# PARTNER ABUSE, CONTROL AND VIOLENCE THROUGH INTERNET AND SMARTPHONES: CHARACTERISTICS, EVALUATION AND PREVENTION

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*La violencia en la pareja constituye un problema social de gran relevancia por su elevada prevalencia y por las consecuencias para sus víctimas. En los últimos años, las tecnologías de la información y de la comunicación, como Internet y los Smartphones, se han convertido en herramientas frecuentes para ejercer comportamientos de control y agresiones en las parejas jóvenes. En esta línea, la finalidad del presente trabajo es la de realizar una revisión actualizada sobre el abuso online en parejas jóvenes. Para ello, en primer lugar, se analiza en qué consiste este fenómeno y las principales manifestaciones del abuso online en la pareja a través de Internet y los Smartphones. A continuación, se lleva a cabo una revisión de los instrumentos desarrollados para su evaluación y sus propiedades psicométricas. Finalmente, se incluyen varias recomendaciones para el desarrollo de estrategias de prevención derivadas de la evidencia empírica disponible.*
*Palabras clave: Abuso online, Relaciones de pareja, Violencia en el noviazgo, Control, Cyberbullying.*

*Partner abuse is an important social problem due to its high prevalence and the consequences it entails for the victims. In recent years, information and communication technologies, such as the Internet and Smartphones, have become frequent tools for exercising controlling behavior and aggression in young couples. The purpose of this paper is to conduct a review of the research on online abuse in young couples. To this end, firstly, we analyze what this phenomenon consists of and the main manifestations of online partner abuse through the Internet and Smartphones. Then, a review is carried out of the instruments developed for the assessment of online abuse and their psychometric properties. Finally, several recommendations are delineated for the development of prevention strategies derived from the available empirical evidence.*
*Key words: Online abuse, Partner violence, Dating violence, Control, Cyberbullying.*

**V**lence in couples is a social problem of the first order due to its high prevalence (Vagi, Olsen, Basile, & Vivolo-Kantor, 2015; Wincentak, Connolly & Card, 2017) and the consequences for its victims (Izaguirre & Calvete, 2015; Vu, Jouriles, McDonald, & Rosenfield, 2016). These aggressions tend to begin at an early age during the first dating relationships (Bowen et al., 2014) and may constitute the precursor of abusive behaviors in later stages of relationships (Almendros, Gámez-Guadix, Carrobles, Rodriguez-Carballeira, & Porrua, 2009). The main types of aggression include physical, psychological, and sexual (Almendros et al., 2009). Although both men and women can be victims of partner violence, women suffer the most serious consequences of this aggression (Archer, 2000).

In recent decades, information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as the Internet and Smartphones, have become instruments that are usually involved in the development, maintenance, and dissolution of relationships (Fox, Osborn, & Warber, 2014). In addition, ICTs are often used as means to carry out abusive behavior towards the partner, mainly in the form of psychological control, and

psychological and verbal aggression (Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix, & Calvete, 2015a; Zweig, Dank, Yahner, & Lachman, 2013).

In this sense, online partner abuse has been defined as a set of repeated behaviors that aim to control, disparage, or cause harm to the other member of the couple (Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix, Pereda, & Calvete, 2015c; Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2017). Online abuse behaviors toward the partner include controlling through social networks, the theft or misuse of passwords, the dissemination of secrets or compromising information, threats and public or private insults through ICTs. These behaviors frequently appear associated with behaviors of psychological and physical aggression face to face, and could constitute a precursor of them (Borrajo et al., 2015c). In addition, according to the studies, online abuse is common in couples. The prevalence data range between 7% and 80% (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011), depending on the type of abuse considered.

Research has shown that online partner abuse is associated with greater depression and anxiety for the victims; greater uncertainty regarding the relationship; insecure and ambivalent attachment styles; antisocial behaviors and higher levels of hostility; as well as levels of perceived stress even higher than those caused by traditional aggressions (e.g., Hinduja & Patchin, 2011).

Therefore, it is necessary to advance in the knowledge and prevention of this type of abuse in the couple. The present paper

has the following objectives. Firstly, the aspects related to the typologies and the assessment of online partner abuse are analyzed. The main categories of online abuse are described as well as the instruments developed to evaluate them. Secondly, the aspects related to the prevention of online abuse in couple relationships are reviewed, including the need to develop holistic approaches and to work on the attitudes that justify violence. Finally, we conclude with a series of recommendations and future lines of research.

## TYPOLOGIES AND EVALUATION OF ONLINE PARTNER ABUSE
### Conceptualization and typologies

Although the study of online partner abuse has begun to generate greater interest in recent years, there are still relatively few investigations conducted on this problem (Brown & Hegarty, 2018; Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). This lack of empirical attention has led to the lack of a consensual definition to delimit the phenomenon, which has generated a wide variety of terminology in terms of its conceptualization. Table 1 includes the different denominations proposed by different authors, as well as the definitions or, where appropriate, the specific behaviors that allow us to characterize the phenomenon. As can be seen, some of the terms to refer to this problem include "cyber-abuse" in the couple, "cyber-aggression", "digital violence" in dating relationships, "cyberbullying" in the couple, "electronic aggression" and "electronic victimization", among others. In our view, the term *online partner abuse* is the most inclusive as it accommodates a wide range of behaviors, such as psychological control (e.g., knowing where the partner is at all times and with whom), harassment (e.g., repeated and insidious calls) and psychological and verbal aggressions, such as insults, threats, and humiliations (Borrajo & Gámez-Guadix, 2016; Zweig, Lachman, Yahner, & Dank, 2014).

The behaviors of control or surveillance of the partner or ex-partner through electronic means have been the behaviors that have generated the most interest (Brown & Hegarty, 2018; Leisring & Giumetti, 2014). Zweig et al. (2013) found that tools such as email, mobile phones, and even equipment such as GPS or webcams, were used to perform controlling behaviors on the partner (e.g., excessive sending of emails, checking of calls and/or email accounts or the use of GPS, spyware, webcams and/or personal passwords to control the partner). Borrajo et al. (2015c), meanwhile, examined the various forms of control and surveillance of the partner through social networks, such as frequently visiting the partner's profile, reading the comments of their friends, reviewing their photos, status updates and/or their relationships, or trying to control the other through their profile in a social network. The prevalence of these behaviors among young Spanish adults was 75% for the perpetration and 82% for the victimization.

Darvell, Walsh, and White (2011) distinguished the following types of abuse: 1) Electronic hostility, which includes the publication or sending of threatening, insulting or harmful messages through social networks, text messages or mail; 2) Intrusiveness, referring to the controlling of electronic mail and social networks, the changing of passwords and the creation of a false profile; 3) Electronic humiliation, mainly referring to the publication of photos or information on social networks or websites to humiliate or embarrass the victim; and 4) Electronic exclusion, which refers to eliminating, excluding, or blocking in social networks or friend lists.

For their part, Burke, Wallen, Vail-Smith, and Knox (2011) place the emphasis on the sexual nature of online abuse behaviors. These authors propose a classification that distinguishes between behaviors of a sexual nature (e.g., sending intimate and/or sexual photos of the partner without permission) and those that are not of that type (e.g., insults, threats) through different electronic tools.

### The evaluation of online abuse in couples

Research on the tools to assess online abuse in couples has advanced considerably. The list of instruments developed for this purpose to date is presented in Table 2. They have been grouped according to whether they assess victimization (Bennett et al., 2011), perpetration (Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke, & Cratty, 2011), or both (Borrajo, et al., 2015c). As can be observed, most of the scales focus on specific types of online abuse in dating relationships, such as, for example, behaviors of excessive control through Facebook (Tokunaga, 2011). It is important to note that some studies do not provide evidence on the validity of the scales, or the evidence on their validity is limited. Most of them do report adequate reliability, mainly on the internal consistency of the scales.

Although it is necessary to advance in the evaluation of online partner abuse, as can be seen in Table 2 there currently exists a variety of instruments with adequate guarantees of reliability and validity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREVENTION OF ONLINE PARTNER ABUSE

The empirical evidence accumulated to date has indicated the potential consequences that being a victim of online abuse could involve (Brown & Hegarty, 2018). Therefore, it is urgent to develop and implement prevention programs among adolescents and young adults. Considering the empirical data that we have up to this moment, we must point out three fundamental recommendations for the design of prevention strategies: 1) integrating the prevention of the two types of violence in the couple, online and offline; 2) studying the role of attitudes that justify violence; and 3) considering perpetration and victimization as related phenomena.

### Integrating online abuse prevention with partner violence prevention programs

Studies conducted on adolescents have found that online abuse in couples tends to occur together with offline psychological and physical violence. Hinduja and Patchin (2011) found that those

| TABLE 1 | | |
|---|---|---|
| **SUGGESTED NAMES FOR THE PHENOMENON OF ONLINE ABUSE IN COUPLES** | | |
| Author(s) | Name | Definition or behaviors |
| Zweig et al. (2013) | Cyber dating abuse | <u>Sexual cyber abuse:</u> Pressurizing the partner to send sexual or nude photos; sending sexual photos of the partner to others knowing that they do not want you to; threatening the partner if they do not send sexual or nude photos; sending text messages, mail or chats to have sex or participate in sexual acts with the partner, knowing that he or she does not want to. <u>Non-sexual cyber abuse</u>: Sending threatening messages; using the partner's social media without permission; taking a video of the partner and sending it to friends without permission; sending messages (SMS, chat, email) that make them feel insecure; using electronic means to physically threaten the partner; writing unpleasant things in the partner's social media. |
| Schnurr, Mahatmya, & Basche (2013) | Cyber aggressions | Using technology toward the current partners to embarrass them, make them feel bad, control, monitor, and argue. |
| Associated Press/MTV; Liz Claiborne Inc. (2011) | Digital abuse in dating relationships | Checking where and with whom the partner is multiple times a day; reading messages without permission; making the partner delete the ex-partner from their friends lists on social networks; insulting them through the Internet or mobile phone; finding out the passwords without permission; contacting the partner to have sex when he or she does not want to; spreading rumors about the partner; using the information published on the Internet against the partner to humiliate or embarrass them; threatening to hurt the partner. |
| Melander (2010b) | Cyber partner violence | Adapting Johnson's (2006) typology of partner violence to an online environment: <u>Situational violence in the couple:</u> New technologies as precursors of violent episodes (e.g., checking the partner's phone). <u>Intimate Terrorism:</u> Controlling behaviors (e.g., constantly controlling where the partner is and what they are doing). <u>Mutual violent control:</u> Mutual control through new technologies. <u>Violent resistance:</u> Using new technologies in defense against the partner's aggressions (for example, breaking off the relationship over the mobile phone). |
| Draucker & Martsolf (2010) | Electronic aggressions Definition proposed by David-Ferdon and Hertz (2007) in the context of electronic aggressions among peers. | Any type of harassment or bullying, including provocations, lies, teasing, making rude or cruel comments, spreading rumors, or making aggressive or threatening comments, which occur through email, chat room, instant messaging, web pages, or text messages. |
| Tokunaga (2011) | Interpersonal electronic surveillance | Covert individual strategies, carried out through communication technologies, to find out the connection status of another user and/or their online friends. |
| Lyndon et al. (2011) | Facebook stalking | The obsessive monitoring of personal information presented on Facebook by friends, acquaintances or strangers who are friends on Facebook. |
| Stonard, Bowen, Lawrence, & Price (2014) | Violence and abuse in adolescent dating relationshipsthrough technologies | Any behavior of threat, control, violence, abuse, harassment or surveillance aimed at the partner or ex-partner in a teenage dating relationship (10-18 years). This may include (independently or in combination) physical, psychological/emotional and sexual behaviors that may occur in person or through electronic means (such as mobile or online) and occur regardless of gender or sexuality. |
| Bennet et al. (2011) | Electronic victimization | <u>Electronic hostility:</u> Publishing or sending threatening, insulting, or harmful messages through social media, text messages or email. <u>Intrusiveness:</u> Controlling email and social networks, changing passwords, and creating a false profile. <u>Electronic humiliation:</u> Publication of photos or information on social networks or websites to humiliate or embarrass the victim. <u>Electronic exclusion:</u> Removing, excluding, or blocking on social media or friend lists. |
| Leisring & Giumetti (2014) | Cyber psychological abuse | <u>Minor cyber abuse:</u> insulting; abruptly stopping sending messages or emails during an argument; using capital letters to shout; obtaining passwords by reading emails, mobile phone messages, or social media messages. <u>Severe cyber abuse:</u> threatening; sending emails to others about the partner to humiliate or embarrass him or her; publishing inappropriate photos of the partner or compromising information to humiliate him or her. |
| Cutbush, Williams, Miller, Gibbs, & Clinton-Sherrod (2012) | Electronic dating aggression | Adapted from Picard (2007). Insulting or saying unpleasant things to the partner; contacting the partner when he or she does not want this; making the partner feel afraid; spreading rumors about the partner; showing private or embarrassing photos/videos to others; threatening to hurt the partner physically; checking up on the partner repeatedly to find out where they are. |

who had been involved in traditional forms of violence admitted that they had also been involved in electronic forms. These authors also indicated that it is possible to identify some risk behaviors that could lead to victimization, such as sharing personal passwords with the partner.

The results reported by Zweig et al. (2013) also follow this line, indicating that online violence is related to the different forms of traditional violence (physical, psychological, and sexual), both in terms of victimization and perpetration. Thus, the victimization of online violence was associated with the victimization of traditional forms of violence and abuse, and perpetration, similarly, with the perpetration of traditional forms of violence.

Regarding studies conducted with samples of university students, Melander (2010a) found that the perpetration of online abuse in dating relationships is significantly associated with a greater perpetration of forms of traditional violence (physical, psychological, and sexual). Likewise, the victimization of electronic aggressions also showed a positive relationship with traditional violence.

In summary, the results of the various investigations show that both types of aggression (online and offline) tend to relate to and share common risk factors. Based on the empirical evidence indicated, the prevention and intervention of both types of abuse must be integrated holistically.

### Studying attitudes that justify online abuse

The role of beliefs that justify violence as a risk factor has been

**TABLE 2**
**PSYCHOMETRIC EVIDENCE OF THE INSTRUMENTS USED IN STUDIES ON ONLINE PARTNER ABUSE**

**Victimization**

| Author(s) | Name of the instrument | Number of items and dimensions | Validity | Reliability |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Barter et al. (2017) | Online Interpersonal Violence and Abuse | 6 items that evaluate 4 main forms of violence and interpersonal abuse through new technologies: emotional abuse, control behavior, surveillance, and isolation. | | α: .76 - .86 |
| Bennet et al. (2011) | Electronic victimization | 22 items: hostility, intrusion, humiliation, exclusion | | Hostility (α=.74); Intrusion (α=.73); Humiliation (α=.74); Exclusion (α=.77) |
| Carlson Fripp, Cook, & Kelchner (2015) | | 5 items adapted from Schnurr, Mahatmy, & Basche (2013) based on Draucker and Martsolf (2010) | | α = .54 |
| Dick et al. (2014) | Cyber Dating Abuse | 7 modified items from Ybarra, Espelage, & Mitchell (2007) and Bennett et al., (2011) It includes two categories of items:Sexual cyber dating abuse in the couple and non-sexual cyber dating abuse. | EFA | α = .72 |
| Domínguez-Mora, Vargas-Jiménez, Castro-Castañeda, & Nuñez-Fadda (2016) | Victimization in Social Networks | 6 items that include control behaviors. | | α = .90. |
| Jaen-Cortés, Rivera-Aragón, Reidl-Martínez, & García-Méndez (2017). | Scale of Couple Violence Expressed through Electronic Media | 32 items 5 dimensions: Control, intrusive surveillance and cyber surveillance (10) Verbal aggression (11) Sexual aggression (5) Sexual coercion (3) Humiliation (3) | EFA | α = .94 for the total scale α =.78 -.93 for the subscales |
| Spitzberg & Hoobler (2002) | Cyber Obsessional Pursuit Scale | 24 items on the frequency with which the couple carries out persecution behaviors. 3 dimensions Hyper intimacy Transfer to real life Threats | EFA | α = .77 - .88 |

## TABLE 2
## PSYCHOMETRIC EVIDENCE OF THE INSTRUMENTS USED IN STUDIES ON ONLINE PARTNER ABUSE (CONTINUATION)

**Victimization**

| Author(s) | Name of the instrument | Number of items and dimensions | Validity | Reliability |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wolford-Clevenger et al. (2016) | The Partner Cyber Abuse Questionnaire | 9 items from Hamby (2013), including harassment, surveillance, humiliation, and verbal abuse through technologies, such as mobile phones, social networks or email, perpetrated by the current partner. | EFA | α = .72 |

**Perpetration**

| Author(s) | Name of the instrument | Number of items and dimensions | Factorial structure | Internal consistency |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fox & Warber (2013) | Interpersonal Electronic Surveillance for Social Networking Sites via Facebook, adapted from Tokunaga (2011) | 13 items on surveillance through social networks | EFA and CFA | α=. 97 |
| Lyndon et al. (2011) | Facebook Survey | 13 items: covert provocation, public harassment, venting | EFA | α = .79 - .88 |
| Korchmaros, Ybarra, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Boyd, & Lenhart (2013) | Perpetration in Dating Relationships Scales, adapted from Victimization in Dating Relationships Scales (Foshee et al., 1996) | 4 items: Control, jealousy, degradation | | |
| Sánchez, Muñoz-Fernández, & Ortega-Ruíz (2015) | *Cyberdating Q A* | 6 dimensions, 2 of them related to online abuse in couples: online control (6 items) and online intrusive behaviors (4 items) | EFA and CFA | α = .84 - .85 |
| Schnurr et al. (2013) | *Cyber Aggression Perpetration* | 5 items adapted from Draucker & Martsolf (2010). | | α =.76 and .71 for men and women, respectively |
| Tokunaga (2011) [Modified from Fox & Warber (2013) | Interpersonal Electronic Surveillance for Social Networking Sites | 12 items that describe surveillance and control behavior in social networks. | EFA and CFA | α =. 97 |
| Wright (2015) | Partner Direct Cyber-Aggression | 5 items adapted from a questionnaire that measures relational aggression in the couple face to face (Linder, Crick, & Collins, 2002). 2 dimensions: Relational cyber aggressions (3) Invasion of privacy (2) | CFA | α = .82 -.91 |

**Perpetration and victimization**

| Author(s) | Name of the instrument | Number of items and dimensions | Factorial structure | Internal consistency |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Borrajo et al. (2015c) | Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire | 20 parallel items Direct aggression (11) Control (9) | EFA and CFA | α =.73 - .84 for perpetration, α = .81 -.87 for victimization |

**TABLE 2**
**PSYCHOMETRIC EVIDENCE OF THE INSTRUMENTS USED IN STUDIES ON ONLINE PARTNER ABUSE (CONTINUATION)**

**Perpetration and victimization**

| Author(s) | Name of the instrument | Number of items and dimensions | Factorial structure | Internal consistency |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Burke et al. 2011 | Controlling Partner Inventory (CPI) | 18 items: photos, camera, GPS and/or spyware, excessive communication, threats, controlling behavior | EFA | $\alpha$= .90 |
| Celis-Sauce & Rojas-Solís (2015) | Cyberviolence in Dating | 4 parallel items that measure psychological aggressions such as control, surveillance and video surveillance. | | $\alpha$ =.74 and .43 for perpetration and victimization, respectively. |
| Chaulk & Jones (2011) | *Online Obsessive Relational Intrusion* | 12 items: benevolent, harmful, dangerous behaviors | | $\alpha$=.71 |
| Dank, Lachman, Zweig, & Yahner (2014) | Cyber Dating Abuse | 16 items adapted from Picard (2007) and 10 from Griezel (2007). Items that measure online abuse in the dating relationship by the current or most recent partner. | | |
| Durán & Martínez-Pecino (2015) | Scales of Cyberbullying against the Partner through the Mobile Phone and the Internet | Adapted to the romantic relationships of "Victimization Scales" (Buelga, Cava, & Musitu, 2010). Two dimensions: Cyber bullying using mobile phones, Cyber bullying using Internet | | $\alpha$ =.75 for the perpetration scale $\alpha$ = .62 - .70 for the victimization scale |
| Leisring & Giumetti (2014) | Cyber Psychological Abuse (CPA) Scale | 18 items: mild online aggressions and severe online aggressions | EFA and CFA | $\alpha$=.81 victimization; $\alpha$=.82 perpetration $\geq$ .70 mild and severe online aggressions |
| Morelli, Bianchi, Baiocco, Pezzuti, & Chirumbolo (2017) | The Cyber Dating Violence Inventory | 22 parallel items adapted from CADRI items (Wolfe et al., 2001). 2 dimensions: Cyber psychological aggression in dating relationships Cyber relational aggressions in dating relationships | EFA and CFA | $\alpha$ = .81 - .82 for the perpetration scales $\alpha$ = .82 for the victimization scales |
| Muñiz (2017) | Teen Dating Violence in Social Networks Scale | 10 items that assess violent behaviors exhibited toward the partner and former partner over the Internet. 2 dimensions: Violent acts Controlling acts | EFA and CFA | $\alpha$ = .80 - .86 |
| Reed et al. (2016) | Digital Dating Abuse Measure | 19 parallel items that measure abuse, which involve behavior patterns such as control, pressure, harassment, threats or other damage to the partner, through mobile phones, computers and Internet communication. | | $\alpha$ = .76 and .73 for victimization and perpetration, respectively. |
| Shorey, Cornelius, & Strauss (2015) | Stalking in Intimate Relationships | 6 items on cyber bullying in a general measure of harassment in dating relationships. | | $\alpha$ = .65 for perpetration and $\alpha$ =.63 for victimization |
| Temple et al. (2016) | *Cyber Abuse* | 13 parallel items modified and adapted from previous studies (Zweig et al.2013; Picard 2007): | | $\alpha$ = .65 -.67 for perpetration and $\alpha$ = .74 - .79 for victimization |
| Zweig et al. (2013) | *Cyber dating abuse* | 16 parallel items: online sexual abuse, non-sexual online abuse | | Online sexual abuse (victimization, $\alpha$=.81; perpetration, $\alpha$=.88) Non-sexual online abuse (victimization, $\alpha$=.89; perpetration, $\alpha$=.92) |

widely evaluated both in general violence (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011; Zweig et al., 2013) and in violence in couples (Calvete, 2008; Fernández-González, Calvete, & Orue, 2017b; Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). In addition, the programs developed for the prevention and intervention of offline partner violence have placed special emphasis on beliefs as a possible risk factor in the appearance of these behaviors (Muñoz-Rivas, Gámez-Guadix, Fernández-González, & González-Lozano, 2011).

The justifying beliefs of violence towards the partner are very widespread among young people. For example, Muñoz-Rivas, Graña, O'Leary, and González (2007) found, in a sample of young people between 16 and 20 years old, that approximately 13% of men justified the aggressions when they were carried out in self-defense, while 22% of women did so in emotional moments of intense rage or anger. Regarding online abuse in dating relationships, Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix, & Calvete (2015b) found that the attitudes that justify the aggressions increased the likelihood of direct aggression through ICTs (e.g., threatening or insulting the partner).

On the other hand, various authors have indicated distorted beliefs about love as a risk factor for the appearance of violence in dating relationships and have incorporated them into efforts to prevent this problem (Garrido Genovés & Tello, 2009). Some authors have indicated that young people could be especially vulnerable to a misinterpretation of partner violence due to the unreal and distorted vision they have of love (Sharpe & Taylor, 1999).

It has even been suggested that the idea that "love has the power to do everything" could cause a decrease in cognitive dissonance and create the hope that the aggression will disappear (González-Ortega, Echeburúa, & Corral, 2008). These irrational ideas or myths include the belief about the existence of a perfect person for each individual, the belief that jealousy is a sign of love, or the belief that loving someone gives one the right to abuse that person (e.g., controlling everything he or she does) (Ferrer Pérez & Bosch Fiol, 2013).

In Spain, several studies have found the wide acceptance among young people of these beliefs about love. For example, Marroquí and Cervera (2014) found that about 30% of a sample of young people either agreed or totally agreed with the myth of the soulmate (i.e., that there is a perfect match for everyone). Also, more than 70% indicated that they agree with the belief that love has the power to do anything. Ferrer, Bosch, & Navarro (2010) also found a high prevalence of acceptance of the myths about love in a sample of a wider age range (18-93 years). In the range referring to young people aged between 18 and 34, they found that about 80% expressed agreement with a distorted belief about love (e.g., jealousy is a sign of love). The results showed, in addition, that it was the women who presented a higher prevalence in relation to the myths about the power of love (e.g., love should have the power to do everything). However, the men showed greater agreement with the myths about the importance of the partner and being matched (e.g., "separation from a partner is a failure").

Therefore, based on this empirical evidence and the considerably widespread attitudes that justify aggression in relationships, this should be a central point in prevention programs.

### Perpetration and victimization are related phenomena

Research on offline physical and psychological violence in adolescent and youth relationships has systematically found that perpetration and victimization tend to appear in relation to one another (e.g., Fernández-González, Calvete, & Orue, 2017a).

In other words, the victim is usually also an aggressor, and the aggressor tends to become a victim. These results have also been reported for online abuse (Leisring & Giumetti, 2014; Reed et al., 2017).

These findings entail a series of implications for prevention. In the first place, prevention should be focused on intervening in the factors that favor reciprocity between perpetration and victimization. In this sense, it is necessary that preventive programs provide strategies to learn how to handle specific situations that could facilitate the appearance of these behaviors. Jealousy or anger seem to be important precursors in the emergence of online abuse, so it is important to detect these situations and encourage strategies to interpret and manage them properly without resorting to aggressive behavior (Borrajo et al., 2015a).

Secondly, the labeling of adolescents that participate in prevention programs (e.g., "the abuser") should be avoided. Data on the prevalence of behaviors such as control, threats and/or humiliation through electronic tools seem to show that these behaviors are part of the usual communication of young couples (Kellerman, Margolin, Borofsky, Baucom, & Iturralde, 2013), reaching rates of 80%. Therefore, the use of stigmatizing terms could be counterproductive. Rather, from an educational perspective, we recommend identifying inappropriate behaviors that must be corrected.

Finally, it is necessary to promote protective factors that include self-esteem, empathy, assertiveness, and appropriate conflict resolution strategies, which in turn will result in the prevention of perpetration and victimization.

### CONCLUSIONS

Online partner abuse has recently begun to receive attention as a differentiated form of partner violence. It is a relatively recent form of aggression and victimization, which requires more research and additional efforts to prevent it.

The prevalence results found in the studies carried out show the high incidence of online aggressions in relationships, both in national (Borrajo, et al., 2015c) and international studies (Lyndon et al., 2011). This urges us to develop studies that allow us to deepen our knowledge of the characteristics and correlates that are related to this phenomenon, with the aim of acquiring greater knowledge about it and being able to design appropriate prevention strategies. However, although attention to online partner abuse is increasing exponentially,

the different names proposed to conceptualize the phenomenon and the diversity of instruments developed to measure it (Brown & Hegarty, 2018) highlight the need to continue advancing in this field.

In addition, we have little knowledge about the risk factors that lead to its appearance, as well as about the consequences of being a victim. On the other hand, in order to obtain a broader perspective of the phenomenon, it is essential to emphasize family factors (e.g., experiences of abuse in the family or exposure to violence in the home) and personal factors (low self-esteem, impulsivity, etc.) that may be related to the appearance of these behaviors. This will allow us to understand whether the risk factors associated with the victimization and perpetration of online abuse in couples are similar to those found in the appearance of offline violence in couples and those that appear in other forms of harassment through new technologies, such as cyberbullying (Gámez-Guadix & Gini, 2016).

An important limitation in this regard is that the investigations available to date are of a transversal nature. Future longitudinal studies should examine the temporal relationship among risk factors, perpetration, and victimization in online abuse and consequences for psychosocial adjustment.

Finally, it is important to promote, from the educational, family, and social context, the promotion of the responsible use of ICTs as tools that promote personal development and communication with other people, and the systematic implementation of programs to prevent violence in the context of the couple, including abuse that occurs through the Internet and Smartphones.

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