Google Home, smart security cameras, doorbells) – has provided new opportunities for the perpetration of TFIPV, in particular stalking, monitoring and controlling behaviours. These devices are usually owned by the perpetrator and shared with the victim in the same home setting, where the abuser can easily observe, monitor and hear them remotely or even restrict their personal liberty by locking and unlocking doors remotely, triggering alarms, and controlling the surrounding environment[218]. IoT devices and systems are rarely recognized by victims as forming part of TFIPV, since to date, no clear guidelines exist to help them recognize these patterns as a form of abuse, and mostly because abusers tend to justify their behaviors in terms of care, concern, and mutuality with the survivor. However, "even when abuse is recognized, reported, and prosecuted, the focus remains on a single snapshot of individual behavior, with little regard given to the patriarchal structural catalysts of that behavior[219]" Even dual-use apps – common anti-theft apps like "*Find My iPhone*" and Android's "*Find My Device*", or Cloud-based file synchronization apps like "*OneDrive*" – enable location tracking as well access to files across a wide range of devices, and can therefore be used by abusers with knowledge of account passwords to stalk and monitor their victims[220]. Abusing children's technology is another tactic used by some perpetrators, which consists of using technology given to children (such as smartphones, gaming consoles, tablets,

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[216]Dunn, S., (2020)
[217]EIGE, European Institute for Gender Equality, (2022), Cyber Violence against Women and Girls Key Terms and Concepts
[218]Afroditi P., Storey J., Duggan, M., and Virginia F., (2021)
[219]Yardley, E. (2021).
[220]Ibidem

laptops etc.) or monitoring their social media accounts to spy on a current or former partner[221].

Another typical and quite widespread form of TFIPV is NCII. However, it is worth remembering that in popular discourse, the term predominantly used – even if not properly correct – when a partner (or ex-partner) is involved in the dissemination or distribution of these materials to humiliate or intimidate the victim, is *"revenge porn"*. The term is sometimes (erroneously) used in the academic literature too. Revenge porn is a flawed term, as it wrongly implies that the victim is to blame in some way[222]. Additionally, the term "porn" does not emphasise the non-consensual nature of the practices. Therefore, it is not recommended to use terms like "non-consensual pornography" or "revenge porn": non-consensual intimate image or image-based sexual abuse are the terms to be preferred.

In the context of IPV or domestic violence, perpetrators are usually motivated to engage in NCII mainly for the purposes of revenge typically after a relationship breakdown, or to make it more difficult for their victims to leave a romantic/intimate relationship. Research to date suggests that this form of abuse disproportionately affects women and girls, both in terms of the number of women and girls affected and the amount of social stigma attached[223]. NCII makes the abuser feel more powerful over the victim, and the victim more vulnerable. Moreover, societal attitudes to female victims of NCII are very often dominated by *"victim blaming":* women and girls are usually considered responsible for posting, sharing, allowing, or producing these intimate images in the first place[224]. What should be understood and not underestimated is the fact that this type of abuse represents frequently a rapidly escalating phenomenon with extremely hurtful and damaging psychological and/or physical consequences for women and girls. Thus, NCII should not be understood as a seemingly "private issue", but on the contrary, as a broader and serious societal issue and crime[225].

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[221]Afroditi P., Storey J., Duggan, M., and Virginia F., (2021)
[222]Cybersafe, (2021), Guide for workshop facilitators
[223]Bond E, Tyrrell K., (2021).
[224]Ibidem
[225]Ibidem

A major risk in TFIPV perpetrated via social media or other online platforms is that individual perpetrator tactics designed to abuse and humiliate a partner or ex-partner can also intersect with broader cultures of online misogyny and machismo. At this point, TFIPV becomes a "viral phenomenon" as online groups of men motivated by shared misogyny, mobilise and join the online abuse against women by using information and images provided by perpetrators without their consent, further exacerbating their reputational damage[226].

To conclude, abusive practices such as cyberstalking, doxing, NCII etc., have grown to the point where they can no longer be minimized or dismissed: the phenomenon of TFIPV needs to be fully understood in its root causes and treated as a serious criminal offense, just as its offline counterpart. There is an urgent need for a new approach: instead of solutions aimed at better detection and security, it would be preferable to prioritize a more proactive approach that truly aims at protecting victims from the harm that TFIPV enables. In a world where audio bugs, microphones, and hidden cameras are openly sold in shops and where spyware apps are available to be purchased on popular app stores, the protection of TFIPV victims is not a priority. Therefore, misogynistic, and patriarchal values associated with this form of violence remain unchallenged. Indeed, more effective practices, policies, legal responses, and remedies for victims/survivors need to be adopted.

1.4.3 *Understanding the abuse in teenage couples: online teen dating violence*

To date, ICTS means, such as instant messaging, social media, mobile phones, and computers, constitute an essential platform for social interaction between young people. Consequently, the digital environment has increasingly become the primary mode of communication between teenagers in intimate relationships. Unfortunately, as the use of these new digital means has increased, *"online teen dating violence"* (OTDV[227]) has also become more widespread and common. As Hellevik highlights «while such technology provides teenagers with opportunities related to establishing and maintaining relationships and exploring their sexuality, it also presents a risk for victimization by providing a new avenue for violent and

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[226]Dragiewicz M., Burgess J., Matamoros-Fernández A., Salter M., Suzor P. M., Woodlock D., & Harris B., (2018),
[227]Also referred to as *"technology-assisted adolescent dating violence and abuse"* (TAADVA)

abusive behaviors, including monitoring and harassment, within intimate partner relationships.[228]» However, «while the type, prevalence, and impact of in-person IPV among adolescents has been widely studied, empirical research on the role of digital media in adolescent dating relationships is still in its infancy.[229]» To date, in fact, there are only a handful of studies (mainly qualitative) investigating the phenomenon of OTDV.

Firstly, when considering the body of existing research dealing with OTDV, it is interesting to note while some studies reveal that young women and girls perpetrate more online dating violence than young men and boys, others show that OTDV is mostly perpetrated by young men and boys. Additionally, some other studies find gender symmetries or that young women and girls experience greater victimisation than young men and boys[230].

To begin with, compelling evidence demonstrates that female adolescents are often more likely (or at least as likely) to experience dating abuse than their male counterparts when it comes to monitoring or controlling behaviors.[231] For instance, a study on the use of technology to monitor and control intimate partners conducted by Burke et al. (2011) found that, in a sample of 804 undergraduates at a U.S. university, half of both female and male participants were either perpetrators or victims of some forms of online abuse, but with young women perpetrating technology-facilitated monitoring and control behaviours more than young men[232]. In fact, of female college students, 25% self-reported that they monitored their partner's behavior by checking emails compared with 6% of male students. On the same line, a more recent study conducted by the Cyberbullying Research Centre, which examined a large, nationally representative sample of 2,218 US middle and high school students (12 to 17 years old) who have been in a romantic relationship, found that «males were significantly more likely to have experienced digital dating

[228]Hellevik, P. M., (2019), Teenagers' personal accounts of experiences with digital intimate partner violence and abuse. *Computers in Human Behavior, 92,* pp. 178–187

[229]Ibidem

[230]Brown, C., Flood, M. and Hegarty, K., (2020), Digital dating abuse perpetration and impact: The importance of gender, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 0(0), pp. 1–16.

[231]Kim C, Ferraresso R., (2023), Examining Technology-Facilitated Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review of Journal Articles. *Trauma Violence Abuse,* 24(3): pp. 1325-1343

[232]Burke, S. C., Wallen, M., Vail-Smith, K., & Knox, D., (2011), Using technology to control intimate partners: An exploratory study of college undergraduates. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27, pp. 1162-1167.

abuse compared to females (32.3% vs. 23.6% when it comes to victimization, and 21.6% vs. 14.2% when it comes to offending), and more likely to experience all types of online and offline dating abuse, including physical aggression. [233] » Furthermore, as emerges from Stonard et. al's qualitative study (2017) on controlling and monitoring behaviors among groups of adolescents aged 12 to 18 years in the UK, young female adolescents (age 12-13 years) are more likely to experience feelings of frustration, sadness, or anxiety when partners do not respond[234]. As the authors report «these young female adolescents also spoke more of obsessive checking of their own mobile phones for their partners' replies and being upset, annoyed, or anxious when they were not in constant contact with their boyfriends.[235]» This evidence was confirmed even by a Spanish study on intimate partner cyberstalking (IPCS) that involved 993 Spanish students of Secondary Education (535 girls and 458 boys, with mean age 15.75). Findings from this study, in fact, demonstrated that even if boys performed more sexting, consumed more pornographic content, and had more hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes than girls, girls however, perpetrated more IPCS than boys[236].

On the other hand, in another large-scale study in the USA conducted by Zweig et. al. (2013), young women and girls reported being victims of technology-facilitated abuse at a higher rate than young men and boys, with 29% of girls reporting abuse and 23% of boys[237]. This difference was increased when the reported abuse involved sexual behavior, with approximately 15% of girls reporting sexualized online abuse, compared with 7% of boys[238]. Indeed, Ringrose et. al (2012), in a qualitative study that focused on sexting among young people in the UK, reported that this practice is often coercive and linked with harassment, and sometimes

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[233]Hinduja S., (2020), Digital Dating Abuse Among Teens: Our Research and what We Must Do, Cyberbullying Research Center 12 February 2020, available at https://cyberbullying.org/digital-dating-abuse-research-findings
[234]Stonard KE, Bowen E, Walker K, Price SA., (2017), "They'll always find a way to get to you": Technology use in adolescent romantic relationships and its role in dating violence and abuse. *Journal of interpersonal violence.* 2017;32(14), pp. 2083-2117.
[235]Ibidem
[236]Rodríguez-Castro, Y., Martínez-Román, R., Alonso-Ruido, P., Adá-Lameiras, A., & Carrera-Fernández, M. V. (2021), Intimate Partner Cyberstalking, Sexism, Pornography, and Sexting in Adolescents: New Challenges for Sex Education. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *18*(4), 2181
[237]Zweig, J. M., Dank, M., Lachman, P., & Yahner, J., (2013), Technology, teen dating violence and abuse, and bullying, Urban Institute,
[238]Ibidem

violence, against girls[239]. Altogether, research to date demonstrates that males are generally more likely to perpetrate sexual forms of online abuse (like sexting, NCII etc.), whereas females are more likely to perpetrate non-sexual forms of abuse (like cyberstalking, constant monitoring and phone checking).

More broadly speaking, this growing corpus of research has also tried to investigate and capture the features and common patterns characterizing online violence within teen couples. For instance, Baker and Carreño (2016), conducted some focus groups with adolescents about the use of technology at different stages of their intimate relationships, including in relation to dating violence. Findings demonstrate that a toxic use of ICTs within an intimate relationship could exacerbate feelings of jealousy and lead to problematic and abusive behaviors, such as checking their partner's phone and social media activity, tracking them, constantly texting/calling, attempts at isolating their partner, and even instances of breaking their phone[240]. Parallelly, findings of other focus groups on IPV victimization and perpetration among dating adolescents, conducted by Lucero et. al. (2014) show that password sharing/access, spying on/ monitoring a partner, sexting, and constant contact were among the most reported abusive actions[241]. Moreover, minimizing the seriousness of the monitoring and controlling behaviours in dating relationships was also common among participants, with most of them considering some of these actions to be typical or even necessary components of teen dating experiences. Monitoring, controlling and other unhealthy behaviours among teen couples, such as controlling partners' messages and accounts to determine who they had been in contact with, demanding passwords to their mobile phone and online accounts, and controlling or deleting friends or ex-partners, were reported also in the study conducted by Stonard et. al. (2017)[242].

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[239]Ringrose, J., Gill, R., Livingstone, S., & Harvey, L., (2012), A qualitative study of children, young people and "sexting": A report prepared for the NSPCC, London: NSPCC.
[240]Baker, C. K., & Carreño, P. K., (2016), Understanding the role of technology in adolescent dating and dating violence. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 25(1), pp.308–320
[241]Lucero, J. L., Weisz, A. N., Smith-Darden, J., & Lucero, S. M., (2014), Exploring gender differences: Socially interactive technology use/abuse among dating teens. *Affilia*, 29(4), pp. 478–491
[242]Stonard, K. E., Bowen, E., Walker, K., & Price, S. A., (2017), "They'll always find a way to get to you": Technology use in adolescent romantic relationships and its role in dating violence and abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence,* 32(14), pp.2083–2117

The need to constantly hear from one's own partner via text or call is frequently justified by young people on the grounds of "having to keep the relationship alive", not to mention that nowadays, young people also experience many long-distance intimate relationships, with many of them being born precisely online on social media platforms, or on the major dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble, OkCupid. However, constant text messaging, especially when coupled with violent, harassing, or threatening messages, can be very dangerous since it can even enhance the gravity of the harassment, being online communication between partners frequently crueller and more harmful than in-person communication[243].

Since sending and receiving intimate pictures is a quite common activity among teen couples, NCII and other forms of IBSA have also been reported by a few studies. For instance, in a U.S. study (2007) into technology-facilitated abuse among teenagers, more than 10% of the participants confessed that their partner had shared an intimate picture of them, with 20% saying they had been asked via technology, to engage in unwanted sexual activity[244]. Teen perpetrators improperly obtain and use private pictures or videos to blackmail, extort, or otherwise manipulate their partner into saying or doing something against their will.

Furthermore, research to date also demonstrates that the level of acceptance and normalisation of these forms of abuse, especially of monitoring and surveillance behaviours, tends to be higher for young people and adolescents than adults.

Concerning the relationship between OTDV and its offline counterpart, scientific literature demonstrates that while in some instances OTDV co-occurs with in-person TDV, in others, this co-correlation is not necessarily present, with ICTs enabling violent and abusive practices and behaviors that do not occur outside of the digital environment. An interesting overlapping between OTDV, bullying perpetration and victimization was provided by Yahner et. al. (2015). In their study, they found that «youth who bully and those who are bullied are approximately twice as likely to also abuse their dating partners or suffer dating violence, respectively,

[243]Hellevik, P. M., (2019)
[244]Picard, P., (2007), Tech Abuse in Teen Relationships Study. New York: Liz Claiborne Inc.

when compared with those who do not bully and are not victimized by bullying.[245]»,
and also that «one in eight youth reported *both* perpetration and victimization
experiences in *both* dating and peer relationships during the prior year.[246]» This
means that online dating abuse is mutual in young relationships, with young people
being perpetrators and victims at the same time. Evidence of the linkage between
bullying perpetration and OTDV perpetration was provided also by another study
conducted by Peskin et. al. (2017), where they found that the individual-level
factors of (a) norms for violence for boys for against girls, (b) having a current
boyfriend/girlfriend, and (c) participation in bullying perpetration were correlates
of the perpetration of cyber dating abuse [247]. Also, the already mentioned
Cyberbullying Research Centre's study found a significant connection between
digital and traditional forms of dating abuse: 81% of the students who had been the
target of OTDV had also been the target of offline dating abuse. Furthermore,
«students victimized offline were approximately 18 times more likely to have also
experienced online abuse compared to those who were not victimized offline.
Similarly, most of the students who had been the victim of offline dating violence
also had been the victim of online dating violence, though the proportion (63%)
was lower.[248]»

To conclude, cyber dating violence constitutes a serious risk to adolescents' health
and well-being. From what emerges from the existing literature, it is possible to
affirm that excessive jealousy, distrust, insecurity, narcissism, concerns about
partner's infidelity, and the normalization of these behaviours are among the main
triggering factors of this kind of abuse. Therefore, efforts aimed at preventing and
fighting against OTDV should start with education. Education and prevention
programs and efforts should focus first and foremost on young people's
understanding of intimacy, affectivity, sexuality, and what it means to be in a
healthy and stable intimate relationship.

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[245]Yahner, J., Dank, M., Zweig, J., & Lachman, P., (2015), The co-occurrence of physical and cyber dating violence and bullying among teens. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*,30(7), pp. 1079–1089.
[246]Ibidem
[247]Peskin M.F., Markham C. M., Shegog R., et al. (2017), Prevalence and correlates of the perpetration of cyber dating abuse among early adolescents. *Journal of youth and adolescence,* 46(2): pp.358-375.
[248]Cyberbullying Research Centre, (2020), Digital Dating Abuse Among a National Sample of U.S. Youth

CHAPTER 2- TECHNOLOGY FACILITATED INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, AN ITALIAN CASE STUDY

The purpose of this second chapter is to investigate the phenomenon of TFIPV, including OTDV, within the Italian national context. Precisely, the starting point of this chapter will be a general overview of the prevalence of the phenomenon in Italy. Since the start of social distancing measures due to the spreading of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the issue of IPV, including TFIPV, has undoubtedly become more serious, with the most affected groups being women, young people, and adolescents. Secondly, the chapter will focus on the Italian legal system, in order to illustrate what provisions, policies, and other civil society initiatives are already in force at the national level and how Italy is trying to counter the issue of TFIPV. Although in more recent years Italy has adopted a number of specific provisions to counter (online) GBV and protect victims, like the so-called *"Red Code",* they seem to be insufficient, on their own, to fight these abusive practices effectively. Data on criminal proceedings and reports to the police concerning crimes such as NCII or cyberstalking, show that there is still a long way to go. Therefore, this chapter will also try to reflect on the main gaps and weaknesses of the Italian criminal provisions concerning TFIPV. Finally, the chapter will provide a brief literature review on the topic, by analyzing and comparing some already existing studies.

2.1 The prevalence of the phenomenon in Italy

Domestic violence or IPV is a widespread phenomenon in Italy too. According to the 2015 Italian National Institute of Statistics report, almost 1 in 3 women in the country have been victims of physical and/or sexual violence[249]. Moreover, in 2018, 73 women in Italy were killed by their intimate partners[250]. Concerning online GBV, according to the 2019 FRA's Fundamental Rights Survey, 6 % of women were subjected to cyber harassment in the past five years, and 3 % in the past 12 months. Among girls and young women aged 16-29, 11 % experienced cyber harassment in the past five years, and 5 % in the past 12 months[251]. Data retrieved

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[249]Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), (2015), Available at: http://www.istat.it/it/archivio/161716
[250]EIGE, Gender Equality Index, data retrieved from https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/domain/violence/IT
[251]Ibidem

from the research commissioned by Amnesty International to the IPSOS MORI Institute, which surveyed around 4,000 women aged between 18 and 55 in eight countries, including Italy, revealed that in Italy, out of 501 women interviewed, 81 had suffered online harassment or threats, and 62 of them on social media.[252] Furthermore, like it occurred in many other countries around the world, the Covid-19 lockdowns restrictions on mobility, and increased isolation exposed women and girls to a higher risk of violence committed by an intimate partner, also online. To date, no study has been able to measure the actual prevalence of the TFIPV phenomenon in Italy, given its extreme complexity and rapid and continuous transformation. What we have at our disposal, are mainly statistics and data collected by some government Ministries, Law Enforcement Agencies, or other national bodies and organisations, especially following the implementation of new legislation in Italy (e.g. on NCII and cyberstalking). These data and statistics, although useful and relevant in measuring the actual effectiveness of these newly adopted provisions, are not able to provide a complete and comprehensive picture of the impact of the overall TFIPV phenomenon in Italy.

To provide some evidence, research aimed at understanding the exact proportions of the NCII phenomenon in Italy was conducted by the Criminal Analysis Service of the Department of Public Safety of the Ministry of the Interior. The analyzed data obtained from the databases of Law Enforcement Agencies throughout the country showed that, in the period between 9 August 2019 and 8 August 2020, 718 cases of non-consensual distribution of intimate images and videos were recorded, with 82% female, 83% over 18 years old and 89% Italian[253]. However, the data recorded represented only the tip of the iceberg, since they did not include all those cases for which no criminal complaints were made, moreover, they do not distinguish between offences committed within an intimate relationship, or perpetrated by others (such as friends, family members, co-workers) or by strangers. Data also show an evident surge in the phenomenon during the months

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[252]Amnesty International, (2028), Violenza Online contro le donne: il coraggio di Silvia, April 2018, available at https://www.amnesty.it/silvia-storia-violenza-online/
[253]Italian Ministry of the Interior, Department of Public Security, Central Directorate of Criminal Police, Criminal Analysis Service. "Un anno di Codice Rosso", October 2020

of lockdown, peaking in May 2020[254]. Subsequently, in February 2021 the Women for Security – the Italian Community that brings together Italian experts in cyber security – conducted another survey that aimed at defying the exact scope of the phenomenon of NCII in Italy[255]. A 14 questions-questionnaire was provided to a sample not homogeneous for age groups composed of 86% women. 88% of the interviewed women were aware that the non-consensual distribution of intimate material was a crime, but only 75% thought it would be helpful to report the fact to the competent authorities[256]. Indeed, «14% of respondents said they knew at least one victim of revenge porn, primarily female. 2% of respondents stated that they had been personally involved in an episode of Revenge Porn, but only in half of the cases was a criminal complaint made.[257]»

Other relevant data emerge from the 2022 Eurispes report: 7.4% of Italians (+18) affirm they have been the victim of stalking and in almost 1 out of 4 cases (22.2%) the perpetrator was an ex-partner[258]. The most widespread persecutory attitudes were repeated phone calls and messages (60.4%). 11.5% had to deal with cyberstalking, with the very young (18-24 years old) being the main victims of this abuse, compared to the other categories. Indeed, 5.8% of Italians had to face cases of non-consensual distribution of intimate images/videos[259].

However, it is worth remembering that, although these data are important and useful to give a general idea of the TFIPV phenomenon and its main sub-categories in Italy, they do not fully capture the prevalence of the phenomenon as a whole. In fact, they do not always distinguish between forms of online GBV occurring within an intimate relationship or a dating relationship, or outside couples' dynamics. This is why there is an urgent need for further studies and research aimed at investigating the extent of TFIPV in Italy, in a more comprehensive manner.

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[254]Ricci G. et al. (2022), Revenge porn in the Italian regulatory and social context: new crime or old blackmail? *Rassegna Italiana di Criminologia*, XVI, 3, pp. 201-210.
[255]Ricci G. et al. (2022),
[256]Ibidem
[257]Ibidem
[258]Report available at https://eurispes.eu/news/risultati-del-rapporto-italia-2022/#:~:text=SECONDO%20LA%20RILEVAZIONE%20DELL'EURISPES,STALKER%20%C3%88%20 L'EX%20PARTNER.
[259]Ibidem

Finally, as far as OTDV is concerned, a very recent and interesting research was conducted by "Movimento Giovani" for Save the Childre (IT) within the *"DATE"* project, and it involved 902 young people aged between 14 and 25 in Italy. From the questionnaires they were given, it emerges that 42.2% of the total number of participants report having a friend who had experienced some form of online violence in their intimate relationships, especially in the sphere of personal control[260]. Among the behaviours considered most frequent there were: the creation of a fake social profile in order to control the partner (73.4%), persistent phone calls/messages to know where he/she is and whom he/she is with (62.5%), controlling his/her movements and people he/she is with (57%), preventing one's partner from accepting someone as a friend on social networking sites (56.2%), but also pressurizing partner to send sexually explicit photos (55.1%) or threatening to disseminate embarrassing information, photos or videos (40.6%)[261]. Once again, although these data are extremely relevant to give an idea of the perception of Italian adolescents on the OTDV issue, they are, however, based exclusively on perceptions and opinions provided by the 902 participants in the survey, and therefore, are not fully able to provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of the spread and prevalence of the OTDV phenomenon in Italy. Indeed, these issues are very delicate and sensitive topics for young people since they belong to their intimate and "private" sphere, and therefore, many may not feel free or comfortable to express themselves on these problems or may not even have an adequate space to do so. For these reasons, new research aimed at investigating the prevalence of OTDV in Italy should be able to involve young people and adolescents in a participatory, meaningful, and open dialogue, to provide a safe place where they can feel free to express and reflect on their own views and experiences on these issues, also to avoid (ri)victimization, victim blaming and stigmatization.

2.2 Italian legislation and policies targeting TFIPV

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[260]Save The Children Italia, (2022), PROGETTO DATE, Develop Approaches and Tools to end online teen dating violence, consultazione delle opinioni di adolescenti sul tema della online teen dating violence, available at https://www.savethechildren.it/sites/default/files/files/Progetto_Date_2023.pdf
[261]Ibidem

In Italy, the interest in the issue of violence against women began in the 1970s, through the adoption of a series of norms aimed at eliminating certain "retrograde legacies of the past" that were still in force within the Italian Penal and Civil Code, such as marital authority, the crime of honour and reparatory marriage[262]. The enactment of Law 66/1996 also established "sexual violence" as an offense against the person and against individual liberty, thus recognizing a subjective right to be protected against this form of violence[263]. The same year, the Ministry of Equal Opportunities was also established to coordinate and implement all regulatory and administrative policies related to equal opportunities. But it was only in recent years that the Italian government started to take the first steps to adopt some legal measures aimed at contrasting online GBV, also thanks to the growing political attention paid to the issue.

Among the first legislative actions upheld Law 38/2009 should be mentioned, as it introduced "stalking" as a criminal offense within Section 612-bis of the Italian Criminal Code for the first time[264]. This offense, entitled "Persecutory Conducts" «punishes with deprivation of liberty from one year to six years and six months, whoever, with repeated acts, threatens or harasses someone causing to the victim a persistent and serious state of anxiety or fear or causing a well-founded worry for his safety or for a safety of a close relative or, finally, forcing the victim to change his life habit. [265]» A very important step towards the conceptualization of "cyberstalking" within the Italian legislative system was a ruling by the Court of Cassation (Section V, penal, 24/06/2011, No. 25488). The case involved a young man who was prohibited from visiting the places frequented by his ex-girlfriend, because of the persecutory acts he committed. In particular, the defendant, after the victim had interrupted cohabitation, was responsible for continuous messages sent via Facebook containing threats and insults. He also had violated the victim's domicile, and beaten her, causing her injuries. The Court of Cassation ruled that the

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[262]Examples are: Law No 151 of 19 May 1975 "Reform of family law", Law No 442 of 5 August 1981 "Repeal of the criminal relevance of the cause of honour", Law No 154 of 4 April 2001 "Measures against violence in family relationships".

[263]Law No. 66 of 15 February 1996 "Regulations against sexual violence", available at https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGaz zetta=1996-02-20&atto.codiceRedazionale=096G0073&elenco30giorni=false

[264]Retrieved from https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/sommario/codici/codicePenale

[265]Ibidem

messages sent via social media, in this case via Facebook, could be attributed to the crime of stalking[266]. After this ruling, the sub-category of "cyberstalking" entered the common language and subsequently also in the Italian criminal law context, as a result of the Legislative Decree 93/2013, then converted by Law No. 119 of 15 October 2013[267], which extended the special aggravating circumstance provided by article 612-bis, 2nd paragraph of the Italian Penal Code to include repeated harassing acts or threats accomplished by ICT means or telematic tools[268]. In particular, the penalty is increased if minors witness violence, as well as if the victim is in a particularly vulnerable situation (if pregnant or disabled). Also, the particularly close relationship between the victim and the stalker was introduced as an aggravating circumstance (e.g. if the perpetrator is the victim's spouse, partner, ex-partner, or non-cohabiting partner)[269].

As far as the specific case of *"stalkware"* is concerned, Article 617 bis of the Criminal Code provides for the protection of the inviolability of remote communications between two or more persons. Paragraph 1 of this provision provides that: «whoever, outside the cases permitted by law, installs apparatus, instruments, parts of apparatus or instruments for the purpose of intercepting or preventing communications or telegraphic or telephonic conversations between other persons shall be punished by imprisonment from one to four years.[270]» The interception of communications and conversations from the victim's mobile devices is typical behaviour of stalkerware. As already stated, in fact, such conduct can be engaged in by a person who intends to spy on and control the victim's life. In this regard, the Criminal Court of Cassation in section V of its judgment number 15071 of 18 March 2019 stated that: «computer programs called "spy-software" which, if installed in a covert manner on a mobile phone, a tablet or a PC, allow the capture of all data traffic arriving to or departing from the device, fall within the "apparatus,

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[266]Corte di Cassazione sezione V penale, sent. 24 giugno 2011 n. 25453, availabe at https://www.avvocati-imperia.it/Cass615bis.pdf
[267]Avallabile at https://www.lexitalia.it/leggi/2013-119.htm
[268]Greco, G., & Greco, F., (2020), Developments in italian criminal law on cyber-violence against women. *European Journal of social sciences*
[269]EIGE, European Institute for Gender Equality, (2016), Combating violence against women, Italy, available at https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/combating-violence-against-women-italy?language_content_entity=en
[270]See https://www.brocardi.it/codice-penale/libro-secondo/titolo-xii/capo-iii/sezione-v/art617bis.html

instruments, parts of apparatus or instruments" aimed at the interception or obstruction of telegraphic or telephone communications or conversations between other persons, referred to in Article. 617-bis, first par. of the Criminal Code, since that provision outlines an open category, susceptible of being implemented as a result of technological innovations that, over time, allow the purposes prohibited by the law to be achieved.[271]» The sentence was pronounced in relation to a case in which a man had installed spyware software on his wife's mobile phone that allowed him to intercept her telephone communications. According to the defendant, however, the programme he had installed did not fall within the categories of "apparatus or instruments" provided for in Art. 617-bis. Moreover, he claimed that his wife had been informed by their son that such software was installed on her phone and that therefore her freedom of communication had not been violated. But the Court of Cassation's ruling made it clear that even in the case of consent to the intrusion by the owner of the device represents a post-factum that does not exculpate the offense. In essence, the offense is detected only at the installation of the spy software and not at the subsequent interception or obstruction of the communications of others. Therefore, the offense is consummated even if the installed software did not work or was not activated[272].

Another key step that led Italy to extend its regulations against GBV, including TFIPV, was the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (the so-called *"Istanbul Convention*[273]"), under Law 77/2013[274]. The adoption of this Convention led in fact to the approval of a new crucial piece of legislation, commonly referred to as the "*Red Code*" (Law 69/2019). The Red Code introduced a series of amendments concerning the substantive, procedural, and criminal law relating to criminal execution, in relation to the protection of victims of GBV, sexual violence, and domestic/IPV. The Red Code was a particularly innovative measure since it also introduced a new form of crime extremely related to TFIPV into the Italian

[271]Cassazione Penale, Sez. V., Sentenza numero 15071 del 18 Marzo 2019, (1 massima), available at https://www.eius.it/giurisprudenza/2019/324
[272]Ibidem
[273]Available at https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=210
[274]Available at https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/07/01/13G00122/sg

Criminal Code, namely the non-consensual dissemination of intimate and private photos or other sexually explicit materials "aimed at remaining private" (Art.10 Law 69/2019[275]). Before the promulgation of the Red Code, the offense of non-consensual dissemination of intimate images did not exist as such and it was covered by other legal offenses, such as defamation, extortion, violation of privacy, and improper processing of personal data[276].

Article 10(1) added Article 612-ter to the Criminal Code, which punishes «whosoever sends, delivers, publishes or disseminates images or videos with sexually explicit content, intended to remain private, without the consent of the persons there represented, with detention from one to six years and a fine ranging from EUR 5,000 to EUR 15,000.[277]» Equally punishable are those who receive and further distribute these images or videos, again without the consent of the represented individuals, "with the intention of harming" them. The so-called "specific intent", which means the precise intention to harm the person depicted, is therefore required. Higher sentences will be given in those cases where this explicit content is shared by a spouse, even when separated or divorced or by a current or ex-partner, or even if the nonconsensual release occurs through ICT or telecommunication means. Indeed, «the penalty is increased by between one-third and one-half if the acts are committed to the detriment of a person in a condition of physical or mental inferiority or to the detriment of a pregnant woman.[278]» Furthermore, if the disclosed material is accompanied by personal information ("*doxing*"), the aggravating circumstances would increase since regulations on privacy would come into play[279]. Moreover, it is worth remembering that in Italy, *"secondary sexting"* − basically the disclosure of private material sent to third persons −falls perfectly into the category of crimes regulated by Article 612-ter of the Criminal Code[280]. And since sexting is a widespread phenomenon among young

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[275]Available at https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2019/07/25/19G00076/sg
[276]Ricci G. et al., (2022), Revenge porn in the Italian regulatory and social context: new crime or old blackmail? *Rassegna Italiana di Criminologia,* XVI, 3, pp. 201- 210
[277]See https://www.brocardi.it/codice-penale/libro-secondo/titolo-xii/capo-iii/sezione-iii/art612ter.html
[278]Ibidem
[279]Art.167 Codice della Privacy, d.lgs 30 giugno 2003, n. 196, available at https://www.brocardi.it/codice-della-privacy/parte-iii/titolo-iii/capo-ii/art167.html
[280]Maderna S., (2020), I fenomeni del sexting e del revenge porn diffusione di materiale pornografico prodotto dalla vittima, *Dis Crimen focus*

people and, above all, minors, if they become victims of it, as vulnerable subjects, they would be entitled to enhanced protections. For example, it is possible to apply the law relating to "cyberbullying", as it would correspond to the definition of the phenomenon articulated in Article 2(2), Law No. 71/2017[281].

As regards the wording, according to the judges of the Italian Court of Cassation, "sexually explicit content" means any content «[…] likely to arouse the viewer's erotic urges, and therefore includes not only images depicting intercourse but also naked bodies with genitals on display[…].[282]» From the outset, it is clear that this new law aims to guarantee and protect not only personal liberty but above all sexual privacy and the reputation of individuals. In Italy, it was the case of Tiziana Cantone that particularly fostered collective sensitization on this matter and initiated a mobilization process that culminated in 2019 with the introduction of the "Red Code" and the criminalization of IBSA. Tiziana Cantone was a 33-year-old woman who in September 2016 committed suicide, after being brutalized by a group of men who shared and diffused a sexually explicit video of her without consent through multiple mass and digital media platforms and websites[283].

To conclude this excursus on the Italian TFIPV regulatory framework, in addition to the Red Code legislation, from March 8, 2021, on the website of the Italian Guarantor for the protection of personal data an online form is available to report cases of IBSA. Those directly concerned can then report their fear of seeing their intimate images or videos being spread on social networks and going viral. The Authority then examines the reports and confidentially forwards the report to the concerned social network, which removes the content in question[284]. Although this

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[281]In May 2017 Italy adopted law no. 71/2017, entitled "Regulation for the safeguarding of minors and the prevention and tackling of cyberbullying". Article 1 of this new law defines cyberbullying as "whatever form of psychological pressure, aggression, harassment, blackmail, injury, insult, denigration, defamation, identity theft, alteration, illicit acquisition, manipulation, unlawful processing of personal data of minors and/or dissemination made through electronic means, including the distribution of online content depicting also one or more components of the minor's family whose intentional and predominant purpose is to isolate a minor or a group of minors by putting into effect a serious abuse, a malicious attack or a widespread and organized ridicule", See https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/06/3/17G00085/sg

[282]Italian Court of Cassation, Section III, 9 December 2009, Judgement No. 8285
[283]Powell, A., Flynn, A., & Sugiura, L., (2021), The Palgrave Handbook of Gendered Violence and Technology, Palgrave Macmillan
[284]Ricci G. et al., (2022)

is certainly an important first step to protect victims (or potential victims) of this online abuse, it should be underlined that this procedure does not cover all websites, applications, messaging platforms and other platforms present on the web, but only some social media platforms.

2.2.1 The main gaps

It is certainly possible to affirm that in Italy, in more recent years, both political/institutional, social sensitivity and interest in the issue of TFIPV have increased, resulting in the adoption of new legislation and initiatives aimed at combating some specific forms of this type of abuse. However, it is not possible to state that in Italy there is a real recognition and comprehensive understanding of TFIPV as a specific and unique form of violence. Therefore, the aforementioned Italian national legislation presents a number of gaps and shortcomings that are worth mentioning.

To begin with, as far as the *"Red Code"* is concerned, Powell et. al. affirm that this legislation is "ineffective by design" since it displays a number of substantial and procedural limitations, as well as some of the limitations identified in recent literature relating to IBSA law[285]. Firstly, the IBSA provision (Art. 61-ter), presupposes that the targets of this form of abuse are already aware of such dissemination. Therefore, this provision remains merely a punitive measure, instead of trying to meet the challenges of preventive justice. An approach based solely on criminal law, which does not include intervention by Internet websites or social media platforms to remove private and sexually explicit images/videos, is ineffective, given the complexity of the issue. Secondly, Art. 612-ter criminalises only the most radical harmful behaviour of non-consensual diffusion of "sexually explicit" materials, but when it comes to cases that involve private images and images without such explicit sexual content (but that can still be sexualised or otherwise can create a range of harms), the Italian legislation leaves discretion to the personal judgment of the Court to define what counts as "sexually explicit[286]". In this way, the Red Code seems to endorse a "victim-blaming" perspective as it

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[285]Powell, A., Flynn, A., & Sugiura, L. (2021)
[286]Ibidem

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binds the element of harm to the absence of "consent" by the target, and «this flows directly from and, at the same time, contributes to normalising and minimising the issue of sexual violence against women in cyberspace, as it leaves room to think that, when consensual (however consent is defined), the diffusion of intimate and sexual images cannot and should not be prosecuted (as harms are not recognised.[287]» Another problematic aspect of the Italian IBSA legislation concerns the fact that it is still inefficient in protecting young people and teenagers since the aggravating circumstances of IBSA crimes do not include minors, but only pregnant women and "people in physical or mental inferiority." In this respect, Sorgato argues that in the case of diffusion of sexually explicit material depicting minors, a different criminal offence will be assumed, namely the provisions of Art. 600-ter of the Italian Criminal Code on "child pornography"[288]. In Italy, in fact, there is any specific legislation aimed at preventing and contrasting OTDV, and only the above-mentioned laws on "cyberbullying" (Law 71/2017) and "child pornography" (Law 269/1998, as amended by Law 38/2006) are currently in force. Indeed, the new IBSA legislation only added a generic article to the Italian Criminal Code without elaborating national guidelines, first and foremost as regards best practices in interacting with the victims, including young people and teenagers[289].

As regards the Italian legislation on "cyberstalking" (Law 119/2013), it should be noted that the provision (Art. 612-bis, 2nd par.) does not contain any notion of the term "cyberstalking", but only refers to "acts committed by ICT means or telematic tools", and this mainly due to a prevailing view from the criminological point of view, which holds that cyberstalking could be considered a variant of "persecutory acts", a position not shared by those who, on the other hand, given the importance of the psycho-physical and financial consequences necessary to deal with the victimisation, hold that it could not be a mere "variant of stalking[290]". But given the ever-increasing prevalence and diffusion of cases, cyberstalking is certainly a new

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[287]Ibidem
[288]Sorgato, A., (2020), Revenge porn: aspetti giuridici, informatici e psicologici, *Milano: Giuffrè Francis Lefebvre,* pp. 42-43.
[289]Powell, A., Flynn, A., & Sugiura, L. (2021)
[290]Boccuzzi C., (2020), Aggravante "cyber" per lo stalking, le nuove sfide del Codice Penale, 28th August 2020, Network Digital 360, available at https://www.agendadigitale.eu/cultura-digitale/aggravante-cyber-per-lo-stalking-le-nuove-sfide-del-codice-penale/

criminal phenomenon that would require concrete intervention by the legislator through the formulation of an ad hoc criminal law specifically providing for it. Indeed, even in the case of cyberstalking legislation, a punitive, instead of a preventive approach seems to prevail within the Italian legislative framework. Although the Art. 612-bis provision is undoubtedly an excellent starting point, it needs to be implemented by effective prevention strategies and a greater framing not only and exclusively as a "cybercrime" but within the specific category of TFIPV, and thus within the even broader framework of (online) GBV.

Furthermore, another critical aspect lamented by several Italian jurists is the absence of harmonious international legislation on these issues. In fact, although many states worldwide have endeavoured to regulate these new online abuses, there is a lack of a general and collective overview that is essential to combat such a complex and extensive phenomenon.

To conclude, it is possible to affirm that in Italy, the protection offered against online forms of IPV has weaknesses, partly due to the intrinsic inability of the system itself to provide the victim with protection synchronized with the speed of the digital world. Within the dynamics of rapid transformations and evolutions, criminal law, as conceived and created to operate in a static reality, inevitably shows its shortcomings. Therefore, there is an urgent need to create new instruments of protection that are free from lengthy procedures and new preventive strategies aimed at stopping the perpetration of harmful behaviors within intimate relationships and couple dynamics[291]. Given the fact that TFIPV is very much alive in Italy, and the introduction within the criminal law system of specific crimes such as cyberstalking and NCII seems to be insufficient, on its own, to fight the practices effectively, in Italy there is still a long way to go.

2.2.2 Campaigns and Civil Society initiatives targeting TFIPV

Although the issue of TFIPV is still a relatively new phenomenon, in more recent years in Italy, growing attention has been given to this form of violence. Therefore, in addition to legislative measures, a number of civil society initiatives, projects,

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[291]Greco, G., & Greco, F., (2020)

and (online) awareness-raising campaigns have been promoted to address the problem and prevent this new form of violence. To begin with, worth mentioning is the 2008 *"I chose"* campaign which was promoted by the organization *"Cuore e Parole"*. This initiative focused primarily on raising awareness among mothers on the dangers of sexting[292]. Another more recent campaign called *"Sop Sexting and Revenge Porn"* was launched by Mete Onlus in partnership with the Sicily Region and *Federfarma.* This project implemented a poster campaign against sexting inside schools and pharmacies in the city of Palermo and its province. The poster also included the 091/8931071 Number of the National Observatory against Sexting and Revenge porn, together with the e-mail to enable victims to seek help or request information and support[293]. Although trying to provide feasible short-term solutions to these forms of online abuse, these types of initiatives adopting a more "preventive approach" have been criticized and their effectiveness has been questioned, as they prioritize «restraining the course of action of potential victims (who are almost exclusively girls and women) rather than addressing the social and cultural causes at the root of the problem.[294]» Moreover, as the authors Capecchi & Gius highlight «focusing on the necessity to abstain from what is perceived as risky, this frame not only normalizes online GBV but also exposes those exposed to violence to the risks of further victimization.[295]»

For these reasons, some other alternative approaches have been recently adopted in Italy to contrast online forms of violence. One of these focuses on media education initiatives or educational programs aimed at supporting teenagers and young people in recognizing violence, promoting consent, and creating a more equal and inclusive society. Examples are the *"Play4 your rights[296]"* EU project (2020) promoted by COSPE Onlus which aimed at constructing new counter-narratives to deconstruct gender stereotypes and at developing new innovative strategies to contrast online GBV, cyberbullying, and online sexism through innovative use of gaming as a

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[292]Capecchi S., Gius C., (2023), Gender-based Violence Representation in the Italian Media: Reviewing Changes in Public Narrations from Femicide to "Revenge Pornography" " *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15(1), pp. 81-100.
[293]See https://www.federfarma.it/Edicola/Filodiretto/VediNotizia.aspx?id=24303
[294]Capecchi S., Gius C. (2023)
[295]Ibidem
[296]See https://www.cospe.org/news/59802/play-4-your-rights-un-progetto-europeo-per-contrastare-il-sessismo-tra-gli-adolescenti-attraverso-il-gioco/

strategy of engagement, or other similar projects and initiatives such as the Action Aid *"Youth for love[297]"* (2021). Finally, another interesting project has been promoted by the Lombardy region. The Region, by implementing the Regional Law 1/2017 "Discipline of regional interventions in the field of preventing and combating the phenomenon of bullying and cyberbullying[298]", has decided to promote the *"BULLOUT"* line of intervention with the general aim of supporting projects to prevent and combat bullying and cyberbullying. The *BULLOUT* intervention line aims at promoting the implementation of projects aimed at implementing awareness-raising, information, and training programs, including computer-based ones aimed at minors and families; implementing support programs for minors who are victims of bullying and cyberbullying; promoting rehabilitation programs aimed at the perpetrators of bullying and cyberbullying; and finally, promoting the development and consolidation of a school and community policy against bullying and cyberbullying through the involvement of local figures such as school contact persons for the fight against cyberbullying[299].

Albeit targeting mostly the broader phenomenon of online GBV and not specifically the TFIPV issue and albeit focusing almost exclusively on adolescents and young generations, these campaigns were very relevant since they tried to address for the first time the phenomenon of online GBV not as a separate issue but as a precise expression of offline GBV while using digital media and new technologies as a bridge to raise awareness and reinforce positive behaviors[300].

Finally, another alternative approach has arisen which has been defined as the "counteract approach". This approach, mainly promoted by online Italian feminist groups, encompasses initiatives and campaigns aimed at promoting gender equality online, based on the idea that women and girls should respond to men's and boys' online GBV and utilize the web to create safe online spaces for everyone to discuss and share their experiences avoiding the risks of further victimization[301]. An

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[297]See https://www.actionaid.it/progetti/youth-for-love
[298]Available at
https://normelombardia.consiglio.regione.lombardia.it/NormeLombardia/Accessibile/main.aspx?iddoc=lr002017020700001&view=showdoc
[299]Available at https://www.cyberbullismolombardia.it/pag/bullout/28/
[300]Capecchi S., Gius C. (2023)
[301]Ibidem

example of this new "counteract approach" was the 2020 campaign *"#teacherdosex"* which was launched by a collective of artists to protest the dismissal of an elementary school teacher whose intimate images were disseminated on the internet without her consent. The hashtag was used nationwide by other teachers and educators to express solidarity and support to their colleagues and refute these forms of online GBV[302].

To sum up, as authors Capecchi & Gius report three main approaches – "preventive", "educational," and "counteractive" – have been adopted in Italy to date to address the phenomenon of online GBV. However, as already mentioned, these projects and initiatives have only focused on the more general and broader phenomenon of online GBV (or some of its forms such as NCCI or cyberbullying), and not on how it is very often perpetrated within an intimate partner relationship or within a dating context. This research argues that the most effective and necessary approach in Italy to prevent and fight against these new forms of online GBV is the "educational" one. Educational programs – both in formal and informal educational settings – should be aimed at combatting or at least reducing gender stereotypes, misogyny, sexism, rape myths, gender violence acceptances, and patriarchal rules since they all contribute to the perpetuation and exacerbation of abusive practices online, particularly within intimate partner relationships. Secondly, educational programs should also be aimed at teaching appropriate and healthy use of digital devices, the Internet, and its main online platforms, including social media, websites, applications, and dating apps. The specific role of education and prevention programs will be more extensively considered and analysed in the following chapter.

2.3 An Italian literature review on TFIPV

2.3.1 Introduction

Although TFIPV is a fairly new phenomenon, and thus, even in Italy the existing scientific literature on this topic is still in its infancy, a number of empirical studies, mostly quantitative, have been conducted and have tried to capture the prevalence

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[302]Ibidem

and impact of some specific forms of TFIPV, such as cyberstalking, IBSA, sexting and other online abusive behaviours within intimate relationships. Indeed, to date, empirical studies of TFIPV in Italy have almost exclusively focused on young people, students, and adolescents, and very little research has examined adult victimization or perpetration.

This paragraph will try to provide a brief literature review of the few existing empirical studies concerning the nature, consequences, and/or prevalence of various forms of TFIPV in Italy. Empirical research on TFIPV in Italy is extremely sparse, and there are no studies to date that have attempted to investigate the nature and prevalence of the TFIPV phenomenon per sé in a comprehensive manner. For this reason, this section will present a review of the existing research literature pertaining either to a collection of abusive online behaviours that fall within the scope of TFIPV or to studies that individually examine a particular dimension of TFIPV. Specifically, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. What is TFIPV prevalence among Italian young adults, and how does it vary by socio-demographic factors (such as age, gender, nationality, and sexual orientation) or other predictors such as previous offline victimization?

2. Which coping strategies are utilized by individuals who have experienced some form of TFIPV?

3. What are the harms experienced by those who are victims of this abuse?

Thus, the purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of the research on TFIPV within the Italian national context and more fully understand the research trends on TFIPV by systematically examining the scholarly journal articles published in recent years. Indeed, this brief literature review also aims to show the strengths or weaknesses of the existing Italian studies' methodologies and design, to suggest future research that enhances the field's rigor, by highlighting that in Italy there is an urgent need for greater academic attention to issues concerning TFIPV since knowledge of the phenomenon, its nature, and incidence is the key starting point for promoting new initiatives and educational projects aimed at preventing this type of violence.

2.3.2 Methodology

The review was based on an electronic literature search using a variety of databases (e.g., Google Scholar, Galileo Discovery, Academic Search Premier, PubMed). Given the broad range of terminology used to describe the TFIPV phenomenon, and given the variety of behaviours that falls into this category, a combination of some keywords (both in English and Italian) were used in the review as research strings, including "technology-facilitated intimate partner violence in Italy", "online intimate partner violence in Italy", "online teen dating violence in Italy", "cyberstalking in Italy", "revenge porn in Italy", "image-based sexual abuse in Italy", "online gender-based violence in Italy", "dating violence in Italy", "non-consensual dissemination of intimate images in Italy" etc. What emerged from this initial research was that the phenomenon of cyberstalking seems to be the most considered and analyzed form of TFIPV. Indeed, nearly all the studies to date on TFIPV concern young adults and adolescents, and therefore very little is known about its prevalence and impact among adults.

From this literature search, theoretical and/or legal articles were excluded if they were not based on empirical, quantitative, or qualitative research. Furthermore, only academic papers published in the last seven years (from 2016 to 2023) were examined. Finally, only four articles were selected and included in this literature review because they seemed to be the most relevant from an empirical and methodological point of view. All the studies are quantitative and two of them deal with the phenomenon of cyberstalking in Italy (Begotti, Ghigo & Maran, 2022, Maran & Begotti, 2019), one with the phenomenon of NCII (Brighi et. al., 2023) and one with the phenomenon of sexting (Morelli et. al., 2016). All the selected studies involved Italian adolescents and young adults, except one study (Begotti, Ghigo & Maran, 2022) involving specifically and exclusively victims of cyberstalking abuses. Finally, the previously mentioned qualitative study conducted by "Movimento Giovani" for Save the Childre (IT) is also referred to in order to supplement what is currently known about OTDV in Italy. To simplify the analysis, this literature review has been divided into three different dimensions: prevalence, coping strategies, and consequences.

2.3.3 TFIPV in Italy: Key Findings

Prevalence

In Italy to date, minimal research has been conducted on the nature, scope, and prevalence among victims of TFIPV. Little is also known about the gender of perpetrators and victims and the intersections of other forms of discrimination and disadvantage on the grounds of race, age, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation. Moreover, consistent divergences exist among different categories of TFIPV. For instance, results from the four considered studies show gender and sexual orientation differences. As far as sexting is concerned, the survey conducted by Morelli et. al. (2016), which involved 1,334 adolescents and young adults aged from 13 to 30 (68% females; 32% males) reported that males did more sexting than women. In fact, young men and boys were more likely to be moderate users (6.1%) and high users of sexting (14.1%) than females (respectively 2% and 4.1%)[303]. Regarding sexuality, non-heterosexual participants were more high users of sexting behaviors (12.5%) than heterosexual participants (6.5%), and there were no significant differences regarding age (adolescents vs. young adults) between the three sexting groups (low users of sexting, moderate users of sexting, high users of sexting)[304]. However, contrasting findings demonstrate that young women and girls engage in sexting more than young men and boys: Brighi et. al.'s online survey (2023), which was conducted among a sample of 2047 Italian young adults (29.3% females, 53.4% males, 16.9%, not indicated=16.9%), and which included questions on NCII victimization, sexting behavior, sextortion, and IPV, showed that 33.9% of respondents reported engaging in sexting behavior, with females being three times more likely to engage in sexting than males. Moreover, participants who identify themselves as belonging to a sexual minority were more likely to be victims of NCII than their heterosexual counterparts[305]. In their research, in fact, they found a significant difference in the occurrence of NCII between LGBTQ+ people and

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[303]Morelli M., Bianchi D., Baiocco R., Pezzuti L., Chirumbolo A., (2016), Sexting, psychological distress and dating violence among adolescents and young adults, *Psicothema.* 28(2), pp.137-42.
[304]Ibidem
[305]Brighi, A., Amadori, A., Summerer, K., and Menin, D., (2023), Prevalence and Risk Factors for Nonconsensual Distribution of Intimate Images Among Italian Young Adults: Implications for Prevention and Intervention. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4412642

heterosexuals, with the first at a higher risk of experiencing NCII when compared to the second ones.

The phenomenon of cyberstalking in Italy seems to be particularly gendered as well: in Begotti, Ghigo & Maran's study (2022), which involved 242 victims of cyberstalking, victims were female in 72% of cases, while the perpetrator was male in 78% of cases[306]. These findings are in line with the results of the other selected research on cyberstalking (Maran and Begotti, 2019) which compared the effects of cyberstalking between victims of cyberstalking and victims of cyberstalking and previous offline victimization in their lifetimes. In most of the reported cases, in fact, the victim was a female while the cyberstalker was a male[307].

Other important predictors considered in these four selected studies are previous offline victimization, substance abuse, and intimate partner dynamics. In Morelli et. al.'s study, 442 participants (33.13%) reported that they had sexted during substance use at least once[308]. More broadly speaking high users of sexting (vs. moderate and low) tend to engage in more risky sexting behaviors, like for instance sexting during substance use. This alarming result seems in line with research that found sexting and other abusive behaviors online often related to substance use, especially when they occur within intimate relationships. Indeed, this study also shows that individuals who are high and moderate users of sexting (vs. low) engaged in more victimization, and more perpetration of dating violence, including online dating violence[309]. Victimization was a key element of analysis also in the study conducted by Maran and Begotti, where from a total of 107 (46.7%) victims of cyberstalking, seventy-two of them (67.3%) were victims of both cyberstalking and other forms of offline victimization in their lifetimes. Their research also demonstrated that victims of cyberstalking who had also experienced previous

[306]Begotti T, Ghigo MA, Maran DA, (2022), Victims of Known and Unknown Cyberstalkers: A Questionnaire Survey in an Italian Sample. *Int J Environ Res Public Health,* 17;19(8):4883
[307]Maran DA, and Begotti T., (2019), Prevalence of Cyberstalking and Previous Offline Victimization in a Sample of Italian University Students, *Social Sciences* 8, no. 1: 30.
[308]Morelli M., Bianchi D., Baiocco R., Pezzuti L., Chirumbolo A., (2016)
[309]Ibidem

victimization in their lifetimes tended to experience more depression and symptoms of trait anxiety than victims of cyberstalking only and non-victims[310].

As far as intimate partner dynamics are concerned, the data suggested by these four articles confirm what the existing literature on these forms of online violence supports, namely that they are often committed by a person known to the victim, who is often a partner or ex-partner. For instance, according to Brighit et. al.'s study, the most common experience of NCII was through initial voluntary content sharing, with 44.7% of the victims spontaneously providing intimate images to their partner during a relationship. Moreover, some forms of sextortion and psychological pressure were experienced by 28.9% of the victims, and in particular, 17.1% of them were involved in a severe form of sextortion[311]. Most of the time, the aggressor was in fact not a stranger but a well-known person from a trusting relationship or ex-relationship, and half of the time, respondents identified the aggressor as a partner (current or former)[312]. Additionally, coercive sexting behaviors within intimate partner dynamics emerged in Morelli et. al.'s research, where 44 (3.30%) participants reported having been forced to sext by a partner at least once. Indeed, high users of sexting were more likely to report being forced to do sexting both by partners, compared to moderate and low users of sexting[313]. These findings demonstrate that sexting and intra-partner violence are significant predictors of NCII.

Different results emerge, however, with regard to the phenomenon of cyberstalking: in Maran and Begotti's sample, most of the cyberstalkers were friends or acquaintances and not principally partners or ex-partners, or strangers[314]. More generally speaking, most of the studies on cyberstalking existing to date in Italy only show that it is a phenomenon that is usually committed by a person known to the victim, but they do not specify and do not investigate the specific emotional bond existing between the victim and the perpetrator (whether an intimate relationship, a friendship, a kinship, etc.) For instance, in Begotti, Ghigo & Maran's

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[310]Maran DA, and Begotti T., (2019)
[311]Brighi, A., Amadori, A., Summerer, K., and Menin, D., (2023)
[312]Ibidem
[313]Morelli M., Bianchi D., Baiocco R., Pezzuti L., Chirumbolo A., (2016)
[314]Maran DA, and Begotti T., (2019)

article, stranger perpetrators of cyberstalking were reported by 35% of victims, while the largest proportion of victims described the cyberstalker as a known person (65%), without specifying the type of relationship existing with the perpetrator[315].

Coping strategies

Victims of TFIPV typically adopt some coping strategies to face these negative experiences which have been the focus of analysis of a few studies in Italy. Coping strategies are those strategies that involve some behavioural reactions to aversive situations, like for instance situations that induce physiological stress reactions[316].

To begin with, academic literature has demonstrated that Italian victims of cyberstalking generally tend not to report their experiences and are more likely to seek help informally than formally[317]. According to Begotti, Ghigo, and Maran's study, victims of a known cyberstalker have a significantly higher tendency to use more than victims of an unknown cyberstalker specific coping strategy, such as increasing the abuse of substances such as alcohol and drugs, reducing social contact with friends and parents, buying a weapon, and trying to reason with the cyberstalker[318]. This may occur because normally well-known cyberstalkers possess more comprehensive and detailed information about the victim which typically involves various aspects of the person's private life and not just those available online. The unknown perpetrator, on the other hand, only has what the victim posts on the internet and social media accounts. But at the same time, victims of stranger perpetrators are more likely to use different strategies, such as blocking online contact or asking the administrator of a social network to intervene, demonstrating that victims of known cyberstalkers tend to use more proactive and

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[315]Begotti T, Ghigo MA, Maran DA, (2022).

[316]Wechsler, B., (1995), Coping and coping strategies: a behavioural view. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science, 43*, pp. 123-134.

[317]See Finn, J., (2004), A survey of online harassment at a university campus., *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *19*(4), pp. 468–483;
Alexy, E.M., Burgess, A.W., Baker, T., Smoyak, S.A., (2005), Perceptions of cyberstalking among college students, Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention, *5*(3), pp. 279–289;
Fissel, E.R., (2021), Victims' Perceptions of Cyberstalking: an Examination of Perceived Offender Motivation. *American Journal of Criminal Justice, 47*, pp. 161 - 175.

[318]Begotti T, Ghigo MA, Maran DA, (2022)

passive behaviors than victims of unknown perpetrators, which prefer to use more avoidance tactics[319].

More informal than formal coping strategies seem to prevail even in the case of NCII and other similar forms of abuse. Brighi et. al. report that «among those who reported NCII experiences, 56.7% spoke with somebody about what happened. The majority of them choose a close friend to share the negative experience. While only one participant reported having contacted anti-violence support centers, none of the victims reached out to the authorities (police), and only one got in touch with Social Media's Help Centers.[320]» Therefore, 43.9% of the victims did not talk with anyone about the negative experience of NCII, and among them, 37.9% chose not to talk about what occurred because they were too embarrassed, favoring an avoidance coping strategy. Particularly, 13.7% thought talking with someone would not have helped, and 6.8% would act as if nothing had happened[321].

To provide additional evidence in this respect, the above-mentioned Save the Children's study seems to confirm this tendency: of the 902 Italian adolescents aged between 14 and 25 years (258 males, 615 females and 29 non-binary) who participated in the consultation and filled out the online questionnaire, 74.5% of them confessed that if they were exposed to online violence by their partner, they would talk about it to a friend. 33% would talk about it only with one parent, 31,5% with both parents, and 30% with siblings. Only 25,5% of them would report the abusive episode to the police, and only 6.5% to the social media administrator. Indeed, 8% of the participants would not talk with anyone, and 5,8% confessed they would not know who to talk to about it[322]. These findings demonstrate that in Italy informal support networks (e.g., through a partner, relatives, or friends) may play an essential role in helping victims cope with the emotional and psychological

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[319]Avoidance tactics are strategies used by victims to deal with the situation, typically by changing their usual activities and routines, like for instance limiting their time spent online, or their use of social media. Passive strategies, whereas are those adopted by victims who try to ignore the cyberstalker, for example, by distracting themselves with other activities. Proactive strategies, on the contrary, consist in reporting the facts to the police or social media administrator, seeking legal or psychological help, telling someone about the abuse. (Begotti T, Ghigo MA, Maran DA, (2022))

[320]Brighi, A., and Amadori, A., and Summerer, K., and Menin, D., (2023)

[321]Ibidem

[322]Save The Children Italia, (2022), PROGETTO DATE, Develop Approaches and Tools to end online teen dating violence, consultazione delle opinioni di adolescenti sul tema della online teen dating violence

harms resulting from TFIPV victimization. Nonetheless, few victims sought professional/formal support (through a counseling center, social media administrator and/or the police) indicating the need for increased awareness and availability of support services for TFIPV victims.

Consequences

The last dimension taken into consideration in this brief literature review on TFIPV in Italy concerns the consequences that this phenomenon causes to victims. As already explained in the previous chapter, TFIPV, like any form of GBV, entails a number of negative consequences that can be classified as physical, psychological/emotional, and material. Evidence provided by the papers selected for this literature review appears to be in line with the already existing scientific literature on TFIPV, even if most of them focused predominantly on the psychological and emotional consequences of harm.

To begin with, the specific relationship between the amount of sexting, psychological distress, and dating violence in adolescents and young adults has been investigated by Morelli et. al.'s study which found that high and moderate users of sexting (vs. low) engaged in more victimization, and more perpetration of dating violence, including online dating violence. However, their study did not find any differences regarding psychological distress between low and high users of sexting[323].

As far as cyberstalking is concerned, Begotti, Ghigo, and Maran analysed the effects of this phenomenon in terms of physical and emotional consequences, depression, anxiety symptoms, attitudes toward telling of cyberstalking experiences, and coping strategies, comparing young adult victims of known cyberstalkers with those harassed by strangers through a self-administered questionnaire which was completed by 689 individuals. Of these, 242 victims were included in the analysis: 115 victims of unknown cyberstalkers and 127 of known cyberstalkers. 125 participants (58.1%) reported a state anxiety score that ranged from mild to high, with the majority of the victims experiencing anxiety symptoms

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[323]Morelli M., Bianchi D., Baiocco R., Pezzuti L., Chirumbolo A., (2016)

in response to the fear triggered by the cyberstalker. Additionally, the results of this study reported that 140 participants (62%) exhibited symptoms of trait anxiety[324]. As the authors explain, «trait anxiety is part of personality and reflects the existence of stable individual differences in the tendency to respond to threatening situations. The majority of respondents were activated even when there was no threat. They experienced the behavior of cyberstalkers in a continuous state of threat, in a seamless situation.[325]» More specifically, victims of known perpetrators more often reported tiredness as a physical symptom and sadness and lack of confidence in others as emotional symptoms than victims of unknown perpetrators. However, no significant differences were reported in the scores for depressive and state anxiety symptoms between the two groups. The only difference consisted in the fact that the scores for trait anxiety of the victims of known cyberstalkers were, on average, significantly higher than those of the victims of unknown cyberstalkers[326].

Additional evidence on cyberstalking effects was provided by Maran and Begotti's article, which aimed to compare the effects of cyberstalking between victims of cyberstalking and victims of cyberstalking and previous offline victimization in their lifetimes. A questionnaire was self-administrated to 229 Italian students, out of which 107 (46.7%) indicated that they had been victims of cyberstalking, with 72 of them (67.3%) being victims of both cyberstalking and other forms of offline victimization in their lifetimes. In the sample, victims reported higher scores for depression and anxiety than non-victims. In particular, victims of cyberstalking who had also experienced previous offline victimization in their lifetimes experienced more depression and symptoms of trait anxiety than victims of cyberstalking only and non-victims. Indeed, many of the cyberstalking victims who had experienced previous offline victimization were already manifesting signs of this tendency in terms of paranoia, fear, anger, and sadness[327].

Save the Children's study instead has reported the perceptions and emotional reactions of the adolescents who participated in the survey, showing that anger is

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[324]Begotti T, Ghigo MA, Maran DA, (2022)
[325]Ibidem
[326]Ibidem
[327]Maran DA, and Begotti T., (2019)

the prevailing reaction in case of receiving persistent and repetitive calls/messages to find out with whom and where they are (42.7%) or in case of attempts to spy on one's own partner's mobile phone, computer or tablet (56.5%). Some of the other reported feelings are confusion (10% and 9.5% respectively), indifference (8.1% and 16.9%), fright (17.5% and 3.9%), and worry (9.8% and 5.9%)[328].

Finally, in Italy to date, there are no significant academic studies on NCII specifically addressing and investigating the consequences of this phenomenon on victims. Even the NCII article selected for this literature review focused mainly on the risk factors and coping strategies used by victims and perpetrators of these forms of violence, instead of investigating the consequences of those harms. The research highlighted only the nonconsensual dimension of this practice, with 28.9% of the victims experiencing sextortion and psychological pressure but it did not consider the subsequent physical, psychological, and material consequences that victims of these practices have to face[329]. While the literature on this field in Italy is basically inexistent, the perceptions and emotional reactions of adolescents to the phenomenon of NCII have been collected by the Save the Children's study on OTDV. Most of the adolescents (29.6%) reported a feeling of embarrassment when receiving nude/sexual photos from their partners, whereas anger seemed to prevail in cases of sending intimate photos/videos to someone without their consent (69%)[330]. However, even this research did not investigate the medium/long-term consequences of the NCII phenomenon but only the immediate emotional reactions of the adolescents who completed the questionnaire. Furthermore, the survey considered a number of hypothetical situations and did not distinguish between those who actually already experienced NCII and other similar online abuses (and therefore were victims of these forms of online GBV) and those who did not (and therefore, were not victims).

To conclude, from what emerges from the analysis of the Italian academic literature on NCII, within the Italian national context there is an urgent need for further studies and research to investigate the impact and consequences that this

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[328]Save The Children Italia, (2022)
[329]Brighi, A., and Amadori, A., and Summerer, K., and Menin, D., (2023)
[330]Save The Children Italia, (2022)

phenomenon has on victims and, in particular, on certain vulnerable and/or discriminated groups (such as persons belonging to a sexual minority, persons with disabilities, migrants etc.).

2.3.4 Results and discussion

This literature review sought to examine the existing empirical literature on a range of TFIPV behaviors in Italy. Research regarding TFIPV in Italy is still extremely new, and there are significant limitations in both the scope and number of empirical studies conducted to date. Moreover, research that considers the adult population is basically non-existent, with almost all existing studies focusing exclusively on young people, students, and adolescents. As far as this literature review is concerned, many of its limitations derive from the fact that the instruments used in these four selected articles vary widely, meaning that their findings are not fully comparable, also due to a lack of standardized and uniform definitions of the different TFIPV behaviors.

Firstly, all the considered studies focus exclusively on one specific category of TFIPV (two studies on cyberstalking, one on NCII, and one on sexting) and do not aim to investigate and analyze the TFIPV phenomenon as a whole. Only one selected study – namely the one conducted by the Movimento Giovani of Save the Children IT – attempted to capture the peculiarities of the OTDV phenomenon in Italy comprehensively. Nevertheless, it was based entirely on the opinions and perceptions of the adolescents who took part in the survey.

Secondly, another main limitation of this literature review consists of the fact that the mean age of all studies' samples was quite young. All the selected studies, in fact, used a "young adult/student sample". This has significant implications for understanding the actual prevalence of TFIPV in Italy since there is still very limited knowledge of how middle to older-aged groups experience such online abusive behaviors.

Third, similarly, very little is known of the prevalence rates of TFIPV behaviours in different racial, ethnic, religious, sexuality, and other vulnerable groups. The sexuality variable has been considered only by two studies: Morelli et. al.

demonstrated that non-heterosexual participants were higher users of sexting behaviors (12.5%) than heterosexual participants (6.5%)[331], whereas Brighi et. al.'s online survey showed that LGBTQ+ participants were at a higher risk of experiencing NCII when compared to heterosexual ones.[332] As far as NCII is concerned, these findings seem to confirm the fact that very often societal stigma and shame for sexual orientation or gender identity for LGBTQ+ individuals makes it harder for them to report IBSA , as they may fear discrimination, social exclusion, rejection or not being taken seriously by authorities. Indeed, although this is not a significant finding, given the inconsistency of literature on this topic, it is important that further investigation be undertaken in relation to NCII against sexual/gender minorities in Italy, especially when occurring in the context of an intimate partner relationship. LGBTQ+ individuals who have experienced these types of abuses should be provided with appropriate legal protection and resources, in order to avoid stigmatization and second victimization.

As far as the "gender" variable is concerned, in all the selected papers TFIPV behaviours in Italy appear to be particularly gendered. The two "cyberstalking studies" considered in this literature review (Begotti et. al., Maran and Begotti), for instance, demonstrate that in most of the reported cyberstalking cases, the victim was a female while the perpetrator was a male. These findings seem to contradict part of the already existing scientific literature (Burke et al. (2011), Stonard et. al (2017)) that considers controlling and monitoring behaviours among young populations and adolescents to be more widespread and more frequently perpetrated by girls and young women, suggesting that further research should be conducted to better investigate the role of gender in TFIPV prevalence.

In line with the findings of the existing literature on the topic, other factors in this literature review, such as previous offline victimization, substance abuse, and intimate partner dynamics, proved to be relevant predictors of TFIPV behaviors in Italy (Morelli et. al., Maran and Begotti). Drug/alcohol abuse and having suffered previous offline victimization, for instance, seem to increase the risks of engaging

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[331]Morelli M., Bianchi D., Baiocco R., Pezzuti L., Chirumbolo A., (2016)
[332]Brighi, A., and Amadori, A., and Summerer, K., and Menin, D., (2023)

in risky sexting behaviours, controlling and monitoring behaviours, and other abusive/non-consensual online practices, especially when occurring in the context of an intimate partner relationship. The existence of an intimate/romantic relationship or a dating dynamic is identified by most of the existing scientific literature, as well as in this literature review, as a predictor of online abusive behaviours. Particularly, from this literature review emerged that sextortion/coercive sexting behaviours, and NCII in Italy were frequently committed by a person known to the victim, who was often a current partner or ex-partner. (Brighi et. al., Morelli et. al.). As already mentioned in the first chapter, persons in abusive intimate partner relationships, especially women and girls living in contexts of domestic violence/IPV, are among those categories of people who are more likely to experience some form of online GBV, at the hands of their (ex) intimate partners since there is often a continuation between offline and online GBV.[333] However, from what emerged from this literature review, in Italy, the same cannot be said for perpetrators of cyberstalking. Most existing studies on cyberstalking in Italy report in fact that it is a crime that is usually and typically perpetrated by a person well-known to the victim (Begotti, Ghigo & Maran, Maran and Begotti). In Begotti, Ghigo & Maran's study, for instance, most victims described the cyberstalker as a known person (65%), without specifying the type of relationship existing with him/her[334]. However, the extensive academic literature on IPCS and TFCC has demonstrated that cyberstalking is a form of TFIPV that typically and particularly takes place in the contexts of IPV/domestic violence. Therefore, it can be assumed that the percentages of "known perpetrators" in Italian studies may represent the category of "partners or ex-partners perpetrators". Of course, further empirical research would be needed in Italy to analyze the weight and incidence of this variable in a more precise and detailed manner.

Following, another relevant element that emerged from this literature review concerns "coping strategies". For both cyberstalking and NCII cases, more informal than formal coping strategies prevailed in three studies (Begotti, Ghigo & Maran, Brighi et. al., Save The Children Italia), with very few victims seeking

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[333]Dunn, S., (2020)
[334]Begotti T, Ghigo MA, Maran DA, (2022)

professional/formal help through the police, or social media administrator and with most of them seeking support through informal networks like family, friends, partners, etc. Moreover, a quite large proportion of victims in Italy still prefer (or would prefer) not to talk with anyone about their abusive experiences because of shame, fear, and embarrassment. These "coping strategies trends" might be the consequences of a normative and political approach that only prioritizes criminal law instead of prevention strategies and educational programs[335]. They can be interpreted as the reflection of a national context where legal proceedings are often too long, too cumbersome, and unclear, where access to justice is still difficult for many persons, and where people often risk not being taken seriously or having their situation belittled or misinterpreted by the police or judiciary themselves. In Italy, in recent years, especially after the Economic and Financial Crisis and the spreading of Populism, there is a high level of mistrust towards the authorities and the law enforcement agencies, which can be seen reflected in these low percentages and numbers of people choosing to report and denounce their abusive experiences to the authorities. Furthermore, many people still lack the necessary tools and knowledge to recognize and stop these forms of online GBV, also due to the weakness and narrowness of the Italian legal framework, which still classifies these forms of violence as common "cybercrimes" instead of placing them under the heading of "online GBV". Controlling and abusive behaviours are frequently considered, especially by young people and adolescents as "normal" behaviours within intimate relationships or simply as manifestations of love, caring, and affection. The "non-consensual dimension" of IBSA is still not very clear among the Italian population due to prevailing gender stereotypes and norms blaming women and girls for their behaviors. Moreover, the Italian framework does not include yet sufficient and well-structured prevention strategies or educational programs aimed at helping individuals to identify potential online dangers and threats and to delineate the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable conduct within intimate relationships. Therefore, the inefficiency and overall limitation of the Italian national framework could explain the prevalence of these

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[335]Greco, G., & Greco, F., (2020)

types of coping strategies, although further studies would be needed to further investigate these dynamics.

Finally, as far as consequences are concerned, this literature review has proved that victims of cyberstalking in Italy tend to experience many psychological and emotional harms such as depression, anxiety symptoms (including "trait anxiety"), tiredness, sadness, fear, paranoia, and lack of confidence (Begotti Ghigo & Maran and Begotti). In particular, Maran and Begotti found a significant and positive correlation between having experienced previous offline victimization and the increase in depression and "trait anxiety" symptoms. A large proportion of cyberstalking victims who had also experienced previous offline victimization in their lifetimes experienced in fact more depression and symptoms of trait anxiety than victims of cyberstalking only and non-victims[336]. However, none of the four analyzed studies except the one conducted by Save The Children IT – which is, however, based only on the opinions and perceptions of the survey participants – investigated the consequences that the NCII phenomenon has on victims in Italy, revealing a strong gap at the academic level. This gap could arise from the fact that IBSA, as well as coercive sexting/sextortion, are quite sensitive topics that people often find it difficult to talk about freely and openly due to shame, fear of social exclusion, and social stigma, even when questionnaires are conducted online and anonymously. Also in this case, the Italian regulatory framework which seems to endorse a "victim-blaming" perspective binding the element of harm to the absence of "consent" by the target, does not help to reduce the social stigma surrounding these issues[337].

To conclude, once again this literature review on the TFIPV phenomenon in Italy has demonstrated that within the Italian national context, there is still an urgent need for further studies and research to investigate this issue, as well as new and innovative approaches to prevent and fight it. Therefore, in this conclusive paragraph, some avenues for future research and strategies will be suggested.

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[336]Maran DA, and Begotti T., (2019)
[337]Powell, A., Flynn, A., & Sugiura, L. (2021)

2.3.5 Conclusion and avenues for future research and strategies

Following this literature review on a few Italian TFIPV studies and the previous analysis of the Italian normative framework to combat these online abuses, it has become evident that within the Italian jurisdiction, there are gaps in legislative responses to newly emerging online harms, particularly when they occur in the context of an intimate partner relationship or when they involve young people and minors (OTDV). Indeed, these normative gaps and limitations are accompanied by a scarcity/limitation of empirical studies and scientific literature on the topic.

However, as revealed by the civil society initiatives, projects, and campaigns reviewed in the previous paragraphs, it is clear that in more recent years, the Italian community has been raising concerns about these abusive online behaviours, even in the absence of empirical research.

This literature review has demonstrated that further quantitative/qualitative research into the prevalence, nature, and gender-based nature of the TFIPV phenomenon in Italy and its main sub-categories would be needed to inform the development of new and innovative legislative and regulatory responses, as well as community education focused on awareness raising and prevention.

To begin with, future research in Italy needs to focus on identifying the extent and nature of a range of TFIPV behaviors, including their prevalence, the effects of victimization and perpetration, the gender dynamics of these behaviors, individual actions taken to respond, and the results of those actions. Future studies also need to embrace a more "intersectional" approach, to investigate the specific relationship between violence and attitudes to violence, gender, and sexuality, and to fully understand intersections between gender, sexuality, race, disability, age, and other factors within the Italian national context. Although TFIPV prevalence rates in Italy are difficult to establish due to the novelty of the phenomenon, due to the lack of comprehensive data and empirical research, and the different definitions used to describe it, this literature review has demonstrated that in Italy both women and men may be victims and perpetrators of TFIPV behaviours. However, women and girls, as well as LGBTQ+ people, are more likely to be targeted for specific forms of digital abuse, such as cyberstalking and NCII. For these reasons, the specific

"gendered" nature of these forms of online abuse should be better and more deeply investigated and understood.

As far as OTDV is concerned, following Sánchez et al. and Walrave et al.'s proposals, Italy should reinforce or adopt new measures to raise young people's awareness concerning sexual risk behaviors and the legal consequences of risky/nonconsensual sexting, NCII, and cyberstalking[338]. Indeed, Italian teachers, psychologists, pedagogists, educators, and health professionals should be more specifically trained in the identification, orientation, prevention, and intervention of TFIPV cases. These figures, together with families and school counselors, may play a crucial role in helping Italian students and their families to identify the risks of online dating abuse in adolescence, an issue that is frequently played down by teenagers' parents as "harmless" or "less dangerous[339]". Italian school curricula should be updated and restructured to include knowledge on teen dating abuse, as well as assessment and prevention of cases of OTDV. Furthermore, in Italy, there is an urgent need to introduce "comprehensive sex education" programs within schools and other formal and non-formal educational settings, which consider the more emotional and relational aspects of sexuality, in addition to the purely sexual ones. Borrajo et al., for instance, recommended «the adoption of preventive programs targeting preteen boys and girls and that challenge the justifications cited by teenagers for relationship abuse, such as "jealousy", "aggression as a game", or "payback", in cases where one partner commits violence because the other partner already did.[340]»

Secondly, as previously mentioned, in Italy to date, most empirical studies on different dimensions of TFIPV focus almost exclusively on young people, students, and adolescents. In contrast, there are very few empirical studies on adults.

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[338]Sánchez V., Muñoz-Fernández N., Vega E., (2015), Cyberdating in adolescence: the risks and the emotional harm of sexual cyberbehavior. *Psychology, Society & Education;* 7: pp. 227- 40;
Walrave M., Ponnet K., Van Ouytsel J., Gool EV, Heirman W., Verbeek A., (2015), Whether or not to engage in sexting: explaining adolescent sexting behavior by applying the prototype willingness model. *Telematics and Informatics;* (32): pp. 796-808.
[339]Dank M., Lachman P., Zweig JM, Yahner J., (2014), Dating violence experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*; 43(5), pp. 846-57
Murray CE, King K., Crowe A., (2016), Understanding and addressing teen dating violence: implications for family counsellors, *The Family Journal*, 24(1), pp.52-59
[340]Borrajo E., Gámez-Guadix M., Calvete E., (2015), Justification beliefs of violence, myths about love and cyber dating abuse, *Psicothema*; 27, pp.327-33 in Flach, R. M. D., & Deslandes, S. F. (2017), Cyber dating abuse in affective and sexual relationships: a literature review, *Cadernos de saude publica*, 33(7)

Therefore, new empirical research should consider and include also "adult population samples", since these forms of online violence are now widespread even within intimate relationships between adults. Overall, prevalence rates regarding adult experiences of TFIPV are crucial to further informing both reforms to law and practice, and future research[341].

Finally, from what emerged from this literature review, TFIPV coping strategies are yet a highly relevant field of study that should be further investigated, to better understand individual responses to these forms of online abuse. Given the inefficiency of formal support agencies in Italy, it would be helpful to design and implement new safe, inclusive, and welcoming "listening spaces", specifically aimed at helping and supporting victims of these types of online abuse. Shelters, anti-violence centres, counseling centers in Italy are usually not sufficiently informed and trained on the individuation, recognition, and assessment of these types of online abuse, or people often do not want to rely on these types of services out of fear, social stigma, and shame or simply because they consider their situation "not that serious" or dangerous enough to have to resort to these facilities. However, it is extremely important to immediately recognize and stop this type of violence wrongly considered as "less serious" or "less dangerous", since it can quickly escalate into physical offline forms of violence and even cause the death of the person involved.

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[341]Henry, N., & Powell, A. (2018)

CHAPTER 3 - EMPOWERING THROUGH EDUCATION: THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PREVENTING TFIPV

As emerged in the previous two chapters, education is an indispensable pillar in the prevention of TFIPV. By raising awareness, promoting digital literacy, fostering healthy, equal, and respectful relationship dynamics, and equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly, education and prevention programs may play a pivotal role in preventing risky, abusive and unhealthy online behaviours within intimate partner relationships. Indeed, education empowers individuals to respond assertively and confidently to online abuses, reducing vulnerability, manipulation, control and risks of victimization and stigmatization.

This third chapter delves into the multifaceted impact of education in tackling TFIPV and emphasizes its capacity to empower individuals, especially young people, to develop safe, equal, and respectful digital relationships. Given the fact that both young boys and girls are educated based on gender stereotypes and standardized gender norms, it is fundamental to provide them with the necessary tools to demystify risky, abusive, and unhealthy cyber-behaviors that they have normalized in their intimate relationships[342]. Firstly, the chapter will provide some reasons why education may play a pivotal role in preventive strategies targeting TFIPV. After this brief introduction, the chapter will continue by presenting some examples of already existing school-based education programs aimed at preventing TFIPV behaviours. A section of this paragraph will be devoted specifically to the "*MenABLE*" (*Empower Manpower against gender-based violence online*) project of the international organisation "European Schoolnet" (Brussels), co-funded by the European Commission, and which inspired this research work. Subsequently, the crucial role of sex and relationship education in preventing violent and abusive online behaviours will also be analysed, in particular by reflecting on the need for the adoption and implementation of comprehensive sex education programs within both formal and informal education settings, which also incorporate ICTs for their

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[342]Rodríguez-Castro, Y., Martínez-Román, R., Alonso-Ruido, P., Adá-Lameiras, A., & Carrera-Fernández, M. V., (2021), Intimate Partner Cyberstalking, Sexism, Pornography, and Sexting in Adolescents: New Challenges for Sex Education. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *18*(4), 2181.

safe and responsible use. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the use of technology and ICT means as pedagogical/educational tools to contrast TFIPV will be questioned, also by reflecting on the importance of critical social media literacy and promoting and implementing comprehensive digital literacy programs. Finally, the chapter will conclude by providing some evidence of the effectiveness of prevention programs in to fight against TFIPV behaviours, also to encourage the design and adoption of new, innovative, and comprehensive programs. By addressing the issue at its roots, these programs can really foster awareness, education, and a sense of empowerment among individuals, communities, and institutions.

3.1 The importance of education to prevent TFIPV

This paragraph will investigate some of the reasons why education may play a crucial role in preventing TFIPV. To begin with, five main reasons have been identified to support this thesis which can be summarised as follows: raising awareness, promoting digital literacy, fostering healthy, respectful, and equal relationship dynamics, equipping people (especially youth) with coping strategies, and building a supportive community.

Firstly, education acts as a catalyst for raising awareness about the potential risks and dangers of TFIPV behaviours. By recognizing, identifying, and understanding the signs and impact of TFIPV, individuals are better prepared to identify and respond to problematic and risky online behaviors. Educational interventions may include awareness campaigns, seminars, and awareness and training workshops for potential victims of TFIPV as well as for potential perpetrators [343]. Through awareness campaigns, for instance, individuals are informed about the various forms of digital abuse that may occur within a dating context or within couple dynamics, such as cyberstalking, IBSA, cyberbullying, cyberharassment, etc. Addressing the root causes of online intimate partner abusive behaviors is essential. Therefore, programs that work with perpetrators (or potential perpetrators) to challenge and modify their behaviors can contribute to long-term change. These educational attempts will in fact make individuals more aware of possible negative

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[343]Barak, A., (2005), Sexual Harassment on the Internet. *Social Science Computer Review*, *23*(1), pp. 77–92.

outcomes that their abusive online behaviours may have on themselves and on their victims. Indeed, it is hoped that for some of these people, educational intervention might change perceptions, attitudes, and socio-cultural values and, thus, contribute to changing their potential problematic and abusive behaviors[344].

Secondly, as the already existing scientific literature on the topic frequently highlighted, digital literacy – especially critical media literacy – is a fundamental component of education aimed at preventing TFIPV. Incorporating digital literacy into formal education curricula equips students with essential skills to become responsible digital citizens who contribute to meaningful conversations, engage in constructive dialogue, and exercise ethical and responsible behavior in online spaces, also by dismantling and deconstructing media stereotypes and biases[345]. By promoting critical thinking and discernment, digital literacy serves as a shield against falling victim to online abusive behaviours such as cyberstalking, doxing, NCII, and other digital hazards. Beyond the classroom, community-based initiatives and workshops can also contribute to enhancing digital literacy among people of all ages [346]. Comprehensive digital literacy programs may teach individuals how to navigate online platforms safely and carefully, protect their privacy and online security, educate them about responsible digital citizenship, and help them recognize the signs of abuse in the digital sphere. Some prevention programs, including some school-based programs, have involved partnerships with technology companies like Apple, Microsoft, Verizon, Dell, to develop pedagogical and educational tools, features, and protocols that enhance users' safety, responsibility, and awareness [347]. These collaborations can deter (potential) perpetrators and provide victims with additional protection and support.

Thirdly, education provides a platform for teaching healthy, equal, safe, and respectful intimate relationship dynamics, both online and offline. By emphasizing principles of mutual respect, healthy communication, consent, and empathy,

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[344]Ibidem

[345]Hobbs, R., & Jensen, A., (2014), The Past, Present, and Future of Media Literacy Education. *Journal of Media Literacy Education,* 6(1), pp. 1-11.

[346] National Association for Media Literacy Education. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://namle.net/resources/media-literacy-defined/

[347]Hobbs, R., & Jensen, A., (2014).

individuals, especially young people, became able to establish positive, equal, healthy, and respectful (online) intimate relationships, while being vigilant against potential abuses. These educational programs, which are normally carried out within school curricula (e.g., sex and relationship education), can really contribute to a cultural shift towards healthy relationships, where violent, abusive, and controlling online behaviors are less tolerated and more swiftly condemned[348]. As has emerged in the previous chapters, young people are often not taught what healthy relationships look like and they tend to associate monitoring, controlling, and other abusive online behaviours as ways to express love, care, and affection toward a partner and as an "effective" tool to maintain solid their intimate relationship[349]. As King-Ries (2011) claims, youth are particularly vulnerable «as they pervasively use and incorporate technology in their intimate relationships» and in so doing they «tend to believe that what is happening [the abuse and stalking] to themselves and their peers is normal.[350]» Moreover, many gender stereotypes and norms have been internalized by young people, which is why education, especially within school environments, could play a crucial role in promoting a culture of respect, tolerance, and gender equality.

As far as the fourth reason is concerned, namely coping strategies, education can equip individuals with effective coping strategies to deal with instances of TFIPV. This fourth reason is strongly connected and related to the previous one, since through prevention programs, awareness campaigns, workshops, seminars, as well as through counseling services teaching individuals to "deconstruct" themselves and recognize the signs of a toxic relationship, individuals become able to obtain useful tools for setting boundaries, managing conflict within their intimate relationships, and seeking help and support when faced with online abusive behaviors. Mental health professionals and other health professionals should also receive training to recognize TFIPV behaviours and risk factors in order to be able

[348]O'Brien, K. M., Sauber, E. W., Kearney, M. S., Venaglia, R. B., & Lemay, E. P., Jr., (2021), Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Online Intervention to Educate College Students About Dating Violence and Bystander Responses. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, *36*(13-14)

[349]Rodríguez-Castro, Y., Martínez-Román, R., Alonso-Ruido, P., Adá-Lameiras, A., & Carrera-Fernández, M. V. (2021)

[350]King-Ries, A., (2011), Teens, technology, and cyberstalking: The domestic violence wave of the future? *Texas Journal of Women and the Law,* 20(2), pp. 131–164.

to provide adequate and specialized support for victims. Therapists can help survivors cope with the emotional and psychological harm of the abuse. Evidence to date shows that there is an urgent need to improve physician continuing medical education (CME) in the management of IPV, and therefore of TFIPV as well[351].

Finally, education has also the positive outcome of creating a supportive community where individuals become able to discuss TFIPV issues and seek support and assistance openly and freely, without fear of judgment, prejudices, and biases. Prevention programs should empower individuals to recognize and resist abusive online behaviors within intimate dynamics, thereby creating a collective force against TFIPV within communities[352]. However, in order to be truly inclusive, prevention programs should be tailored to the diverse needs and cultural contexts of different communities, respecting their unique values and challenges. Indeed, it is fundamental, especially within schools, to develop strategies tailored to vulnerable and marginalized groups and to embrace an intersectional approach that recognizes all the factors that, along with gender, increase the vulnerability of people to TFIPV risks [353]. Teachers, students, their parents, and the wider community should work together with a shared responsibility to create an inclusive and welcoming environment that can foster both learning and academic knowledge on TFIPV issues, as well as well-being outcomes for everyone involved[354].

In conclusion, both formal and informal educational settings, communities, local organizations, and online platforms can serve as spaces for sharing experiences, seeking advice and help, and accessing useful and meaningful tools and resources. Education fosters a culture of solidarity and equality that encourages individuals to stand against TFIPV collectively. In the following paragraph, some already existing

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[351]Short LM, Surprenant ZJ, Harris JM Jr. (2006)., A community-based trial of an online intimate partner violence CME program, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine;*30(2), pp.181-5.

[352]Why Community Engagement is Key to Student Success in Schools, 16th August, 2023, available at https://www.district.au/article/why-community-engagement-key-student-success-schools

[353]Ferreira, G.L., (2021), Technology as Both a Facilitator of and Response to Youth Intimate Partner Violence: Perspectives from Advocates in the Global-South. *The Emerald International Handbook of Technology Facilitated Violence and Abuse*, pp. 427-446

[354]Why Community Engagement is Key to Student Success in Schools, 16th August, 2023, available at https://www.district.au/article/why-community-engagement-key-student-success-schools#:~:text=Engaging%20with%20the%20community%20delivers,that%20may%20affect%20student%20outcomes

school-based prevention programs targeting IPV, as well as TFIPV behaviours will be presented in order to provide a general picture of the design, modalities, and implementation of these programs.

3.2 School-based programs targeting TFIPV/OTDV

Schools and other formal educational settings are more than just educational institutions: they are influential environments where students develop social skills, beliefs, attitudes, and values. For this reason, integrating within school curricula prevention programs that address TFIPV issues can equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate the digital sphere safely, responsibly and consciously, and establish healthy and durable relationships both online and offline.

Although most school-based programs adopted so far have focused mainly on "teen dating violence", and not specifically on "online teen dating violence", a few of them have also tried to address the online component. These programs generally aim to increase students' knowledge about OTDV and healthy/unhealthy relationships, to modify attitudes and beliefs towards violence and abuse in the intimate relationship context, to increase positive behaviors, and to increase and develop the skills needed to create positive, healthy, and respectful relationships[355]. These programs also allow for early intervention, which is very important for averting future violence. TDV prevention programs are usually administered in person in middle and high schools, allowing teachers, educators, and program organizers to reach a large number of youths in an efficient manner[356]. Indeed, most of the recently developed programs adopt the so-called *"Socio–emotional learning"* (SEL) educational approach. SEL programs, in fact, aim to enhance the socio-emotional skills of students, with the proximal goal to foster «the development of five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies: self-

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[355]Lee, C., & Wong, J. S., (2020), Examining the effects of teen dating violence prevention programs: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 18, pp. 1-40*
[356]Ibidem

awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.[357]»

3.2.1 Examples of TDV/OTDV school-based prevention programs

For the purpose of this study, a number of school-based TDV/OTDV prevention programs tackling different topics will be presented, also covering different geographical areas and different school systems, even if the majority of them are US-based. In addition, this brief review has collected both school curricula specifically created to teach, discuss, and learn about these issues, as well as (online) initiatives, projects, and programs that target a young audience and can be implemented by teachers and educators in schools.

To begin with, almost all early programs adopted in schools on the topic of GBV among young people in the digital sphere focused on cyberbullying. In fact, given that traditional bullying is the strongest longitudinal risk factor for cyberbullying, prevention programs against traditional bullying have frequently, even if indirectly, targeted cyberbullying too[358]. Examples of such programs are the *"Olweus Bullying Prevention Program",* developed during the mid-90s by Dan Olweus, and which inspired most antibullying programs developed over the last 20 years. This program is based on a comprehensive approach that involves schoolwide, classroom, individual, and community components. It is designed and evaluated for use in elementary, middle, junior high, and high schools (K-12) and it aims to reduce and prevent various forms of bullying, including cyberbullying, among students and to improve peer relations at school[359]. It has been implemented in more than a dozen countries around worldwide, and in thousands of schools in the US. According to the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program's official website, «the program has been found to reduce bullying among students, improve the social climate of classrooms, and reduce related antisocial behaviors, such as vandalism and truancy.[360]» Other similar curricula have been developed in more recent years, such as the *"Common*

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[357]Schneider, M., & Hirsch, J. S., (2020), Comprehensive Sexuality Education as a Primary Prevention Strategy for Sexual Violence Perpetration. *Trauma, violence & abuse*, *21*(3), PP. 439–455.
[358]Sticca, F., Ruggieri, S., Alsaker, F., Perren, S., (2013), Longitudinal risk factors for cyberbullying in adolescence. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 23(1), pp. 52-67.
[359]See https://olweus.sites.clemson.edu/about.php
[360]Ibidem

Sense Media Digital Citizenship Curriculum", which offers a digital citizenship curriculum for educational settings, covering a range of different topics related to abusive or risky online behaviors, including cyberbullying. The curriculum provides interactive lessons, videos, and other interactive activities to teach students about responsible and respectful online communication, privacy, online security, and the potential consequences of cyberbullying[361]. Additionally, Google has created an educational program named "*Be Internet Awesome*" that focuses on teaching students about digital citizenship skills. This program includes an interactive game called "Interland" which helps young people learn about various aspects of online safety, including cyberbullying prevention[362]. As the authors Sticca et. al. highlight «because cyberbullying is related to other group dynamics (e.g. traditional bullying) and aggressive behaviours emerge early in childhood, there is a need for comprehensive programs that are able to target different antisocial behaviours starting as early as preschool. Furthermore, preventive efforts need to involve and actively support both the school and the parents in their efforts to deliver the prevention program.[363]»

Concerning school-based programs targeting dating violence in general, and not specifically OTDV, worth mentioning is the *"Break the Cycle's Ending Violence Curriculum*[364]"*. This Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-funded project is a partnership between RAND Corporation and Break the Cycle, and it consists of a prevention and early intervention program targeting ninth-grade Latino teens in Los Angeles. The project focuses on legal rights, responsibilities, legal repercussions, and protections for perpetrators and victims of teen dating violence, and it is delivered by attorneys. Early intervention services are made available to students within Break the Cycle's confidential legal services program[365]. Another very relevant project is the "*Fourth R: Strategies for Healthy Youth Relationships*[366]", a school-based interactive curriculum intended to be delivered in

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[361]See https://www.commonsensemedia.org/common-sense-annual-report
[362]See https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us/
[363]Sticca, F., Ruggieri, S., Alsaker, F., Perren, S., (2013).
[364]See https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reprints/2008/RAND_RP1308.pdf
[365]Hickman, L. J., Jaycox, L. H., & Aronoff, J., (2004), Dating violence among adolescents: prevalence, gender distribution, and prevention program effectiveness. *Trauma, violence & abuse*, 5(2), pp.123–142.
[366]See https://youthrelationships.org/pages/fourth-r-programs

classrooms by teachers in middle and high schools and designed to promote healthy behaviors related to dating relationships, sexual behavior, bullying, and substance use [367]. The program is based on social learning theory and stages of social development, and it was originally designed to be implemented for ninth-grade students, but it was subsequently adapted to be implemented among younger students and among students in the Bronx. It has been implemented widely throughout Canada, in the US (in 16 states), in Australia, Portugal, and Spain. It has been adapted for alternative education and aboriginal populations, Catholic schools, and French- and Spanish-language settings [368]. The Fourth R model draws inspiration from international movements that promote young people as agents of positive change on major health and well-being issues. Very similar is the *"R4Respect"* Australian project designed for school-aged children and young people ages 14-25 years. Its aim is to challenge attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that foster gender inequality and toxic masculinity. The project also facilitates workshops with young people to investigate the connections between power, gender, and violence [369]. In doing this «the peer educators improve the understanding young people have of consent; the dangers of coercion, catcalling, victim-blaming; and gender stereotypes. There is an emphasis on informing young people about digital abuse including sexting, revenge pornography and cyber-bullying.[370]» An example of a mixed intervention, instead, is the "*Safe Dates*" program which included both school activities for middle and high school students like for instance a school play about dating violence performed by peers, a 10-session curriculum delivered by health and physical education teachers, a student poster contest and community activities (e.g., community services for adolescents experiencing dating violence and service provider training). This program, in fact,

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[367]Cissner A. B., Ayoub L. H., (2014), Building Healthy Teen Relationships: An Evaluation of the Fourth R Curriculum with Middle School Students in the Bronx, Center For Court Innovation
[368]According to the program's developers, the aims of the Fourth R include:
1) helping youth strengthen relationship skills to assist in making safe, responsible choices;
2) addressing the common elements of multiple risk behaviors;
3) counteracting pro-abuse messages from peer culture;
4) emphasizing positive messages around safety and harm reduction; and
5) providing opportunities to develop assets and strengths (youth connections)
(Ibidem)
[369]See https://r4respect.org/
[370]R4Respect, (2019), Respectful Relationships Education, a program for school aged children and young people ages 14-25 years, available at
https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/media/10063/r4respect_peereducationguide_may2019_digital_pages.pdf

seeks to reduce dating violence among students and participants by changing attitudes that condone IPV and promote gender stereotypes, building conflict management skills, and increasing knowledge about community resources[371].

All these programs, although found to be quite effective, focus almost exclusively on the "offline" component of IPV, with only a few of them including also the "online" counterpart. But since these two forms of violence are extremely interconnected and often tend to coincide and overlap, some more recent school curricula have decided to include new modules and new programs/projects dealing more explicitly and specifically with TFIPV/OTDV issues. "*Love Is Respect*", for instance, is a comprehensive program that addresses technology-facilitated abuse as a significant component of its curriculum, again by promoting healthy relationships among young people and offering them various useful resources, including educational materials, videos, workshops, and a 24/7 helpline for teens[372]. Other relatively recent prevention programs are the "*Dating Matters: Understanding Teen Dating Violence Prevention[373]*" program, developed by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and the "*Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships[374]*", developed by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Both programs focus on preventing TDV, including OTDV, by providing students with educational resources, activities, and discussions to develop skills for recognizing and addressing OTDV instances and risks. The program *"That's Not Cool"*, developed by Futures Without Violence, instead, has adopted a "peer-education approach" since it includes an Ambassador Program that aims to encourage youth to take action against digital dating abuse in their school or community, by promoting the importance of setting boundaries, respecting consent, and communicating effectively in online and offline relationships. The program also includes interactive media like an online game, and social marketing to engage students in conversations about healthy digital behavior [375] . Finally, worth

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[371]Hickman, L. J., Jaycox, L. H., & Aronoff, J., (2004)

[372]See https://www.loveisrespect.org/

[373]See https://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/datingmatters/

[374]See https://www.rwjf.org/en/insights/our-research/2014/12/start-strong--building-healthy-teen-relationships.html#:~:text=Description%3A%20Start%20Strong%3A%20Building%20Healthy,messages%2C%20and%20changing%20school%20policies.

[375]See https://thatsnotcool.com/teen-violence-prevention-ambassador-program/

mentioning is also the *"SafeTeens Online"* educational program, specifically designed to teach young people about different topics such as online safety, digital citizenship, and healthy relationships. The program includes resources and interactive activities that cover various aspects of OTDV and how to protect oneself in online interactions which can be used by teachers and educators in classrooms[376].

More broadly speaking, many schools of different types and levels, including universities, all around the world have incorporated digital citizenship and online safety modules into their curricula, which frequently included discussions about TFIPV/OTDV as well. Moreover, some schools have also chosen to collaborate with local organizations or Internet providers/ICT companies to organize workshops specifically addressing TFIPV issues. Others have organized campaigns or events during which students learned and discussed digital citizenship, online safety, and healthy relationships, with the specific purpose of preventing OTDV. One example is the previously mentioned "*DATE*" Italian project, funded under the "*Rights Equality and Citizenship*" (REC) EU program. The program is implemented by Save the Children Italy in partnership with Edizioni Centro Studi Erickson and its activities run from January 2021 to December 2023. The objective is to open a debate on the OTDV issue between the adult world (professionals in the socio-educational and health area) and the world of adolescents (aged between 14 and 22), raising awareness and providing tools to recognize the phenomenon, prevent and contrast it[377]. In fact, this project –in addition to the creation of training courses addressed to professionals in the socio-educational and health areas, a basic e-learning course, a guide to affective relations named "Relation tips" addressed to adults (parents, professionals, etc.), and a toolkit for professionals – also envisaged the realisation of workshops in the cities of Reggio Calabria and Venice and their provinces. These workshops saw the "SottoSopra" citizens' groups of the Movimento Giovani for Save the Children IT as protagonists, who confronted each other, during 4 meetings in each territory through a series of mutual learning activities (Mutual Learning Workshop). The project results have been disseminated

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[376]See https://safeteensonline.org/
[377]Save The Children Italy, Progetto Date (Developing Approaches and Tools to End Online Teen Dating Violence), see https://www.savethechildren.it/cosa-facciamo/progetti/date-develop-approaches-and-tools-end-online-teen-dating-violence

through a peer-to-peer communication campaign and four awareness-raising events (one national event in Rome and three local ones in Ancona, Reggio Calabria, and Venice)[378].

To conclude, the effectiveness of some of these programs has already been investigated by a number of studies and will be the object of analysis in the following paragraph. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that the effectiveness of school-based TFIPV prevention programs depends on various factors, including the school's commitment, resource availability, and the engagement of both teachers and students. Tailoring programs to fit the needs and cultural context of the school community enhances their impact in addressing TFIPV/OTDV and promoting healthy relationships.

3.2.2 The MenABLE project

This session will be entirely devoted to the presentation of the *"MenABLE"* (*Empower Manpower against gender-based violence online*) project of the Bruxelles-based international organization European Schoolnet (EUN), on which I had the opportunity to collaborate during the three-month internship (from February to April 2023) that I have carried out within the EUN Digital Department.

EUN is a network of 34 European Ministries of Education (MoE) founded in 1997. As a non-profit international organisation, it aims to bring innovation in teaching and learning to key stakeholders such as MoEs, schools, teachers, educators, researchers, and industry partners in Europe, to support the transformation of education processes for 21st-century digitalized societies. Therefore, ICTs, digital rights, and digitization are assets of EUN's work[379]. More specifically, EUN works mainly on three strategic areas, namely:

- Providing usable evidence and data in the area of innovation in education to inform policy recommendations (via peer exchanges, policy experimentations, surveys and reports and via its various working groups);

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[378]Ibidem
[379]See http://www.eun.org/about;jsessionid=43773442D61A70C7C9A86D7535C6FDE8

- Supporting schools and teachers in their teaching practices (via the animation of three European networks eTwinning, Scientix and Better Internet for Kids/Insafe);

- Developing and sustaining a network of schools engaged in innovative teaching and learning approaches (via the activities organised around the Future Classroom Lab and via the FCL Ambassadors scheme)[380]

Concerning the internal structural organization, EUN is governed by a political body, the Steering Committee representing all its members (34 MoEs), and a Board of Directors, which manages the administrative and financial operations. In addition, the organization is composed of 4 working groups and 2 interest groups, which provide support to the EUN's agenda, and fuel its mission and vision[381].

MenABLE is a twenty-four-month newly launched (January/February 2023) project co-funded by the European Commission which aims to tackle online GBV, in response to its "Citizens, Equality, Rights, and Values Programme" (CERV-2022-DAPHNE)[382]. The first MenABLE kick-off meeting took place in Bruxelles on two days (20th-21st March 2023). Although the project is not solely and exclusively concerned with the issue of TFIPV/OTDV, it is extremely relevant since it is aimed at combating online GBV by promoting mutual awareness, tolerance, and respect and by means of prevention strategies primarily, but not exclusively, targeting boys and young men. According to this project, in fact, achieving this objective will only be possible when men and boys become part of the solution[383]. In this respect, MenABLE will focus particularly on Priority 3 ("primary prevention, changing social norms and behaviour, in order to end tolerance of all forms of gender-based violence"), which is aimed at preventing GBV by tackling its root causes.

The Belgian organization EUN is collaborating on this project with other three organizations: Child Focus (Belgium), Centre For Digital Youth Care DYC

[380]Ibidem
[381]See http://www.eun.org/about/governance
[382]See https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/cerv/wp-call/2022/call-fiche_cerv-2022-daphne_en.pdf
[383]See http://www.eun.org/projects/detail?articleId=9861943

(Denmark), and FORTH (Greece). The project will develop three main action pillars, namely: Creation of Tools, Education and Training, and Awareness Raising Activities.

Specifically, MenABLE aims at promoting a better understanding of the phenomenon of online GBV, by providing a European Toolbox for educators/practitioners, comprising a wide variety of resources, such as guidelines and interactive and audio-visual materials to be used in both formal and non-formal educational settings. Indeed, the project comprises also a wide range of national and European training and outreach activities to train and support students, teachers, school professionals, social workers, and other caregivers, as well as some awareness-raising campaigns and activities to promote the Toolbox and to tackle gender-based prejudices, bias, and stereotypes which could lead to GBV[384].

In more concrete terms, MenABLE targets early teens (13-15 years) and late teens (16-18 years) through formal and non-formal educational settings, by engaging them – together with their peers, educational professionals, and other professionals working with young people in youth and sports clubs, camps, libraries, and Safer Internet Centres amongst others– in youth-centric consultations, through a multifaceted learning journey.

The MenABLE Toolkit is built on a comprehensive research program that comprises three interrelated components enriching each other: a literature review on the online GBV phenomenon, a series of qualitative focus groups with young people, and fifteen semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders and experts in the field, as well as with some youth.

This project is extremely relevant also with regard to TFIPV/OTDV since it is aimed to tackle those social norms and behaviours that produce prejudices and gender-based stereotypes leading to the encouragement or acceptance of (online) GBV, like for instance the consumption of online pornography and how it can impact young people's expectations of sexual relationships, or the hyper-sexualization of youth both online as offline (e.g. sexting). The project, therefore, supports the importance of early intervention and positive sex education covering

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[384]See MenABLE Official Website https://www.menable.eu/about/

both online and offline aspects of young people's healthy relationships and sexuality. The project is further highly important since, despite broad calls for prevention programs to reduce TDV, there is a dearth of programs designed specifically (even if not exclusively) for young men and boys. In fact, programs that capitalize on the importance of informing and educating young males about the issues related to (online) GBV can have a positive impact on the choices they make in their future or current romantic relationships. Furthermore, the project will address different issues related to online GBV to raise awareness about the risks and dangers associated with specific types of online behaviours (e.g., NCII, grooming, sexting, cyberbullying), also to encourage young people to disclose and report online/offline incidents and look for support and help. The project will try to approach these various topics from a number of different educational focus angles and approaches, in particular, Social and emotional learning [385] (SEL), Media literacy[386] (ML), and Citizenship education[387] (CE).

3.3 Sex education and relationship education

As has already emerged in the previous paragraphs, the inclusion of sex and relationship (or sexual affective) education programs in school curricula is a key starting point for preventing abusive behaviours within intimate partner relationships, both offline and online. Sex and relationship education programs should be integrated into the curriculum at all levels of education as just one more subject, addressing essential content such as gender identity (sexism, misogyny, gender stereotypes, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.), self-esteem, and self-

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[385]SEL is the process through which youth and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (retrieved from https://casel.org/)

[386]ML provides a set of perspectives from which citizens can expose themselves to the media and interpret the meaning of the messages they encounter. Within an education context, it allows educators to start from pupils' existing understanding of the media. It uses a set of key media concepts – production, language, representation, and audience – which can be applied to the whole range of media. It enables children and young people to think in a more conscious and deliberate way, to understand and to analyse their own experience as online content users and creators. (Buckingham, D., (2013), Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture. Polity)

[387]CE refers to the cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural competencies learners need to become informed and critically literate citizens, socially connected and respectful of diversity, ethically responsible and engaged. (UNESCO, (2015) Global Citizenship Education, Topics and Learning Objectives, available at https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232993)

concept, emotions, respectful, healthy, and egalitarian socio-affective relationships based on trust, respect, loyalty, healthy communication, sexual behaviours, and sexual health[388]. The term "*respectful relationships education*" (RRE) as defined by the "*R4Respect*" Peer Education Guide encompasses «a broad view of educational work to prevent violence in relationships. It specifically includes respectful relationships education while also referring to related programs such as sexual violence prevention programs, image-based abuse, and online abuse prevention programs.[389]». RRE programs are usually grounded on a gender-based analysis of violence, including cyberviolence, and they investigate the influence and impact that power and gender inequality have on violence against women and girls. Many schools worldwide have embedded RRE learning in their Health and Physical Education curriculum[390]. An example of an effective RRE program is the "*Love U2: Communication Smarts [391]*" curriculum, which consists of seven modules that address healthy and unhealthy relationship patterns, communication and conflict resolution skills, and general problem-solving. This program teaches students skills to form and maintain healthy relationships, as well as to avoid or end unhealthy ones[392]. There were 260 individuals who completed the curriculum and classes were offered in two-day sessions. A study (2011) was conducted to measure the relative effectiveness of a brief intervention with the Love U2 healthy relationship curriculum compared to the much more intensive relationship education programs that have been previously provided to high-risk youth. Data were collected from 233 participants through measures of training and relationship outcomes pre- and post-training[393]. This study demonstrated that participants in the two-day sessions experienced a significant increase in relationship knowledge. Moreover, there was a significant improvement in attitudes toward couple violence,

[388]Rodríguez-Castro, Y., Martínez-Román, R., Alonso-Ruido, P., Adá-Lameiras, A., & Carrera-Fernández, M. V., (2021)
[389]R4Respect, (2019)
[390]Ibidem
[391]Pearson M., (2004), Love U2: Communication Smarts for All Relationships PREP® For Teens, The Dibble Institute, see https://www.dibbleinstitute.org/Documents/LoveU2-Communication.pdf
[392]Antle, B. F., Sullivan, D. J., Dryden, A., Karam, E. A., & Barbee, A. P. (2011), Healthy relationship education for dating violence prevention among high-risk youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(1), pp. 173–179.
[393]Antle, B. F., Sullivan, D. J., Dryden, A., Karam, E. A., & Barbee, A. P., (2011).

with students reporting a much lower level of acceptance of TDV[394]. This shows that knowledge of healthy relationships might contribute to a reduction in violent and abusive behaviours among youth.

To begin with, to fully understand the importance of these programs, it is worth remembering that boys and girls experience different socialization processes, and both are frequently educated and socialized on gender stereotypes and norms. As the authors Rodríguez-Castro et. al. explain «boys are educated as an "autonomous self", stressing independence, power, and oriented toward competitiveness. Girls are educated in the ethics of care, emotionality, and dependence, and they build their identity based on an "I in relation" to others, on commitment to the partner, granting love a central place in their life.[395]». This makes adolescent girls believe that they need to have a partner to obtain security, social recognition, status, and protection, making them afraid of losing "the girlfriend status" in the peer group. This demonstrates that intimate partner relationships are still very much conditioned by patriarchy and a conception of androcentric sexuality that implies that girls "without a partner" can be more easily ignored, attacked, or rejected by the peer group. Cyber abusive behaviours within couple dynamics are basically the combination of emotional dependence on a partner, on one hand, and feelings of jealousy and mistrust, on the other[396]. As a result, both boys and girls tend to consider cyber-controlling and other abusive online behaviours as harmless, not as a form of violence, and they may even regard them as normal, as a play, or as ways to express love, care, and affection toward a partner and as an "effective" tool to maintain their intimate relationships[397].

Therefore, teachers, professors, educators, schools, and universities, as well as students and their families, need to grapple with these gendered and sexualized power relations in the online environment and shift away from victim-blaming perspectives that only focus on victims' behaviors and responsibilities by replacing the attention on boys' toxic masculinity and practices that contribute to perpetuating

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[394]Ibidem
[395]Rodríguez-Castro, Y., Martínez-Román, R., Alonso-Ruido, P., Adá-Lameiras, A., & Carrera-Fernández, M. V., (2021)
[396]Ibidem
[397]Ibidem

a culture that normalizes NCII, cyberstalking and other forms of online abuse[398]. It is only by acknowledging the degree and severity of TFIPV/OTDV and how these practices, shaped by longstanding sexual double standards, disproportionately affect women and girls, that educational settings can begin to tackle these normalized forms of online GBV and support young people in navigating the complex terrain of digital sexual culture[399]. The goal of sex and relationship education programs should be to create a model of liberating, critical, and emancipating sexuality and for this purpose, it is necessary to design and implement "comprehensive sex education" (CSE) programs and to have adequate comprehensive sexual training. This is the only way for the current educational system to be able to respond to the new social realities and challenges generated both online and offline and to allow young people to live and express their couple and intimate relationships in an equal and violence-free way[400].

Comprehensive sexuality education has been defined by the United Nations' technical guidance, which was developed together by UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, UNAIDS, and WHO, as «a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being, and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.[401]» CSE programs may have different names depending on the country or region and they are different everywhere. For instance, CSE is sometimes called "holistic sexuality education". However, according to this Guidance, all CSE programs should be based on an established curriculum; scientifically accurate; tailored for different ages; and

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[398]Ringrose, J; Regehr, K., (2023), Recognizing and addressing how gender shapes young people's experiences of image-based sexual harassment and abuse in educational settings, *Journal of Social Issues,*
[399]Ibidem
[400]Rodríguez-Castro, Y., Martínez-Román, R., Alonso-Ruido, P., Adá-Lameiras, A., & Carrera-Fernández, M. V., (2021)

[401]World Health Organization, International technical guidance on sexuality education, (2018), An evidence-informed approach, 14 March 2018, available at https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/9789231002595

comprehensive, meaning they cover a range of topics on sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, throughout childhood and adolescence, as well as other aspects related to families and relationships; respect, consent, and bodily autonomy etc[402]. CSE programs are quite widespread in all US districts, especially after the 2012 partnership (the *"Future of Sex Education"*) among three leading national sex education organizations, Advocates for Youth, Answer, and SIECUS. The partnership, in fact, released the National Sexuality Education Standards (NSES), which were then updated in 2020, as the NSES, Second Edition[403]. These standards stress the importance of positive relationships, and they emphasize age-appropriateness of the topics covered, spanning kindergarten through 12th grade, with different learning objectives in each grade level, therefore ensuring that students are reached before the emergence of any risk behaviors and at a developmental moment where the information provided is relevant and appropriate. They also recommend preservice teacher training, professional development, ongoing support, and mentoring to ensure that staff is well-trained and the use of different teaching methods[404]. Consequently, through CSE programs, students become able to name jealousy, lack of trust, and possessiveness as problematic and toxic signs, and they can apply this to knowledge in future relationships[405].

It is true, however, that primary preventive education on TFIPV/OTDV in late adolescence, in college and/or university cannot by itself be the solution. NSES-CSE, relationship education alone will not overturn the inequitable societal gender norms and stereotypes that permeate every level of society and that are disseminated through the internet and acquired and internalized during the primary socialization process that occurs within the family[406]. They do, however, have the power to help students and young people develop critical attitudes toward beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors about gender, and in that way mitigate the gender-related risk factors that can lead to the preparation of TFIPV. Therefore, primary prevention must be

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[402]World Health Organization, Comprehensive Sex Education, 18 May 2023, available at https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/comprehensive-sexuality-education

[403]Goldfarb, E. S., & Lieberman, L. D., (2021), Three decades of research: The case for comprehensive sex education. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 68*(1), pp. 13–27

[404]Schneider, M., & Hirsch, J. S., (2020).

[405]O'Brien, K. M., Sauber, E. W., Kearney, M. S., Venaglia, R. B., & Lemay, E. P., Jr (2021).

[406]Schneider, M., & Hirsch, J. S., (2020).

complemented by strategies that include secondary and tertiary prevention interventions, such as initiatives that address perpetration recidivism, as well as strategies that help prevent victimization and work with victims/survivors in the aftermath of their abuse in a trauma-informed way[407]. CSE that gets to the root of the issue before the issue begins may be one key component of a comprehensive strategy to end TFIPV/OTDV.

Secondly, another key aspect that has been highlighted by many authors is that to date it is essential to implement effective sex and relationship education programs in schools in which ICTs are incorporated so that students can learn how to experience their intimate relationships, both offline and online, in an egalitarian and violence-free way[408]. This combination of sex education and technology has been repeatedly referred to in the academic literature as "*digital sext education*". Jørgensen et al. (2019) for instance, argued that «digital sext education needs to be improved to incorporate contextual issues of power, gender, trust, and communication to better support young people.[409]» In short, current digital literacy claims that educational settings should implement sex education programs in schools incorporating ICTs for their safe and responsible use[410]. The following paragraph will precisely address this issue.

3.4 The use of technology as a pedagogical tool to prevent TFIPV

Multiliteracies pedagogy and new literacies advocate for the expansion of literacy education to include ICTs. These digital competencies include being able to use a variety of technological tools, such as the Internet, social media platforms, global connectivity, and the collaboration it affords[411]. This means that «teacher educators are called upon to design learning environments that reflect the global and local peer-to-peer collaborative and participatory technologies students interact within,

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[407]Ibidem
[408]Rodríguez-Castro, Y., Martínez-Román, R., Alonso-Ruido, P., Adá-Lameiras, A., & Carrera-Fernández, M. V., (2021)
[409]Jørgensen, C. R., Weckesser, A., Turner, J. & Wade, A., (2019) Young people's views on sexting education and support needs: findings and recommendations from a UK-based study, *Sex Education*, 19(1), pp. 25–40

[410]Rodríguez-Castro, Y., Martínez-Román, R., Alonso-Ruido, P., Adá-Lameiras, A., & Carrera-Fernández, M. V., (2021),
[411]Nagle, J., (2018), Twitter, cyber-violence, and the need for a critical social media literacy in teacher education: A review of the literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies, 76*(1), pp. 86-94.

such as social media spaces. This call to action is with the aim of using digital technologies with a new generation of teachers, so that teacher education can play a role in transforming school practice.[412]» Within critical media literacy and social media literacies discourse, however, there are currently no clear discussions regarding the experiencing of, or exposure to, online GBV. Such conversations are occurring within other fields, such as human-computer interaction cyberfeminism, feminist media studies, and criminology but they are lacking in teacher education[413]. This section aims to investigate the effectiveness of using digital tools as pedagogical/teaching tools to prevent TFIPV by trying to highlight both strengths and weaknesses.

To begin with, several studies have already tested the high effectiveness of teaching tools in version 4.0 (audiovisual materials, apps, etc.) focused on the prevention of IPV and dating violence, which can be used by both teachers/educators and students[414]. For instance, the *"Liad@s"* mobile app addresses very important issues (ambivalent sexism, myths about love, and egalitarian relationships etc.) from a playful perspective and it has been proved to be very effective in helping adolescents to have egalitarian and non-toxic couple relationships, to have fewer sexist attitudes, to identify myths about love, and to reduce situations of violence in their relationships[415]. Similarly, another example of effective digital tool designed to prevent TDV, is the online intervention *"STOP Dating Violence",* developed to educate students about dating violence and appropriate bystander interventions on college campuses[416]. The STOP Dating Violence intervention is in fact grounded in the Model of Bystander Behavior[417] and informed by risk recognition research, Bandura's, social learning theory[418], and prior work on sexual assault prevention.

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[412]Ibidem

[413]Ibidem

[414]Rodríguez-Castro, Y., Martínez-Román, R., Alonso-Ruido, P., Adá-Lameiras, A., & Carrera-Fernández, M. V., (2021)

[415]Ibidem

[416]O'Brien, K. M., Sauber, E. W., Kearney, M. S., Venaglia, R. B., & Lemay, E. P., Jr., (2021).

[417]The Model of Bystander Behavior proposes several contingencies that must be met before bystanders can help someone in need: bystanders must become aware of the problematic situation, perceive the situation as an emergency, decide that they have responsibility to act, determine what type of help they can provide, and finally take action. (Ibidem).

[418]Social Learning Theory, developed by Albert Bandura in the 1960s, is a psychological framework that emphasizes the importance of observational learning, imitation, and the influence of social interactions in

A very recent study (2021) based on a randomized controlled trial to assess the efficacy of STOP Dating Violence among college students demonstrated that STOP Dating Violence online intervention was effective in educating undergraduate students about warning signs of dating violence and bystander interventions[419]. Students (N = 317) were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (a) the STOP Dating Violence intervention, (b) a website containing information about dating violence, or (c) a control condition. The study showed that students who took part in the STOP Dating Violence intervention reported more knowledge of appropriate interventions, greater intentions to intervene, more bystander self-efficacy, and could identify the warning signs of dating violence. Indeed, after participation in the intervention, participants were able to create a list of demeaning, jealous, and possessive behaviors that were representative of TDV[420]. Also, another empirical evaluation that compared online versus in-person bystander interventions related to sexual and dating violence found that online interventions were equally effective regarding changes in knowledge and attitudes over time[421].

Very effective was also the online, parent–son intervention named *"STRONG"*, which aimed at reducing dating violence among early adolescent males. Through this initiative 119 7th- and 8th-grade boys were recruited, with a parent (90% mothers), from six urban middle schools in the Providence (Rhode Island)[422]. Successively, preliminary effects of this online intervention were evaluated in a small randomized, waitlist-controlled trial that followed early adolescent males and their parents for 9 months using audio computer-assisted structured interviews and a computer-based task. STRONG proved to have positive effects on adolescents' attitudes toward dealing with TDV, their emotional awareness, and their short-term

shaping human behavior. This theory suggests that individuals learn not only through direct experiences but also by observing and imitating the actions, attitudes, and behaviors of others. (Bandura, A., (1977). *Social learning theory.* Prentice-Hall)

[419]O'Brien, K. M., Sauber, E. W., Kearney, M. S., Venaglia, R. B., & Lemay, E. P., Jr., (2021).

[420]Ibidem

[421]Hines, D. A., & Reed, K. M. P., (2017), Bystander prevention of sexual and dating violence: An experimental evaluation of online and in-person bystander intervention programs. *Partner Abuse,* 8, 331-346

[422]Rizzo, C. J., Houck, C., Barker, D., Collibee, C., Hood, E., & Bala, K., (2021), Project STRONG: an Online, Parent-Son Intervention for the Prevention of Dating Violence among Early Adolescent Boys. *Prevention science: the official journal of the Society for Prevention Research*, *22*(2), pp. 193–204.

regulation skills and was associated with increased discussion of critical relationship topics[423].

Lastly, worth mentioning is the online dating violence prevention program called "*WISER*" (*Writing to Improve Self-in-Relationships)* for emerging adults (ages 18-25). It consists of a four-week online intervention designed to improve relationship quality and decrease dating abuse in situations in which the relationship is already troubled, with the long-term goal of preventing future dating violence. The program is based on narrative therapy principles and uses structured guided writing techniques[424]. A single group pre-post feasibility test of the WISER program was conducted with 14 college women, and it found that all 14 college students exposed to the writing tasks were able to reflect on and improve the quality of their relationships, demonstrating that WISER was an effective online program to decrease dating violence in this population[425].

Since these digital pedagogical/teaching tools have proven to be useful and effective, at least in the immediate term, in preventing dating abuse and informing young people about the risk factors of abusive behaviours, this research intends to support the thesis that these technological tools could prove to be effective in preventing TFIPV/OTDV as well.

First, technology and ICT means can provide victims access to essential educational resources, materials, service providers, campaigns etc. in very fast and immediate way, reaching therefore a larger audience, including those in remote or underserved areas, or even young people who have not access to school-based education programs around (online) GBV because of fundamentalist and conservative resistance from religious and political groups[426]. Digital tools can therefore make it easier to raise awareness about TFIPV issues and provide support to a diverse

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[423]Ibidem

[424]McCord Stafford, A., & Burke Draucker, C., (2019), Emerging Adult Women's Views-of-Self in Intimate Partner Relationships That Are Troubled. *Issues in mental health nursing*, *40*(4), pp.289–296.

[425]Draucker, C. B., Martsolf, D. S., Crane, S., McCord, A. L., Romero, L., & Al-Khattab, H. A., (2019), A feasibility test of an online intervention to prevention (sic) dating violence in emerging adults. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 33, pp. 37-45

[426]Lopes Gomes Pinto Ferreira, G., (2021), Technology as Both a Facilitator of and Response to Youth Intimate Partner Violence: Perspectives from Advocates in the Global-South. *The Emerald International Handbook of Technology Facilitated Violence and Abuse.* Emerald, Bingley, pp. 427-446.

range of individuals. Secondly, TFIPV teaching programs relying on technological tools such as interactive apps/modules, games, quizzes, videos, simulations, and online workshops can engage and involve students more effectively and actively than "traditional" methods, fostering pro-active participation and learning and enabling customization of educational content to suit different learning styles and preferences. These methods can make learning about TFIPV more interesting and memorable for students. Using digital tools within classrooms can also be an asset for more introverted/reticent students, as they might feel more willing to participate. Using social media as a pedagogical tool, for instance, holds benefits for engaging collaboratively with others in a global space[427]. Technology allows also for real-time dissemination of information and data, ensuring that students have access to the latest resources and updates on TFIPV prevention strategies. Given the rapidly evolving nature of technology and its impact on intimate relationships, this adaptability is essential. Indeed, technology has the advantage of keeping users anonymous and do not judge them. This might be very useful for those who may be hesitant to seek help in person since online platforms offer a high level of anonymity that can encourage individuals to seek information and support without fear of judgment or exposure[428]. Finally, another key benefit of developing a TFIPV/OTDV intervention in an online format is that, after the online intervention has been developed and tested, widespread dissemination of this program is possible with minimal costs[429]. In-person interventions are frequently costly, time-consuming, and difficult to disseminate. These limitations impose barriers that may prevent many students from participating in these initiatives. Computer-based programs address many of the shortcomings that characterize in-person programs and have the potential for rapid and widespread dissemination[430]. Online platforms can even serve as a central hub for information, resources, data and support services related to TFIPV/OTDV prevention, making it easier for students to find the help they need.

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[427]Nagle, J. (2018).

[428]Lopes Gomes Pinto Ferreira, G., (2021)

[429]O'Brien, K. M., Sauber, E. W., Kearney, M. S., Venaglia, R. B., & Lemay, E. P., Jr., (2021).

[430]Rizzo, C. J., Houck, C., Barker, D., Collibee, C., Hood, E., & Bala, K., (2021), Project STRONG: an Online, Parent-Son Intervention for the Prevention of Dating Violence among Early Adolescent Boys. *Prevention science: the official journal of the Society for Prevention Research*, *22*(2), pp. 193–204.

Once we have identified some of the advantages that technology as an educational tool for prevention can offer, it is fundamental to remember that these digital tools nevertheless have a number of disadvantages and shortcomings. Incorporating digital tools into practice, such as mobile technologies, is in fact a challenge[431]. Firstly, given the still existing huge digital divide, not all students have equal access to technology and the internet, potentially leaving certain demographics at a disadvantage in terms of receiving TFIPV prevention education. Although access to the Internet is increasingly being recognized as a human right, Internet access is not uniformly shared[432]. Women and girls in developing countries, for instance, may not have access to the Internet due to a range of factors including age, disability, education, ethnicity, poverty, or lack of control over their own (or household) finances. Moreover, students living in rural or remote areas often have poor Internet connections and have relatively less access to digital devices and online platforms[433]. But even where access to technology is feasible, there may be some other barriers that may obstacle students to access technology. For instance, some students may feel anxious about using ICT means, or be overwhelmed by the amount of information available online[434]. Given the fact that these are quite sensitive and delicate topics, online content related to TFIPV could trigger traumatic experiences for victims/survivors, necessitating careful design and moderation of online resources. In fact, it should be always remembered that digital spaces have the potential to be unsafe, especially for young people. This is why students need to be made fully aware of the risks, not only to themselves but to others, when entering the online environment[435]. But first of all, students need to have the right to choose whether or not to enter (or remain) in these online spaces: they need to be well informed about the websites, apps, social media, etc. they participate within, and they need to know how do they work, which are their affordances and their risks and they should always have the possibility to withdraw at any time. They also need to be provided with supportive tools to deal with

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[431]Nagle, J., (2018).
[432]Fiolet R, Brown C, Wellington M, Bentley K, Hegarty K., (2021), Fighting fire with fire: Exploring the Impact of Technology-Facilitated Abuse and Its Relationship with Domestic Violence: A Qualitative Study on Experts' Perceptions. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*;8.
[433]Ibidem
[434]Ibidem
[435]Nagle, J., (2018).

harmful content they may encounter online [436]. Teachers and educators have therefore an ethical responsibility to inform and protect their students, yet they also have an ethical responsibility to enter into difficult conversations with their students to uncover dominant narratives surrounding TFIPV/OTDV issues, which shape and influence our behaviours and ways of life via social media and other online platforms. Critical digital and social media literacy is needed within educational settings because online spaces are not neutral. As the author Nagle suggests, by embracing critical social media literacy «teachers and preservice teachers alike can enter into a necessary dialogue to become informed by examining the social media sites they use and by examining diverse participation. This dialogue must acknowledge that not everyone is experiencing cyberspace in the same ways. Such conversations will also create an understanding that participatory technologies are a choice with risks, which need informed consent. There needs to be open dialogue in teacher education about how to respond to cyber-violence and an awareness that the teacher educator will be their guide through the process.[437]»

In conclusion, critical digital and social media literacy education empowers students to use technology safely, critically, and consciously, assert their digital rights, and recognize abusive behaviors, thereby reducing their vulnerability to TFIPV. Technology can therefore potentially serve as a powerful teaching/educational tool in preventing TFIPV/OTDV. By leveraging its accessibility, interactivity, and adaptability, teachers and educators can effectively address these critical issues and promote healthy relationships in the digital age.

3.5 The effectiveness of TFIPV prevention programs

This paragraph aims to review the current literature on the effectiveness of prevention programs in mitigating TFIPV, also to highlight key areas for future research.

As emerged in the previous paragraphs, numerous TDV prevention programs have been developed in recent years, with a heavy focus on school-based programs, and some of these also include topics related to OTDV issues. Although many programs

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[436]Ibidem
[437]Ibidem

have been developed and implemented, knowledge about the effectiveness of such programs is quite limited because only a handful have undergone evaluation. Because of such limitations and the small number of published evaluations, very limited conclusions can be drawn about the impact of TDV/OTDV prevention programs[438].

In any case, a number of meta-analytic reviews have tried to capture programs' effectiveness; however, these reviews produced often mixed findings, and each has an accompanying set of limitations[439]. As the authors Lee et. al. (2022) explain generally, «programs show positive results concerning increases in knowledge about and attitudes towards dating violence, although the relationship is not always statistically significant.[440]» However, «with respect to behavioral outcomes such as violence perpetration or victimization, findings vary considerably in both significance level and direction of effect, with studies producing both positive and negative impacts.[441]» For instance, in their study– which examined the overall effectiveness of a sample of 38 TDV prevention programs about dating violence, improving attitudes towards dating violence, reducing incidents of dating violence perpetration and victimization, and increasing the prevalence of bystander behaviors and intentions – the authors found that as a whole, these appeared effective at increasing adolescents' knowledge about TDV behaviors and impacts, as well as changing attitudes and beliefs concerning TDV. However, these programs were not as successful at improving teens' behaviors[442]. An evaluation was conducted also for the already mentioned "*Break the Cycle's Ending Violence*" curriculum, with a sample of predominately Latino teens from a large urban school district. The study (2006) found that the adolescents demonstrated improved knowledge of the laws related to TDV, less acceptance of female-on-male

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[438]Hickman, L. J., Jaycox, L. H., & Aronoff, J., (2004), Dating violence among adolescents: prevalence, gender distribution, and prevention program effectiveness. *Trauma, violence & abuse*, *5*(2), pp.123–142.
[439]Lee, C., Wong, J.S., (2022), Examining the effects of teen dating violence prevention programs: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Experimental Criminol*ogy 18, pp. 1–40
[440]Ibidem
[441]Ibidem
[442]Ibidem

aggression, and increased perception of the likelihood and helpfulness of seeking assistance from various sources after they had participated in the program[443].

The same can be said for sex/relationship education programs. For instance, a study (2014), which sought to test the effectiveness of the previously mentioned "*Fourth R*" curriculum among an urban middle school target population in the Bronx, New York, showed that students exposed to the Fourth R program were more likely than control students to delay sexual activity and that it reduced acceptance of pro-violence beliefs and gender stereotypes[444]. Research's findings also suggested that the program's dosage mattered, given the fact that students who received "more" of the curriculum also perpetrated less bullying and saw greater attitudinal changes than students who received lower dosages of the curriculum. Indeed, high-risk students who had already experienced or perpetrated dating violence at baseline were especially likely to experience program benefits at follow-up. However, the research demonstrated that the program did not generally reduce dating violence, peer violence/bullying, or drug and alcohol use among the experimental sample[445]. Only the four-year follow-up study of the *"Safes Dates"* project found reductions in the likelihood of being a victim/perpetrator of moderate psychological and physical violence as well as sexual violence among the eighth- and ninth-grade youth from North Carolina who had attended the project; however, no significant reductions were reported in the likelihood of being a victim of severe physical or psychological violence[446]. Also in this case, findings demonstrated that those students involved in the Project reported less acceptance of TDV and traditional gender roles, a stronger belief in the need for assistance and support, and more awareness of services available in the community.

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[443]Jaycox, L. H., McCaffrey, D., Eiseman, B., Aronoff, J., Shelley, G. A., Collins, R. L., & Marshall, G. N., (2006), Impact of a school-based dating violence prevention program among Latino teens: randomized controlled effectiveness trial. *The Journal of adolescent health: official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, *39*(5), pp. 694–704.

[444]Cissner, Amanda B., Ayoub, Lama H., (2014), Building Healthy Teen Relationships: An Evaluation of the Fourth R Curriculum With Middle School Students in the Bronx, *Center for Court Innovation*, New York

[445]Ibidem

[446]Foshee, V. A., Bauman, K. E., Ennett, S. T., Suchindran, C., Benefield, T., & Linder, G. F., (2005), Assessing the effects of the dating violence prevention program "safe dates" using random coefficient regression modeling. *Prevention science: the official journal of the Society for Prevention Research*, *6*(3), pp. 245–258.

Even some digital/computer-based initiatives, programs and interventions presented in the previous chapter (such as STOP Dating Violence, STRONG and WISER) have proven to be effective, but mostly with regard to the level of knowledge of youth, their attitudes towards dealing with TDV and their emotional awareness in the short-term, but the studies did not report an actual decrease in behaviours associated with TDV in the long-term. This demonstrates that although existing TDV prevention programs may have some impact on teens' attitudes and beliefs related to IPV, it is unknown whether such changes are lasting or have an influence on behaviors during adolescence and into adulthood [447]. Overall, prevention programs for students and young people appear to be effective at improving knowledge and attitudinal measures of TDV but are not as successful at improving behaviors[448].

As far as prevention programs addressing more specifically TFIPV/OTDV issues, there are yet no literature reviews or studies attesting to the effectiveness (or otherwise) of these programs. The few existing studies to date have mostly focused on investigating the effectiveness of school-based prevention aimed at contrasting cyberbullying. For instance, according to Gaffney et al.'s meta-analysis (2019), cyberbullying intervention and prevention programs reduce the involvement in cyberbullying by 10–15% and victimisation by 14%. However, once again, the long-term effect of anti-cyberbullying programs is in doubt[449]. A more recent meta-analysis (2021) of a total of 56 research reports from 90 independent studies implementing both direct and indirect interventions against cyberbullying was conducted by the US National Institute of Justice. The study found that all programs were associated with significant reductions in cyberbullying perpetration and victimization as well as significant reductions in traditional bullying perpetration and victimization[450].

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[447]Hickman, L. J., Jaycox, L. H., & Aronoff, J., (2004), Dating violence among adolescents: prevalence, gender distribution, and prevention program effectiveness. *Trauma, violence & abuse*, 5(2), pp. 123–142.
[448]Lee, C., Wong, J.S., (2022).
[449]Gaffney, H., Ttofi, M. M., & Farrington, D. P., (2021), Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying perpetration and victimization: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 17(2), e1143.
[450]National Institute of Justice, (2021), "Cyberbullying in Schools: Meta-Analysis Finds That Tailored Programming Protects Students," April 29, 2021, available at https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/cyberbullying-schools-meta-analysis-finds-tailored-programming-protects-students#citation--0

More broadly speaking, scientific literature to date has demonstrated that in order to enhance their effectiveness, prevention programs targeting youth should involve parents as well as the entire school community, as the phenomenon of OTDV has frequently an extended impact on more levels – individual, family, and school. Indeed, a growing literature suggests that family communication has a significant impact on dating risk factors[451]. In sum, programs involving parents/family may have long-term effectiveness for two main reasons: first, because parental influence tends to persist over time, and second, because the family is the primary context in which adolescents acquire information and relationship values [452]. However, judging the effectiveness of TFIPV/OTDV prevention/intervention programs is quite hard, not only because of the variability of these programs but also due to the novelty of these programs. Not to mention the low number of reliable, scientifically founded programs with follow-up measurements. TFIPV/OTDV prevention programs face in fact several challenges in their implementation. One key challenge is the rapidly evolving nature of technology, which requires programs to stay updated and relevant. Cultural differences and societal norms also influence the effectiveness of prevention strategies, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive and intersectional approaches. Moreover, the stigma surrounding TFIPV/OTDV issues and underreporting pose obstacles to program evaluation and impact assessment. Despite these challenges and difficulties, this research intends to support the thesis that, since IPV/TDV prevention programs have proven, at least in the short term, to be effective, TFIPV/OTDV prevention programs have also the potential to be effective in combating abusive behaviours within intimate partner relationships. To address these challenges and filling gaps in the existing literature, this research will try to suggest some inputs for future studies.

To begin with, future research investigating the effects of TFIPV/OTDV prevention programs should focus on several areas. First, future studies should expand the length of time for follow-up assessment. Given that existing literature has found knowledge and attitudes to be significant predictors of abusive (online) behaviors within intimate partner relationships, successful behavioral changes through

[451]Rizzo, C. J., Houck, C., Barker, D., Collibee, C., Hood, E., & Bala, K., (2021).
[452]Ibidem

prevention strategies are possible but may not be evidenced in short-term measures of behavioral outcomes. Future research should therefore further investigate the relationship between short-term improvements in knowledge and attitudes with respect to these abusive behaviours and long-term behavioral changes[453]. In particular, it would be very interesting to understand whether the improvements that have been recorded as a result of these prevention programs during the adolescent/youth period are likely to endure and persist into adulthood, and thus also have consequences on the way intimate relationships are conceived and experienced in adulthood.

Secondly, future studies should also investigate whether participants in the programs had the opportunity to intervene in online violence situations, also by examining the outcomes for those who intervene[454]. More research regarding bystander behaviors would be needed since prevention programs that have integrated these behaviors have been demonstrated to be quite useful and effective. Education about (and enhanced confidence regarding) appropriate bystander behaviours and responses may contribute to efforts to contrast (online) TDV[455]. Thirdly, the integration of ICT means into prevention programs, such as utilizing AI-driven chatbots for information dissemination and assistance, chat-box to raise awareness about TFIPV/OTDV issues, and social marketing campaigns, should be further considered and investigated since many of these technology-based programs have proven to be effective and useful prevention tools, taking into consideration the possible risks and dangers that these new technologies may bring. In addition, collaboration between researchers, teachers, educators, policymakers, and technology companies is needed to ensure that prevention efforts keep pace with evolving technological innovations and changes. Collaboration between schools/educational environments and students' parents is also key since parents who engage in frequent and open dialogue about dating and intimate relationships with their sons/daughters and monitor their relationship activities may be able to reduce their teens' abusive (online) behaviours. Therefore, prevention programs,

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[453]Lee, C., Wong, J.S., (2022)

[454]O'Brien, K. M., Sauber, E. W., Kearney, M. S., Venaglia, R. B., & Lemay, E. P., Jr (2021)
[455] Ibidem

especially school-based ones, should capitalize on the importance of parents in modeling and influencing the choices their sons/daughters make in future romantic relationships[456].

Finally, more empirical description is needed to inform theoretical and program development. For instance, some research indicates that girls and boys perpetrate (online) violence against a partner for different reasons. This might suggest that it would be preferable to adopt differing approaches to prevention and intervention programs for female and male adolescents[457]. As the authors Hichman et. al. suggest «more basic research can help shine light on whether a single curriculum, delivered in mixed gender groups seems indicated or whether gender-specific groups and curricula seem more well suited to address the nature of the underlying problem[458].''

In conclusion, countries need to prioritize TFIPV/OTDV prevention and address the lack of funding in this area to allow the design, development, and implementation of medium-to-long-term initiatives (and evaluations) that can promote real change around abusive online behaviours within intimate partner relationships. As technology continues to shape the dynamics of intimate partner relationships, the importance of education and prevention programs in tackling these issues can not be overstated. Investing in comprehensive sex education is essential for fostering the development of healthier and more equitable intimate relationships, as well as creating a safer, more respectful, and abuse-free digital environment.

3.6 Interviews with experts

3.6.1 Methodology

The findings of this thesis were further completed through semi-structured interviews with seven experts in different fields. Since the focus of this research work is on Italy, experts were selected within the Italian national context and particularly within the reality of the city of Padua. The purpose of these interviews is to support and complement existing scientific literature on the TFIPV

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[456]Rizzo, C. J., Houck, C., Barker, D., Collibee, C., Hood, E., & Bala, K., (2021).

[457] Hickman, L. J., Jaycox, L. H., & Aronoff, J., (2004).

[458]Ibidem

phenomenon in Italy and to provide additional evidence on the specific nature of this phenomenon and its causes and impact on the younger population, as well as on the main limitations and shortcomings of current school-based prevention programs, but more generally on the lack of a deep understanding of the phenomenon per sé. Interviews were conducted with experts from different expertise fields (the academy, civil society organizations, NGOs, psychologists, educators, and other professionals with experience in public health, education, GBV, women's rights, and children's rights) in order to provide a final overview of the TFIPV phenomenon through different perspectives and points of view. The interviewees responded in Italian. The interviews took the form of a conversation around a questionnaire of eight semi-structured questions (annex 1). Questions were arranged and adapted according to the experts' field of expertise. Indeed, questions have been divided into four different topics, although closely connected to each other: sex and relationship education, prevention programs, technology, causes, and consequences. A number of additional questions regarding some specific projects, initiatives, and campaigns (such as the *"DATE"* project and the "*Stop Sexting and Revenge Porn"* campaign) have been reserved for certain experts. Each interviewee signed an informed consent (annex 2) which authorized the data and information collection and process, including the interviewee's name, current/past workplace, and the role he/she plays in it, also allowing for the possibility of choosing anonymity. With the respondent's approval, each interview was recorded as an mp3 file and then transcribed to facilitate their codification. Data management followed the updated European Standards on Ethics in Social Science research. Qualitative data obtained from these interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis. Transcriptions were then analyzed and systematically coded in order to identify significant and recurrent conceptual categories, which were then reorganized into other subcategories and interrelated categories, to identify patterns, commonalities, and differences between interviews. Finally, the coded segments were then organized into four broad categories, namely: school-based prevention programs' effectiveness, TFIPV causes and consequences, parental education, and educational approaches/strategies. The segments of the interview that are quoted or paraphrased in this thesis have been translated from Italian into English. To simplify the

collection and analysis of the results obtained from these interviews, the main findings will be divided according to these four conceptual categories.

3.6.2 Results

This section develops the main themes obtained from the interviews. These themes point at obstacles, limits, and features that impede an effective understanding and prevention of the TFIPV issue within the Italian national context:

- The incompleteness and neutrality of school-based prevention programs;
- The increasingly strong connection between the offline and online reality that young people experience nowadays;
- The misinterpretation of the TFIPV phenomenon and the normalization of violence;
- The differentiation in behaviours and reactions between boys and girls, which stems from a different socialization process that has its common roots in sexism, patriarchy, and gender structural inequalities;
- A lack of interest and responsibility on the part of family/parents with regard to education on issues concerning affectivity, sexuality, and online risks/dangers;
- A lack of cooperation and collaboration between the school, parents, and students;
- The importance of participative educational methodologies when dealing with TFIPV-related topics within educational settings;
- The importance of working on youth's skills and competencies, not only on knowledge
- A lack of youth's self-awareness about their emotions, feelings, and values, and their inability to express themselves.

School-based prevention programs' effectiveness

With regard to school-based prevention programs, in particular sex and relationship education programs, these interviews reveal that the general picture in Italy is quite chaotic, confused, and deficient. Respondents report that there are three main reasons for this:

First of all, there is strong resistance and reluctance on the part of the Italian school system to talk about certain issues related for instance to sexuality, affectivity, GBV, or online risks with students. Dr. Stefania Loddo, the contact person for educational and prevention activities for the "Centro Veneto Progetti Donna" of Padua, for instance, explains that the set of contents that could be part of the macro theme of sexual health and affective education programs in Italy is very wide: it could include topics related to relationships within the family, or peer-relations, or even diversity education, but very rarely it includes sexuality and affective education within couples/intimate relationships, mainly because there are many conservative drives, especially on the part of families and teachers. Therefore, teachers, professors, and educators tend to implement programs that are "*as neutral and binary as possible*", which of course does not correspond to reality. Indeed, she comments that "*often, teachers and headmasters are afraid of possible repercussions and complaints from parents. They often think it's not their task, their responsibility, to talk about these issues to the sons and daughters of others.*" However, all experts believe that the school, together with the family, should take on the task of talking to students about these issues, given the very strong interconnection between the offline and the online reality that every adolescent experiences. They highlight the fact that to date, almost all intimate relationships between adolescents involve a virtual part, which also includes sexuality-related aspects (like for instance sexting, the exchange of intimate photos/videos, etc.). As the Save the Children's expert Brunella Greco[459] stresses "*we now live "on-life" experiences, which means integrated experiences between online and offline*" and given the existence of this hybrid experience "*to date, it would be impossible to think about an affectivity, a sentimentality, an intimate relationship that totally excludes the technological element. There are even relationships that are exclusively online, there are girls who have been engaged with someone for two years and they are only dating online, without ever having met each other.*"

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[459]She is the thematic Advisor and Trainer at Save the Children IT. She also supported and followed the boys and girls of the Movimento Giovani for Save the Children in designing the already mentioned "*Lo hai mai fatto?*" awareness campaign, including the online consultation with young people which took place within the "DATE" project.

However, almost all experts report that Italian teachers, professors, headmasters, and educators tend to ignore the reality of facts and instead of trying to overcome taboos and stereotypes related to sexuality and affectivity, their approach is usually either neutral or very judgmental. Professor Gaia Cuccì, researcher at the Department of Psychology of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Milan), collaborator and member of the *C.Ri.d.e.e.* and expert on TDV/OTDV issues, explains that, since youth today search for answers to their questions and curiosities online, particularly on social media platforms like TikTok, the task of educators, and first and foremost, of the school, should be to provide them with correct information on these issues.

Another criticality, which has been reported by some experts, concerns the lack of communication between the school and students' families, which often leads teaching staff to be afraid of possible reactions or complaints from parents if sensitive issues related to sexuality and affectivity are addressed at school. According to Dr. Antonio Trimarchi, Head of the National Study Centre *"CARD" (Confederazione Associazioni Regionali Distretti),* and expert in the area of institutional social and health integration between operators, "*school-based prevention programs' effectiveness depends very much on the collaboration and involvement of families, parents, and children, which in the Italian case is very weak".* Professor Alessandro Zanon, educator, and secondary school teacher at the Professional Institute for Social and Health Services "Leonardo da Vinci" in Padua, notices that this lack of communication and collaboration between school and parents is a fairly widespread trend within the reality of the city of Padua and province. He comments: *"The tendency I have seen over the years is that of a distancing between teachers and parents, the difficulty of finding an educational agreement, a synergy of strategies, of goals and intentions. Often there is difficulty in sharing an educational project. If students see that there is a lack of communication between school and family, they tend not to engage, to lose motivation. Sometimes it is also teachers' fault since they fail to grasp their students' needs and requirements.*"

The second negative aspect that makes it difficult to implement school-based prevention programs in Italy, and thus diminishes their effectiveness, concerns their

strong fragmentation and diversity. As Dr. Stefania Loddo explains *"everything concerning the prevention of violence through sexuality and relationship education in Italy is provided for by the 2015 "Buona Scuola" Law, but its implementation is very varied throughout the national territory and depending on the interests and agendas of who is specifically designated to design or choose a strategy within the school or Institution. Often schools don't know who to turn to implement these sex/relationship education programs, or they don't know they can outsource this part."* Professor Alessandro Zanon confirms this evidence by providing some examples through his professional experience as a teacher at the Professional Institute for Social and Health Service in Padua. He explains that most of the projects and initiatives concerning sex education, affectivity, GBV prevention, or issues related to the digital world, that are currently implemented in middle/high schools, come from outside. These are external bodies, associations, and organizations with their own already existing projects, and it is the school (the headmaster together with the teaching staff) that decides whether to adhere to these projects/initiatives or not. He comments: *"In recent years, various projects concerning these issues have been proposed to our school by different external bodies, such as the Adolescent Advice Centre with which we collaborate, the Addiction Department Ser.D., or even the InformaGiovani Service. Our school often participates in these initiatives, with the approval of the teaching staff."* In addition, there are also some individual school subjects that choose to deal with these issues within their curricula, but very much depends on the teacher's discretion or on the different school subjects existing in different high school types. One of his comments includes:

> *"Even individually, some school subjects deal with sex or relationship education, human rights, and even during civic education hours these issues are often addressed as well. Within the module on digital citizenship, for example, we talk about cyberbullying, online violence. The psychology subject includes modules on gender-based violence, the child's growth environment, different parenting styles within the family environment, and the effects that a parenting style can have on identity formation and possible deviant behaviours in children/adolescents. This occurs, however, in the*

socio-health course, in the other courses there are still projects coming in from outside but often the teaching staff is less sensitive to these issues, and fewer hours are devoted to them. The school subject religion also deals with these issues, but unfortunately, in recent years there has been a gradual reduction in the number of adhering students." -Alessandro Zanon

He also highlights that these external interventions usually last only a few hours or a single meeting, for this reason, it becomes difficult to create a solid relationship between students and experts/adults since there is no continuity over time. Indeed, in many cases, it occurs that *"students have the perception that it is a lighter, softer lesson, and therefore their involvement is more difficult, and the experts find it difficult to relate to them."*

Finally, several experts pointed out another shortcoming of current Italian school-based sex and relationship education programs, namely the lack of reflection and discussion on what feelings and emotions really are and how they should be processed by young people. Dr. Giorgia Butera[460], President of METE Onlus, author of the book *"Dal sexting al revenge porn. Consapevolezza, educazione e crimine digitale"* and creator and promoter of the already mentioned campaign *"Stop Sexting and Revenge Porn",* comments that "*at the basis of an approach to issues related to sexuality, what has been missing is to also talk about feelings and souls".* According to Professor Gaia Cuccì, prevention work should be done on two levels: on knowledge and on skills. First, she explains that it is fundamental to work on *"relational and emotional skills that can help adolescents to be competent in their emotional relationships, like for instance empathy, perspective-taking, conflict negotiation skills etc."* She presents the new model of "romantic competence", which consists of "*a set of competencies linked to the sentimental experience, which has been tested, that makes a person capable of creating*

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[460]She is a Communication Sociologist, Writer, Human Rights Defender and Advocacy. Since 2015 she has been President of METE Onlus (Multiculturalism, Earth, Territory, Education). Since 2021 she has been General Director of the National Observatory against Sexting, Revenge Porn and Digital Crimes. Since 2021 she is the Founder of the Global Communication Programme: *'Gobal Media and Cultural Democracy'.* Author of the book "*Dal sexting al revenge porn. Consapevolezza, educazione e crimine digitale"* and creator and promoter of the already mentioned campaign *"Stop Sexting and Revenge Porn*" in collaboration with Federfarma (Palermo).

functional relationships and able to recognise which relationships are the most dysfunctional and at risk, and that makes a person able to say "no" whenever he or she does not want to do something..." This would be particularly urgent since, according to experts, most young people today do not have full awareness of their emotional sphere and do not know how to give proper value and weight to their emotions and feelings. According to Dr. Giorgia Butera, *"What does not exist is awareness of one's own body and being."* Other comments include:

> *"You have to encourage students to talk because they tend to have very little awareness of their emotions, their potential, and what they can or cannot do in a given situation. Sometimes there is also a lack of empathy toward others"* -Alessandro Zanon

> *"During a meeting with young people with a focus on sexting and revenge porn, I asked a 13-year-old girl "do you know what emotions are?" and she replied, "teacher, you are old". That is why emotional education, "education of the soul" should be taught."* -Giorgia Butera

TFIPV causes and consequences

As far as TFIPV consequences are concerned, most experts confirm that online GBV is a continuation of offline GBV, so the consequences for the victims are similar. Dr. Stefania Loddo, for instance, affirms that there is not so much difference in terms of consequences between online and offline GBV, but *"what changes is the medium, and what is needed to carry out the violence. [...] What has changed is the intensity and also its durability, but the injury to the victim's personal dignity has not changed."* Dr. Luca Milani[461], Professor of Developmental Psychology and Educational Psychology at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Milan), explains that responses to experiencing traumatic or peri-traumatic events can be of different kinds: in evolutionary terms, the literature distinguishes between "externalizing" and "internalizing" disorders. He comments that

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[461]Professor of Developmental Psychology and Educational Psychology at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Milan), Director of the C.Ri.d.e.e. (Centro di Ricerche Dinamiche Evolutive ed Educative), and member of the ReDiSpi (Reti di psicologi per i diritti umani).

"Externalizing disorders consist of aggressive/violent responses, and problematic behaviors, while internalizing disorders are more oriented toward anxiety, depression, so turning the suffering inward". He further explains that *"while males are more likely to resort to externalizing forms of response, females tend to resort to internalizing ones, although these data are valid only at the population level and not at the individual level, and very much depends on the individual situation"*. According to Professor Gaia Cuccì, when talking about TDV/OTDV, internalizing symptoms like anxiety, depressive symptoms, some severe cases of PTSD, or suicidal thoughts seem to prevail. She also reports that some adolescents may also experience negative consequences for their physical health, such as eating disorders, physical injuries, self-harm, etc. According to her, cyber-dating violence might be even more invasive and pervasive than TDV itself because *"it breaks down boundaries. Even within the home, the place where you should feel safe, you cannot. This increases the victim's sense of insecurity: never feeling safe, anxiety, depressive symptoms..."* As far as causes are concerned, instead, she explains that TDV/OTDV and other behaviours such as sexting are frequently associated with other risk behaviors, such as risky sexual behaviours, or substance abuse, even if in the literature it is not always clear *"which is the cause and which is the consequence"*. She comments that *"in adolescence we often see these behaviours appearing as a sort of cluster: that is, the appearance of several risk behaviours altogether, so we often speak of a "constellation of risk behaviours"."*

However, the main problem in Italy is that these forms of online violence within intimate relationships are hardly recognized as real forms of violence. And according to experts, this occurs for two main reasons: first, because TFIPV behaviours are more difficult to recognize, and second, because of a general minimization and normalization of the phenomenon. Professor Luca Milani reflects on the fact that very often adolescents are not immediately aware of the significance not only of the harm that their abusive/violent behaviour creates but also of the criminal offence that they are committing. He comments: *"Certain actions mediated online, for instance, the non-consensual sharing of sexual/pornographic images/videos, are perceived as being of "minor gravity", of "little importance" by those who commit them, but in reality, if they have certain characteristics,*

certain criteria, they can cross the criminal boundary for which the criminal action, even in the presence of a certain orientation in favour of the adolescent, for the juvenile court becomes irreversible". According to the Save The Children expert, *"when we experience an online relationship, it happens that all those things that should be easier to recognize in the offline experience (like for instance shame, fear, non-appreciation, discomfort, and expression of consent), online are harder to recognize. Boundaries are different and the recognition of boundaries is also different, and this is a big challenge, not only for young people but also for adults."* Dr. Stefania Loddo also reports that TFIPV is a form of violence, which like psychological violence is much more difficult to acknowledge. She also points out that underlying this lack of recognition is an incomprehension, minimization, and normalization of the phenomenon itself. She comments:

> *"These abusive online behaviours are not recognised as forms of violence neither by adults nor by young people: they are considered as side effects of either promiscuous or dangerous behaviours. […] For instance, following a person with an app that allows you to share your location in real-time, and asking your partner for photos to see "how are you dressed" are not recognised as forms of violence but are considered normal manifestations of jealousy, as is the non-consensual sharing of intimate material."* -Stefania Loddo

On the same line, Professor Gaia Cuccì highlights that adolescents often find it difficult to recognize certain behaviours as violent, particularly with regard to physiological violence, or control and monitoring behaviours. She makes some examples in this respect: "*Sharing passwords or accessing partner's social media account are considered as normal behaviours by teens*". Some interesting insights into the extent to which certain toxic behaviours related to the sphere of control are normalised by younger generations are provided by the expert Brunella Greco. She presents some of the data collected from the online consultation that took place within the "DATE" project. She explains that, although not a scientific statistical research since there was no sampling and any statistical representation but only spontaneous participation by youth who expressed their personal opinions on certain topics, these results already tell us a lot. First, she explains that the

consultation was done twice: once in 2021 and the second one in late 2022/early 2023, but the percentages remained virtually the same on many of the responses. Then, she comments:

> *"There is a section of this consultation that concerns "couple relationships": when boys and girls are asked what the basic elements for a healthy relationship are, the words mentioned are basically the same: 'love', 'respect', 'empathy', 'honesty'... However, the percentages of those who do not have a clear opinion on the forms of control that can be exercised in an intimate relationship and that can often be confused with love remain very high. These are for instance jealousy and controlling behaviours, which are hardly recognized as forms of GBV."*

She provides some examples in this respect:

> *"Almost 20% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement "if your partner asks you to delete a photo of yourself posted online, it is because they care about you". Boys compared to girls agreed more with this statement. The behaviours that are perceived to be most prevalent are those related to controlling one's partner, mainly through technology. Another part of the consultation asked the participants "How widespread do you think these control-related behaviours are within relationships?" 73% in the first phase of the consultation and 75% in the second said that it is very widespread to create a fake social profile in order to control their partner on social networks. Persistent phone calls and texting to find out where and with whom their partner is, preventing their partner from accepting someone's friendship/follower on social media, pressurising their partner to send sexually explicit photos, forcing one to use a shared geolocation app... are also considered to be widespread behaviours."* -Brunella Greco

On the other hand, Dr. Antonio Trimarchi reflects on the meaning of the two terms "violence" and "normal", commenting that *"violence is a type of language",* so that *"everyone speaks in his own language, which can be verbal and non-verbal. Violence is a type of language that must be listened to and redefined"*. Indeed, according to him, before affirming that these online abusive behaviours within

intimate relationships are more "normalized" and "accepted" than offline behaviours, first *"we need to understand what is meant by the word "normal"."* For him*, "the word "normal" is a generalization that then foresees any kind of instrumentalization".* Therefore, the solution is to *"get out of the rhetoric of emphasizing" and "to cleanse words from judgment."* According to the expert, these forms of online violence are a reflection of a much broader normalization of violence in general in our contemporary society since *"there is a normality that is violent, and it is this normality that contributes to the construction of violence."* Also according to the expert Giorgia Butera, the level of brutality, violence, and moral degradation within our contemporary society is increasingly high, leading to a sort of regression. She comments that "*we are at a point of no return. The bar of "ugliness" is rising higher and higher every day".* A pessimistic view of the present situation and of the future is also expressed by the expert Brunella Greco, who describes our contemporary society as a "society of control". According to her, in fact, control has been even more exacerbated by new ICTs, and we are getting used to being controlled. For her "*control is even more normalized through new technologies within teenage couples to the point where they become real forms of exercising GBV, which can then be the basis for a possible escalation in the future".*

Another question that was asked to experts concerned the causes of these behaviours, in particular, the reasons for the different behaviours between boys and girls that the existing literature on the phenomenon has highlighted. All experts confirm the existence of these differentiated attitudes and behaviours between boys and girls, in particular, confirming the fact that boys usually tend to commit "more serious", "more violent" and "sexual" forms of TFIPV (such as non-consensual distribution of intimate material, or sextortion, etc.), whereas girls tent do perpetrate "less serious", "more subtle", and "non-sexual" abuses (such as cyberstalking, constant monitoring, constant calls, and texts, etc.). According to experts, the reasons for these differential behaviours and reactions lie in the same structural gender inequalities that characterize the more general GBV phenomenon, as well as in the different socialization processes that boys and girls undergo since birth. Comments in this respect include:

"Part of the explanation of why violence exists, regardless of age and how it is perpetuated, lies in the existence of gender relations. Based on the idea that there is some kind of "hierarchy of genders" or sexes and given the fact that the male gender is considered the dominant and the strongest one, male violence is more possible and more normalized. This is why violations committed by males are more intense, more frequent, and more serious. The reason why these forms of online violence perpetrated by girls against boys pertain more to the psychological sphere is that girls are generally considered more socialised to be possessive, manipulative, etc., and because they cannot be physically violent in most cases. The reason why it is less effective for women to be sexually violent is because men and women are socialized differently."-Stefania Loddo

"These behaviours are the result of a culture in which we are all immersed: the patriarchy culture, the rape culture to which we have all been socialized since birth. Within this culture, women are also "healthy carriers" of patriarchal and sexist violence that makes it normal to perpetrate a wide range of structural violence against girls and women, who are socialized into a normal acceptance of these forms of violence. The attitudes and behaviors of girls are more related to the psychological sphere, of control and monitoring, they are a reflection of a relationship, a couple's conception that is based on "ownership" and "property" that is imposed on them. The impact of this is different on boys and girls. All these behaviours are accepted and normalized because they are based on this sexist model of relationships. Boys are socialized to consider various forms of abuse towards women and girls without any kind of constraint, therefore, violence is directly accessible for them." -Brunella Greco

As can also be deduced from these comments, girls, because of the gender stereotypes and social norms to which they are socialized from an early age, tend to engage in online abusive behaviours that are more related to the psychological sphere. Professor Alessandro Zanon confirms this evidence by talking about his personal experience, stating that in his classes, although he always had a larger representative sample of girls than boys, *"Boys tend to be more direct if there is*

something that upsets them or bothers them, while girls tend to play more psychological games and they are less direct. And perhaps this behavioural differentiation could be translated even to the intimate relationship sphere". The METE Onlus expert also notices that violence, of any kind, is increasingly widespread within the "female world" too. She comments: "*on the side of the female gender, what I notice more and more, and which is always on the rise both in terms of behaviours that take place in presence and online, is that girls are starting to be bullies as well. There is actually very little female solidarity, the net has exacerbated this aspect as well."*

Since TFIPV behaviours perpetrated by boys and girls are different, their reactions tend to be different as well, with girls usually suffering more severe, longer-lasting consequences and greater risks of victimization. According to Professor Gaia Cuccì, this occurs partially because girls tend to have a greater awareness of the seriousness of these abusive behaviors. Dr. Stefania Loddo explains this evidence by using the example of an interactive game on a platform played within classrooms which is part of a module on virtual reality called "*virtuale è reale"* designed by the Centro Veneto Progetti Donna. She explains that during this game *"we read a story together with students and then they have to vote on the options they would choose in a specific situation. Most students, when confronted with the example of non-consensual dissemination of intimate images sent by a girl to her boyfriend, believe that the girl is equally responsible, so sometimes responsibility is 50%-50%, and sometimes even more responsible (therefore 75%-25%), meaning that that the responsibility of the girl who shared her photos is greater than that of the boy who disseminated them, and this regardless of gender."*

Finally, interviewees were also asked whether, given this differentiation in behaviours, it would be preferable to design and implement gender-differentiated prevention programs, and different, though not conflicting, opinions have emerged in this regard. Almost all experts believe that gender-differentiated approaches are not necessary, since it is from the mutual exchange of ideas, opinions, and experiences that boys and girls can learn to really get to know each other. Professor Alessandro Zanon reflects on how important the moment of mutual relationship and

exchange is in the classroom, not only between students and teachers/professors but also between girls and boys. Comments from other experts include:

> *"I don't think that we should address girls and boys differently when we talk with them about relationships. Especially when we design an intervention aimed at preventing intimate partner violence the only successful strategy is to make them realise the difference between violent behaviour and its effects in a relationship and the effects of positive behaviour giving them the tools to recognise what is not safe for them."* -Stefania Loddo

> *"At the school level, it would be useful for boys and girls to work together: it is very important for boys and girls to exchange opinions and to see each other's perceptions... Then within an intervention, one may choose to address some aspects that are more targeted towards one gender and others towards the other... It is important to talk about these issues not only in the school context but also for example in other non-formal educational settings such as in patronages, afternoon centres, youth centres..."* -Gaia Cuccì

The Save the Children expert, however, while recognizing that it is only through confrontation dynamics between boys and girls that change can actually occur, highlights that *"separate moments in which the male gaze's absence, which triggers that sort of need "to be liked by men", creates for women and girls much freer contexts for confrontation and dialogue"*. She also adds that *"this kind of sexist culture violently afflicts boys too, imposing on them masculinity models that are often acted upon otherwise they don't feel accepted by their peer group, or they don't feel "masculine enough"."* Therefore, she suggests that a possible good strategy could be *"to set up group meetings for boys only, to confront each other, and for heterosexual males to confront themselves with their homosexual peers. This absence of the other gender's gaze can provide spaces for freedom and deconstruction, but the relationship aspect should always be there"*.

Parental education

After investigating the role and importance of school, and school-based programs in preventing these forms of violence, experts were also asked how much and to

what extent the family context and parental education can influence and condition children's choices and behaviours in their intimate relationships. First, all experts agree that family's influence plays a key primary role when it comes to behaviours and values related to the relational, romantic, and sentimental spheres. As the expert Brunella Greco explains in early childhood through imitation children learn from their parents/primary caregivers the first relationships, affectivity, and sentimentality models, which are often based on gender stereotypes. Professor Luca Milani reflects on the phenomenon of the so-called "inter-generational transmission of violence", commenting that while it has been proved by the scientific literature that this intergenerational transmission of violence – and not exclusively of GBV but of many other deviant/violent behaviours – exists, "*on the other hand, the literature refutes the assumption that if a person has witnessed violence he or she will surely become a victim or aggressor*". Therefore, *"it cannot be considered as the only cause, otherwise, there would be a scenario in which it would not be possible to intervene. It is one of the mechanisms of perpetuation of gender-based violence, and it also has a lot to do with general attitudes, the way gender relations are considered within society...Not all teenagers become violent, but they often adopt a neutral or "benevolent sexism"' attitude."*

Secondly, virtually all experts express their concern for the situation in Italy, where the parental model is increasingly fading, showing a lack of responsibility and interest on the part of parents/educators when dealing with these issues. Comments in this respect include:

> *"Parental education underpins everything. What has disappeared is moral rigour, it no longer exists within families. There is a regression. Families very often endorse these abusive behaviours and do not allow warnings even within the school environment [...] There is an absence, an educational vacuum on the part of families, a relegation to other aspects"* -Giorgia Butera

> *"I have also taught for a few years in the suburbs, for instance in Piove di Sacco, Este, Piazzola sul Brenta, and one thing I have noticed is that in the city, in Padua, there is more alienation, there is a greater detachment*

between youth and adults than in the suburbs. There were also parents who, despite the numerous disciplinary notes their children have received, have never shown concern or interest and I had to call, contact them personally and repeatedly, and sometimes I had great difficulty in reaching them. There are many parents who completely downplay the problems of their sons and daughters. [...] It seems that many children and adolescents do not have models, they do not have clear reference models from their parents, and they feel at the mercy of an adult world that gives no reference points and no certainties, and that discharges its educational function exclusively to the school" -Alessandro Zanon

According to Professor Giorgia Butera, when it comes to TFIPV issues, a lot of responsibility belongs to families, that *"in no way allow their children to be educated and reprimanded"* by teachers/professors/educators. Therefore, the school can certainly play an important role in this respect, but if the family does not play its part, it becomes very difficult to actually change students' behaviours and beliefs. The main problem according to most experts, derives from the fact that parents/caregivers avoid talking expressively about these topics with their sons and daughters, although they are often aware that there already are some potential "red flags". The METE Onlus expert, for instance, when talking about the *"Stop sexting and revenge porn"* campaign that has been implemented within some Italian schools, states that young people at meetings talked about these issues freely and openly, without shame or fear of judgment. However, this does not occur within the family environment, even if *"families actually know about these issues, but they simply pretend not to"*. Professor Brunella Greco points out that adolescence is often a rather critical age, so it is not always so easy for adolescents to open up and confront the adult world, therefore, having as many adult reference figures as possible could help, but the real concern is that *"very little is said about these problems."* Professor Luca Milani explains that today, the criteria for learning about sexuality are being questioned: on the one hand, there is what he defines as a "family desert" because the task of talking about these issues related to sexuality and sentimental education with children has been delegated to "someone else". On the other hand, there are adolescents, and even pre-adolescents surfing

pornographic sites and being exposed to a gender relationship representation that suffers from gender stereotypes, sexism, and machismo. He comments: *"As soon as no one monitors an area it becomes controlled by the actors themselves. Adolescents look for the information, the answers they need where they find them."* What almost all experts report, however, is that in addition to parental influence, there is an equally important and strong influence, which is that of the community. According to experts, family behaviours are replicated by other families and so on, creating a real influence within the community that has an impact on children's upbringing, which can be both positive and negative. Dr. Brunella Greco, for instance, states that the places of learning/education are different and change with respect to the different age groups. In Save The Children's vision there is an "educating community", rather than single specific places, because *"there are several agents and factors that contribute to education, and in these, there are also peers, who from a certain age onwards are fundamental in the processes of socialization, growth, and identity formation."* Therefore *"the more the educating community is open, the more parents tend to talk to each other, and the more there is an educational alliance that allows children and adolescents to have adults as reference points, especially during the most critical moments. Which is a very fundamental thing."* In this respect, Dr. Antonio Trimarchi explains a new approach based on an innovative model that stresses the importance of community when dealing with communication and education:

> *"I have been working for years within a research center, which is a "family ecology center", which means connecting all the communication modes of three generations: grandparents, parents, and grandchildren. This model is called "family ecology", later called "social ecology" and then became "health ecology", which contains the social, the family, and the individual, and the environment. It is important that education flows on all levels, there is an influence that is biological, psychological, and social. Health is the integral of these things. Every setting is an important influence, there is no exclusive one."* -Antonio Trimarchi

Educational strategies/approaches

Interviewees were also asked to reflect on what might be the best educational/pedagogical approaches/strategies to adopt when addressing these issues with young people. Also in this case, experts' answers were rather unanimous. In particular, all experts emphasized two fundamental aspects: the importance of participative and inclusive methodologies, and the importance of an open, non-judgmental approach. Experts think that young people should feel free to express themselves on these issues within an open, inclusive, and non-judgmental environment. Furthermore, they must feel stimulated and encouraged to actively participate in lessons, projects, and initiatives as active agents and not as passive listeners. Comments in this respect include:

> *"It is increasingly difficult to do frontal teaching at school; students need concrete experiences, so rather than being theoretical and explaining it is better to use more concrete methods (like school trips, and workshop activities). One possibility could be using "circle time" as a teaching method to actively involve them, but to do this you have to enter into a dimension of relationship and mutual trust, you have to make sure that students do not feel judged by the adult or by each other".* –Alessandro Zanon

> *"What makes these programs more effective are participative methodologies, those that involve young people in every way, both in listening to their views and experiences without a judgmental/moralistic attitude and through peer-education. Peer-education in the adolescent age group, which is an age group with its own criticalities and distances with respect to the adult world, is very effective: it involves opening up on intimate, sensitive topics. Youths often are afraid of expressing themselves, not feeling understood, or being judged/discredited by adults. The approach must be open, participative, and non-judgmental and always aimed at listening."* –Brunella Greco

> *"Perhaps in Italy, we often tend to talk only and exclusively about knowledge, but not about skills. Adolescents themselves often ask for more*

practical interventions because for them these are more activating, they need to feel involved... Getting them involved is extremely effective because they feel much more listened to and understood". -Gaia Cuccì

Indeed, some experts suggest that, as a first step, to ensure the effectiveness and success of educational approaches and strategies, it is fundamental to work on the referring adult/educator's authority and competencies on the issues and not take them for granted.

Finally, experts were invited to consider the role of technology as a didactic/pedagogical tool to implement prevention programs. All experts recognize the potential and numerous advantages that new technological tools can have for educational purposes, however, they also recognize the value of maintaining a traditional, face-to-face approach. According to most experts, it all depends on how digital tools are used and for what purposes. Comments include:

"Virtual and real world are increasingly intersecting, one cannot replace the other: if they complement each other, we are much more effective and closer to youth. We need to strike a balance between the speed that technology and technocracy impose on us and the time we need to understand what we are doing. The challenge is to connect tools and ends and make them coherent. Technology should help us gain and save time also in educational settings"-Antonio Trimarchi

"It all depends on how you use the tool and the type of communication you do. Traditional/classical communication is always important. There is no one-size-fits-all communication, but there is targeted communication according to a certain target, otherwise, that message could not be understood by everyone"-Giorgia Butera

"There has been a strong change in recent years from the point of view of communication and relationships because of the increasing use and implementation of digital media and technological devices, especially after COVID-19 pandemic. All these new digital tools are useful if used to support teaching, but I strongly believe in face-to-face dialogue. The truth is never

an individual domain but is found together in confrontation, dialogue, and research activities. The moment of the frontal lesson, not as a moment of assertive lesson but as a moment of dialogue is very important. The teacher must have the sensitivity to understand the characteristics of his/her students and empathize with them. Innovative teaching can of course support all this."-Alessandro Zanon

Nevertheless, some of the interviewees also reported some of the risks and dangers to which young people may be exposed when navigating the Internet. The METE Onlus expert, for instance, describes the dangerousness of the so-called *"dark web"* and of other well-known channels and platforms used not only by adolescents but even by pre-teens and children. She comments: "*The black hole of the net, the so-called "dark room" is impressive for all that it contains, but there are also various channels on Telegram or the website Omeglee, also known by 10-year-olds, where it is all about sex, sex between adults and minors with impressive numbers that are frightening. And all this material ends up on online platforms."* According to her, digital crimes have increased in recent years in Italy too because new ICTs and technological innovations have made it easier to commit them, and the main problem is that "*nobody filters and monitors these abusive online behaviours."* Professor Gaia Cuccì reflects on the risks of new social media platforms and pornography. She comments: *"Anyone on social can share any content and TikTok's algorithm works based on the virality of the content, so teenagers see the most viral videos, not those of the most experienced or trained people. Pornography also becomes an information medium, but pornography often conveys messages that do not correspond to reality, which will generate fantasies in teenagers that are not realistic or will generate insecurities because the models reproduced are stereotyped and do not correspond to reality."*

3.6.3 Discussion

These interviews seem to largely confirm what emerged in chapter two through the analysis of the already existing scientific literature on the topic and the literature review, namely that TFIPV is a quite widespread phenomenon in Italy, even among

the younger segments of the population, although still extremely little known and recognized.

As far as the most widespread TFIPV behaviors are concerned, Dr. Stefania Loddo, by taking into account her professional experience and work at the Centro Antiviolenza of Padova, provides us with some evidence. She reveals that *"stalking, constant monitoring, and psychological violence are among the most common forms of violence that are reported by the women who refer to us. [...] Sometimes violations consist of conscious monitoring, or even unconscious, through microchips or apps (stalkwares, spywares). There are also cases of non-consensual sharing of intimate material, but they very often don't reach the Anti-Violence Centre. Primarily because these are forms of violence that are very little and rarely reported and because generally if they are reported, this is done without the support of the centre but directly to law enforcement agencies."* She also provides important information on the coping mechanisms/strategies used by victims: *"victims of revenge porn usually choose to report the episode to friends, family, school, or even to the police, or even to nobody, but not necessarily to us."* From these insights, it is possible to infer that informal, rather than formal, coping mechanisms seem to prevail (at least in the reality of Padua), as emerged in the previous literature review. She also describes the "stereotypical" perpetrator, who, in most cases is a man, a partner, or an ex-partner, underlining once again how these forms of violence are part of a much broader framework of GBV.

Concerning school-based prevention programs, these interviews showed that there is still a long way to go in Italy to improve these programs and make them more comprehensive, updated, and effectively effective. However, as the experts demonstrated, a number of impediments seem to prevail, such as the lack of collaboration between the school and the students' parents, the fragmentation and diversity of programs, the stigma that still surrounds these issues, the lack of interest and responsibility on the part of parents in wanting to address these issues with their children, and first and foremost the lack of a real understanding of the phenomenon itself, which often leads to its being downplayed. Furthermore, according to experts, the Italian school system should prioritize approaches that are as inclusive and participatory as possible, also through the support of new technological tools, and

avoid assuming excessively neutral and judgmental attitudes, as still happens in most cases.

On the other hand, not even new generations seem to worry much about this ever-growing phenomenon and tend to normalize or accept toxic, abusive, and controlling behaviors in their intimate relationships which should instead be avoided, reported, and denounced. This seems to derive from a strong difficulty in recognizing and processing one's own emotions and feelings, from a "hypersexualization" to which contemporary society and new media subject them, and from a lack of affectivity and sentimentality education. This evidence demonstrates the urgency of working first and foremost on the emotional and relational skills of youth, in addition to knowledge.

To conclude, these interviews have shown that education, whether parental or scholastic, underpins everything and only collaboration and coordination of objectives and goals can lead to effective results with respect to these issues. Both school and parental education must be aimed at eliminating gender stereotypes, fighting sexist and patriarchal culture, and above all teaching their children and students respect for others, for the other gender, and offering models of healthy and open communication. And in this regard, community influence also plays a key role.

2.6.4 Limits and suggestions for future research

Some study's limitations are worth mentioning for future improvements and corrections: firstly, methodologically speaking, the number of expert interviews conducted appears to be rather small, and this is mainly due to time constraints and difficulties in finding experts available/willing to participate in this interview. Secondly, as regards the field of expertise of the experts, it should be further expanded, to include other professionals such as law enforcement agencies, policymakers, university professors, middle school teachers, and other figures working with children and adolescents who possess good knowledge on these topics. Thirdly, further, more detailed and in-depth questions regarding the specific nature of the TFIPV phenomenon should be asked. In addition, future research and studies should carry out investigations, both qualitative (such as focus groups or

interviews) and quantitative (surveys, online questionnaires), not only with experts/adults but directly on samples of young populations/students/adolescents to effectively understand the nature, the extent and the impact of these behaviours on them. Furthermore, more follow-ups and impact assessments are needed to evaluate the actual effectiveness of Italian school-based prevention programs in reducing these abusive behaviors, not only in the short-medium term but also in the long term.

CONCLUSIONS

New ICTs have created new opportunities and benefits, but they have also exacerbated existing forms of violence. As has emerged in this research, cyberstalking, NCII, and other forms of cyber abuse and control have been facilitated and increased because of the new sophisticated technologies, such as spyware and stalkware. Artificial intelligence and synthetic media have also contributed to the emergence and spreading of new forms of TFIPV such as virtual rape, creepshots, deepfakes, and digital voyeurism. These forms of digital violence are now also widespread among the younger population, giving rise to what is now referred to as the phenomenon of "online teen dating violence". Although common thinking mistakenly believes that TFIPV, because of its nature, is less virulent and impactful than IPV, it is as damaging as its offline counterpart, and it constitutes a real social problem that must be taken seriously. This research has demonstrated that TFIPV is part of the continuum of IPV that comprises both abuses that are facilitated or committed through ICT means, as well as those that are perpetrated as forms of in-person IPV. For these reasons, it is fundamental to focus on the actual human agents in the perpetration of these abuses, to avoid technologically deterministic approaches that attribute the fault of these acts only you ICTs. The real root causes of TFIPV lie in the same gender inequalities, power imbalance, discrimination, gender stereotypes, and sexism that characterize IPV. Therefore, TFIPV practices should not be classified just as "cybercrimes", but they should be placed under the heading of "online GBV".

As has been evidenced in the first chapter, TFIPV threatens the privacy, dignity, freedom, and safety of individuals, especially women and girls. It threatens their ability to access the Internet and online platforms, share information, maintain employment opportunities, and stay connected for personal reasons and well-being. It may also weaken, disintegrate, or even destroy social cohesion. It might help to perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes and norms, misogyny, and toxic masculinity, leading to further/additional violence and/or hate between individuals, groups, and communities. TFIPV is in fact an issue that concerns and involves everyone, both females and males, as well as the whole community. Research to date, as well as

expert interviews presented in Chapter Three, demonstrate that when men and boys tend to commit more severe and sexual forms of TFIPV (like online sexual harassment, NCII, sextortion etc.), women and girls, on the other hand, tend to perpetrate some subtle, and non-sexual forms of abuse (like cyberstalking, constant phone checking, monitoring etc.). Indeed, studies also affirm that the level of acceptance and normalization of these abusive behaviors within intimate relationships tends to be higher for younger generations than adults. The results obtained from this research work open the way to a series of reflections and questions. First, they lead us to reflect on what these phenomena might mean on a social level. They could reflect the profound existential crisis that many individuals, especially the younger generations, are experiencing nowadays, caused by a sense of uncertainty for the future, low self-esteem, lack of confidence and trust in themselves and in others, and the new mass media that very often carry wrong messages that contribute to the reconstruction or dissemination of gender stereotypes, norms, abusive and toxic behaviour or create new ones.

The new digital frontier is therefore putting the human rights of many individuals at serious risk. To complement existing programs, initiatives, and strategies to regulate, monitor, or report TFIPV behaviours, a more proactive, positive, and inclusive approach is needed, especially when young people are involved. New and appropriate legislative measures, as well as additional remedies for protecting victims, need to be further theorized and adopted in order to fill the existing gaps. The Italian case study considered in Chapter Two is extremely emblematic in this regard. Although in more recent years the country has adopted a number of specific provisions to counter (online) GBV and protect victims (like the so-called *"Red Code",* or Law No. 119 of 15 October 2013), they seem to be insufficient, on their own, to fight these abusive practices effectively. The Italian TFIPV legislation, in fact, presents a number of gaps, as well as many substantial and procedural limitations since based on a purely punitive/criminal approach, instead of a preventive and more proactive one. From what has emerged in this study, and particularly from expert interviews, in Italy, despite the growing number of civil society initiatives and campaigns aimed at contrasting these forms of violence, it seems that there is still not a real recognition and comprehensive understanding of

TFIPV as a specific and unique form of GBV. Moreover, in the country, there is still a high tendency to endorse victim-blaming perspectives, meaning that a real culture of consent does not yet seem to have been formed. The Italian case study has shown that the introduction within the Italian criminal law system of specific crimes such as cyberstalking and NCII seems to be insufficient, on its own, to fight the practices effectively, demonstrating that prioritizing prevention strategies and educational approaches is the right way to go. Obviously, this should be facilitated by additional studies and research aimed at investigating the nature and extent of TFIPV in Italy, in a more comprehensive manner. As the Italian literature review presented in this second chapter has demonstrated, empirical research on the nature, scope, and prevalence of TFIPV in the country is extremely sparse and there are significant limitations in both the scope and number of empirical studies conducted to date. In any case, the findings from this brief literature review resulted to be largely in line with the already existing literature on the topic, namely that women, girls, and LGBTQ+ people in Italy tend to be at a higher risk of experiencing some forms of TFIPV (like NCII and cyberstalking), that previous offline victimization, substance abuse, and intimate partner dynamics are relevant predictors of TFIPV behaviors, that in both cyberstalking and NCII cases, more informal than formal coping strategies tend to prevail, and finally that victims of cyberstalking tend to experience severe psychological and emotional harms such as depression, anxiety symptoms, tiredness, sadness, fear, paranoia, and lack of confidence.

Finally, the last chapter of this research work has proven the importance of education in preventing TFIPV behaviours, particularly by introducing "comprehensive sex education" programs within schools and other formal and non-formal educational settings, which consider the more emotional and relational aspects of sexuality, in addition to the purely sexual ones. When dealing with basic values, norms, and behaviours, it is true, however, that the primary socialization process that takes place between the child and those people in their life with whom they have a close, personal, and intimate face-to-face relationship (usually their parents, siblings, and family members), plays a major role. It is through the family that children learn about their culture, values, norms, and behaviors related to affectivity and intimate relationships. Children observe and learn from the

dynamics of their parents' relationship. Whether healthy or dysfunctional, these patterns serve as models for future intimate relationships.

However, while primary socialization, primarily occurring within the family, lays the foundation for an individual's values and beliefs, the secondary socialization process – which occurs in various social contexts, including education, peer groups, media, and work environments – further helps shape and refine these aspects, therefore also playing a significant role in influencing how individuals approach and engage in intimate relationships. As emerged from expert interviews, education is a prominent agent of secondary socialization, exposing students to diverse perspectives, values, and social norms. The educational environment fosters the development of cognitive and interpersonal skills that can directly impact intimate relationships. For this reason, school-based programs, curricula and other initiatives aimed at preventing these forms of (online) violence, can positively influence the choices and behaviours of young people in their intimate relationships as well. Therefore, for prevention programs to be actually effective, they should prioritize the involvement of parents, family, and the entire school community, as well as fostering family communication on these issues, given the fact that the family is the primary context in which adolescents acquire information and relationship values. Prevention programs should prioritize educational strategies and approaches such as peer education and SEL models, to enhance the socio-emotional skills of students. New technologies can be extremely useful and effective pedagogical and educational tools, provided they are used with caution and in the right dose, otherwise, they could produce the opposite effect and be a vehicle for the further perpetuation of abusive online behaviors. This highlights the importance of adopting Critical Digital and Social Media Literacy within educational settings because online spaces are not neutral and can be very dangerous for young people.

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Annex 1: Interview Questionnaire

Questionnaire:

Profile of the expert: _____

SEX AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION

1. How do you assess the effectiveness of current school-based sex education and relationship education programs? How much can these programs really influence the way children and adolescents live/will live their intimate relationships? What is missing in these programs? What could be the most problematic/controversial aspects?

SCHOOL-BASED PREVENTION PROGRAMS

2. What are the aspects/elements that can make a prevention program really effective? What are the best pedagogical/educational approaches to adopt?

3. How much and to what extent, in your opinion, can the school environment influence and condition children's choices and behaviours in their intimate/couple relationships? How much, on the other hand, does the family context influence their behaviours and choices in this respect?

TECHNOLOGY

4. Are the new digital tools (PCs, smartphones, apps, interactive games, etc.) an effective tool to implement these school-based prevention programs? Or is a "more traditional"/face-to-face approach preferable?

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

5. What are the psychological and emotional consequences of being a victim of TFIPV? Are they the same for both boys and girls?

6. What could be the possible causes for young people to engage in violent online behaviours or attitudes towards their partner?

7. Is it possible to say that some forms of online violence within relationships are "more accepted" or "normalised" than offline forms of violence? If yes, why?

8. Which could be the reasons for different behaviours and attitudes between boys and girls? Would it be preferable to design and implement gender-differentiated prevention programs?

Annex 2: Informed contest form (Italian version)

Consenso informato

Università degli Studi di Padova, Via 8 Febbraio, 2 - 35122 Padova - Italy, | +39 049 827 3131

Modulo per il consenso informato

Titolo della tesi: TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN ITALY:THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PREVENTING ABUSIVE BEHAVIOURS IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

1.	Accetto di partecipare al suddetto progetto di ricerca dell'Università di Padova. Il progetto mi è stato illustrato e sono consapevole che ciò comporterà: essere intervistato dal ricercatore e consentire la registrazione audio dell'intervista ai fini della sua trascrizione.	
2.	Queste informazioni saranno conservate ed elaborate per i seguenti scopi: la stesura e la discussionedella tesi di laurea magistrale, nonché per la futura pubblicazione della tesi o di parte di essa. Sono consapevole di aver dato la mia approvazione affinché il mio nome e il nome del mio posto dilavoro e il ruolo che svolgo (o ho svolto) in esso siano utilizzati nella relazione finale della tesi Sono consapevole che, se richiesto, il mio contributo sarà anonimo e si farà riferimento solo al nomedel luogo di lavoro e/o al ruolo che svolgo (o ho svolto) in esso.	
3.	Sono consapevole che la mia partecipazione è volontaria, che posso scegliere di non partecipare a unaparte o a tutto il progetto e che posso ritirarmi in qualsiasi fase del processo senza essere penalizzato o danneggiato in alcun modo.	
4.	Acconsento alla registrazione e al trattamento di queste informazioni da parte dell'Università di Padova. Sono consapevole che tali informazioni saranno utilizzate solo per gli scopi indicati nella presente dichiarazione e che il mio consenso è subordinato al rispetto da parte dell'Università dei doveri e degli obblighi previsti degli artt. 13 e 14 del Regolamento UE 2016/679 (Regolamento generale sulla protezione dei dati)	
5.	Acconsento a partecipare all'intervista	

Nome del partecipante   Firma   Data

_____   _____   _____

Una volta completato, 1 copia per il partecipante