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## **PREVENTION OF CYBERHATE AND CYBERBULLYING IN ADOLESCENTS: FAMILY STRATEGIES FOR PERSONAL GROWTH**

*Prevención de la violencia y el acoso en la red en  
adolescentes: estrategias familiares de crecimiento personal*

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years research and protocols have been developed for detection and intervention of aggressive virtual phenomena in adolescents-cyberhate and cyberbullying among others. This article mainly studies the second of these phenomena, given its relevance in recent years. There is a clear lack of strategies for the prevention of the cyberbullying phenomenon in scientific literature. This could explain why many

of the strategies carried out do not prevent violence or its consequences. With the aim of responding to this need, some personal development strategies for adolescents are proposed and critically analysed to address phenomena of virtual aggressivity. Online aggressivity arises due to a combination of individual and environmental factors. These latter include the family setting, the environment in which the teenager acquires the skills needed for socialization and personal maturity. Thus, the family environment, parental support and the type of communication established between parents and children represent some of the protective factors against aggression and victimization in cyberbullying. In addition, the development of a mature personality constitutes one of the essential cornerstones for preventing violent behaviour. The strengthening of the socializing role of the family and the cultivation of virtues for the formation of character and personal growth skills, based fundamentally on forgiveness, are proposed as the main educational strategies for prevention of violence among peers in the Internet.

*Key words:* cyberhate; cyberbullying; strategies; character education; forgiveness; personal growth; adolescence.

## RESUMEN

En los últimos años se han desarrollado y puesto en marcha estudios y protocolos de detección e intervención de fenómenos de agresividad virtual en adolescentes —ciberodio y ciberacoso, entre otros—. Este artículo va a abordar especialmente el segundo de los fenómenos, dada su relevancia en los últimos años. Existe un claro vacío en las estrategias de prevención del fenómeno del ciberacoso en la literatura científica, lo que podría explicar que muchas de las medidas llevadas a cabo no prevengan la violencia ni las consecuencias de esta. Con el objeto de dar respuesta a esta necesidad, en este trabajo se proponen y analizan críticamente algunas estrategias de desarrollo personal en adolescentes para hacer frente a estos fenómenos de agresividad virtual. La agresividad en la red es una realidad que surge por la interacción tanto de factores individuales como ambientales. Entre estos últimos está el contexto familiar, ámbito en el que el adolescente adquiere las habilidades necesarias para su socialización y madurez personal. Así, el clima familiar, el apoyo parental y el tipo de comunicación que se establezca entre padres e hijos se constituyen en algunos de los factores protectores para la agresión y la victimización en el ciberacoso. Por otra parte, el desarrollo de una personalidad madura se constituye en uno de los ejes fundamentales para la prevención de conductas violentas. Se propone el fortalecimiento del papel socializador de la familia, el cultivo de virtudes para la formación del carácter y habilidades de crecimiento personal, basadas fundamentalmente en el perdón, como las principales estrategias educativas para la prevención de la violencia entre iguales en la red.

*Palabras clave:* ciberodio; ciberacoso; estrategias; educación del carácter; perdón; crecimiento personal; adolescencia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Hate and aggressivity occur in relationships both inside the digital world and outside it. The phenomenon of violent communication is nothing new in our society, but the Internet has fostered new ways of expressing this reality, including cyberhate and cyberbullying. The aim of this article is to suggest strategies for personal development to cope with phenomena of virtual aggressivity related mainly to cyberbullying and to promote a mature personality. To do this, the main factors behind the phenomenon of virtual aggressivity in the Internet and cyberbullying are reviewed, with special emphasis on the family setting. As seen below, the main emotional education strategies and programs implemented in recent years for prevention of cyberbullying are also discussed. In the literature review, articles published in relevant journals in both English and Spanish languages in the past five years are considered. Prevention programs carried out in Spain have been taken in account in particular.

In the scientific literature, a number of cyberbullying intervention and response strategies have been addressed (Giménez-Gualdo, *et al.*, 2018; Martín and Martínez-Otero, 2020). In turn, Albert, *et al.* (2017, p. 198) and Yudes, *et al.* (2020) note the lack of prevention strategies against this phenomenon in recent studies and research on the topic. In terms of cyberbullying intervention and prevention, several strategies and methods have recently been brought to attention, focusing on digital applications (Lowry, *et al.*, 2017), emotional intelligence programs (Motamedi, *et al.*, 2017), parent training (Roberto, *et al.*, 2017), having older students help younger ones (Berne, *et al.*, 2019) and programs that promote safe browsing to reduce cyberbullying via WhatsApp based on improving the climate in the classroom and the students' sense of belonging to the class (Aizenkot and Kashy-Rosenbaum, 2021).

In Spain, the prevention programs by Avilés (2017), and by Garaigordobil and Martínez-Valderrery (2016, 2018), focused on fostering skills related to empathy, active listening and strategies for controlling impulsiveness and rage, etc., stand out in particular. The programs by Schoeps, *et al.* (2018), Díaz-López, *et al.*, 2019 and Carbonell and Cerezo (2019), based on developing emotional intelligence in adolescents, are similar. In turn, the program proposed by Del Rey, *et al.* (2018) is aimed primarily at teachers. It is based on the theory of normative social behaviour, the promotion of metacognitive self-regulation skills and reflection on the ideas/beliefs of young people. The program by Villarejo-Carballido, *et al.* (2019) stems from the dialogic model of prevention and conflict resolution, which involves the educational community as a whole.

In turn, the program proposed by Ferrer-Cascales, *et al.* (2019) is based on peer tutoring and also involves the entire educational community. To do this, it uses Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development, the principles of emotional intelligence theories and positive psychology as a reference. The Prev@cib program by Ortega, *et al.* (2019) has three theoretical frameworks: the ecological model, the

theory of empowerment and Hellison's personal and social responsibility model, which promotes shared responsibility among all the students to resolve this problem.

Despite all the programs in existence, as seen, there are no proposals that endeavour to link cases of cyberbullying to an educational perspective that fosters character-building and the promotion of virtues and values needed for personal growth. It is true that, within the educational sphere, it is possible to work on prevention that addresses the education in emotions among adolescents. However, such an exercise might be insufficient because emotions themselves are unpredictable. Therefore, the present study highlights the relevance of developing virtues that, as stable character traits, contribute to a more solid personal growth (Polo, 2013). Another important factor is educating on how to cultivate deep, healthy interpersonal relationships in which forgiving and being forgiven is a key feature. In relation to forgiveness, the importance of addressing prevention and repair of damage in cases of Internet violence has recently been noted (Pérez Ferrer and Pérez Vallejo, 2016). Dans and Muñiz (2021, p. 21) have recently proposed forgiveness as a learning strategy in cyberbullying situations. To this end, the Arendtian perspective (Arendt, 2005) on forgiveness is taken into consideration, distinguishing its *restorative* and *regenerative* sense. Thus, it becomes a cornerstone for restoring — *repairing* — the damaged ties and, in turn, for contributing to personal growth — *regenerating* the person.

## 2. CYBERBULLYING, HATE AND AGGRESSIVITY

The development of the so-called web 2.0 and the social media entails a wider-reaching communication tool that enables more personalised, interactive messaging. This has prompted a change in the spread of violence/hate that is more qualitative than quantitative. It is not so much that potential violent messages or content reach more people as it is a matter of the scope of the harmful effects and of how the Internet fosters these communicative effects, leading to a spiralling and escalation of violence deriving from the interaction, and possible social divide (Miró, 2016, p. 95).

The latest report on incidents related to hate crimes in Spain (Ministry of the Interior, 2019, pp. 6-8) highlights certain data that prompt a reflection on the need to develop appropriate strategies for detection, prevention and intervention in these activities, especially among the very young. According to *UK Safer Internet Centre* (2016), 82 % of young people between the ages of 13 and 18 claim to have witnessed some kind of online hate, and 24 % have been the victim of it. This evidences a normalisation of the discourse of violence among young people in the virtual world, which is expressed through support for extremist ideologies, aggressive manners and even as a channel for sharing risky behaviour.

Within the phenomenon of cyberhate, there are different expressions, such as hate or cyberbullying. The first of these is defined by the Royal Spanish Academy as «antipathy and aversion towards something or someone for which ill will is felt».

Hate is referred to as the use of forms of expression such a humiliation towards a person or group based on characteristics related to race, language, religion, ethnic origin, nationality, sexual orientation, gender or disability (General Recommendation no. 15 on guidelines for action to combat hate speech, by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2015, p. 18). Such speech is based on a series of stereotypes or prejudices and is spread over the virtual media, taking advantage of its reach. In this case hate often has a social dimension, with a structured character that is sometimes induced and organised (Miró, 2016, p. 96). In turn, cyberbullying refers to conducts such as harassment, belittling and social exclusion involving an intentional use of ITCs in order to cause harm to peers (Tokunaga, 2010). This study focuses especially on this phenomenon due to its relevance in recent years. Therefore, firstly, the factors behind its appearance and development are outlined. The characteristics of the family setting are emphasised here.

### 2.1. *Why cyberbullying occurs. Reasons causing it*

There are diverse theories that attempt to explain the origin of aggression in human beings. According to López-Hernández (2015, p. 682), three main theories can be distinguished. First of all, there are the so-called biological theories, which view aggressiveness as something innate to humans, marked by genetics.

Then there are the environmental or social theories, which place emphasis on exogenous causes (Berkowitz, 1993), viewing aggressivity as a learned conduct. Crucial among these theories is the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Dollard, *et al.*, 1939), in which aggression is seen as a natural response to a situation that causes frustration. Frustration is thus always present in any aggressive behaviour and is directly proportional to the individual's degree of frustration. From this perspective, frustration is an emotion that arises when there is interference on the path to a goal, which is not achieved. This theory prompted criticism from several sources, leading Miller (1941) to correct the original. Thus, frustration did not necessarily have to be an essential condition for aggression, but could facilitate it.

Within the context of the present study, cyberbullying can be considered a means of revenge for coping with frustration (Sánchez, *et al.*, 2016, p. 22). In this regard, the phenomenon of violent communication is nothing new in our society. Hate, as a social feeling, is related to violence, oftentimes as an expression of frustration in response to certain aspects of society. Adolescents perceive the digital environment as lacking limits and rules, strengthened further by the anonymity afforded by the Internet. In addition, the online environment favours the moral disconnection between the aggressor and the victim (Yubero, *et al.*, 2017, p. 95). In this regard, Albert, *et al.* (2017, p. 194) assert that these conditions lead to a lack of inhibition. These same authors also indicate a series of causes that the aggressor considers for carrying out his/her actions, such as retaliation, revenge, internal motivations such as rage, guilt or jealousy, or a perceived weakness in the victims, among others.

Finally, interactionist theories discuss the interaction between these factors, the innate and the environmental (López-Hernández, 2015). In this article, the so-called ecological theory of development, by Bronfenbrenner (1979), which states that conduct is the result of the interaction between a developing individual and his/her environment, will be used as reference. Therefore, the interaction between personal and environmental factors is discussed. In this interaction, special attention is placed on the different micro-systems in which an adolescent is integrated and lives, especially family and school. From this perspective, it is not surprising that phenomena like cyberbullying comprise a series of factors related to the cognitive and socio-emotional nuances of the individual, in addition to the family, community and school environments, which constitute systems that, in turn, interact in the development of the child and/or youth (Madrid, *et al.*, 2020, p. 69). One of these systems is the school system, in which certain interpersonal relationships take place that represent the school community. This peer-based social system moulds the individual and social personality of the students, as well as their civic education (Ortega Ruiz, *et al.*, 2012, pp. 18-20). However, this study will focus mainly on the family environment for the purposes of understanding violent behaviour in adolescents.

## 2.2. *Family factors in cyberbullying*

Family is the most important factor in primary socialization, where children learn the rules of conduct, values and virtues they need for coexistence and to adjust to society (Bas and Pérez de Guzmán, 2010, p. 45). In recent years, several authors have assessed the relationship between family variables and bullying or cyberbullying (Buelga, *et al.*, 2016; Chen, *et al.*, 2018; Nocentini, *et al.*, 2019; Machimbarrena, *et al.*, 2019; Garaigordobil, 2019; Pérez-Fuentes, *et al.*, 2019). In terms of parenting styles, the scientific literature shows that democratic styles protect from cyberbullying whereas authoritarian, permissive or negligent styles are related to both victimization and to aggression (Cerezo, *et al.*, 2018; Gómez-Ortiz, *et al.*, 2019; Machimbarrena, *et al.*, 2019, p. 45).

One fundamental aspect is communication in the family. Communication represents not only a protective factor from these phenomena (related to self-esteem or feelings of loneliness), but it is also linked to the conveyance of information and disclosure of problems by children and youths. The study conducted by Yubero, *et al.* (2018, p. 150) notes that adolescents displaying evasive communication with their parents are more involved in problematic behaviours. In turn, family communication acts as a protective factor against violence at school and the consequences of cyberbullying, and also in the strategies used in these cases (Murphy, *et al.*, 2017; Offrey and Rinaldi, 2017; Garcés, *et al.*, 2020).

Parental support appears in the scientific literature to be linked to a lower frequency of cyber-aggression in young people (Martínez, *et al.*, 2019). According to Livazovic and Ham (2019, p. 7), a low quality family life can be predictive of

cyber-victimization, whereas higher quality family relations negatively predict cyberbullying perpetration. In addition, a lack of quality relations may indicate a high likelihood of taking part in cyberbullying conduct.

The study conducted by Perasso, *et al.* (2020, p. 1) found that family support represented a protective and mitigation factor against cyberbullying victimization. Dysfunctional homes with conflicts, in which there is a lack of parental support and communication is evasive or offensive, are related to victimization and online aggression (Martins, *et al.*, 2016; Moreno-Ruiz, *et al.*, 2018). Families with strong bonds among their members, consistent rules and a warm, close climate of communication and trust represent environments that protect from cyberbullying (Machimbarrena, *et al.*, 2019, p. 50).

Having seen the main family factors underlying cyberbullying, characteristics relating to psychological maturity will now be discussed. The absence of a mature character can encourage certain behaviours that lead to abusive and bullying relationships towards others. In addition, the promotion of character-building cannot be understood without addressing this concept, which is key to personal growth and family education.

According to Martínez Priego (2018), maturity is defined as the «level of harmonic development of the personality in which the chronological age is sufficiently adjusted to the psychological age, intimately connected to the vital reality —the real environment— of the person» (p. 154). Maturity as such is not something that is completed, but rather a question of growth, that must be in keeping with each stage or phase of life and with the conditions arising therein.

The concept of psychological maturity features three main components, as per Morales (2014, p. 2): the stance toward work, i.e., the capacity to take on one's own responsibilities in both academic settings and in regular life, autonomy and, finally, identity, which refers to the adolescent's knowledge of him- or herself in terms of what defines that person and distinguishes him/her from others. The latter component is particularly important during the adolescent years, when an individual's identity is being built. Identity is related to self-esteem, self-confidence and emotional stability. An identity that is not consolidated or is vague can hinder vital decision making, one's life project or interpersonal relations.

According to Sarráis (2013, p. 35 and p. 67), the features of psychological maturity are self-esteem, security, realistic self-knowledge, voluntary self-control, emotional independence and inner freedom. On the other hand, immature persons feature a sense or complex of inferiority, insecurity, distrust, hate, rage and frustration, among others. Therefore, many of the aggressive behaviours seen in the Internet are related to a lack of a mature character, with hate, rage and frustration being the most relevant signs.

A person is mature when he/she is capable of mobilizing personal resources to cope with conditions and challenges posed in life. This entails realism and a

strong knowledge of oneself and of reality. In turn, affectivity plays a key role in the development of maturity. It involves knowing oneself, especially one's affective dynamics and the emotional responses generated in relation to stimuli. Therefore, the influence that parents have on the internal perception of emotional intelligence is crucial to the emotional development of the child or youth (Sánchez-Núñez, *et al.*, 2020). Disproportionate responses, for example, can indicate a certain degree of immaturity. In this regard, phenomena such as a low tolerance for frustration or impulsiveness are found among the individual factors that explain the behaviour of many cyber-aggressors (Bartrina, 2014, p. 388).

To continue along the lines of Martínez Priego (2018, pp. 155-156), a mature personality must be based on four traits that can be analysed from an anthropological and a psychological perspective. The first is the ability to cope with strenuous tasks. From a psychological viewpoint, this would be seen as the ability to cope (resilience), and in anthropology, one would speak of strength. The second trait is the capacity to move beyond mere pleasure or immediacy. This would be delayed gratification in psychology, or temperance in anthropology. The third trait is the capacity to recognise others as another self. This refers to an understanding of the personal reality of the other. This is empathy and, anthropologically speaking, it is related to justice. The final trait of a mature personality is the ability to make decisions based on a sense of reality. This is linked to the virtue of prudence.

As explained, one of the essential cornerstones in prevention of violent conduct in the Internet is the development of a mature personality. The key role of the family in the process of acquiring this maturity has also been noted. Some strategies for personal growth are suggested below, focusing on gaining this maturity as a clear way to preventing possible cyberbullying behaviours.

### 3. PERSONAL GROWTH STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH CYBERBULLYING

Albert, *et al.* (2017, pp. 198-200) have highlighted the relevance and also the lack of cyberbullying prevention strategies in the scientific literature. As a proposal in this regard, they discuss the need to work on developing self-esteem, empathy, social and individual principles of human rights, social skills, conflict resolution, prevention of gender violence and equality, online ethics literacy and individual and criminal liability training. In all these areas, it is important for diverse educational stakeholders to be involved. Other essential elements in the prevention of cyberbullying — as mentioned above — are family communication (Nikiforou, *et al.*, 2013, p. 5), parental support (Perasso, *et al.*, 2020, p. 1) and the development of a mature character (Sarráis, 2013, p. 35 and p. 67).

One cyberbullying prevention strategy that has drawn attention in recent years is the use of role-playing games, or *serious games*, which aim to raise awareness among adolescents in online environments, prompting them to reflect on and develop empathetic attitudes (Del Moral and Villalustre, 2018, pp. 1359-1360). This



strategy offers numerous benefits as a resource for training in personal ethics and morals (López Raventós, 2016, pp. 9-10; Sáiz, *et al.*, 2020, p. 516-518; and others). An educational current has even been created, called *Personal and Social Learning & Ethics* —PSLE— (Pereira, y otros, 2012) the main element of which is the use of role-playing games. However, while serious games help reduce the rate of cyberbullying, they do not address the root causes of violent conduct. As explained above, cyberbullying behaviours can arise as a result of serious shortcomings during an individual's socialization process, the source of which lies with the family. The purpose of this study is to outline personal development strategies in which the family plays an important role so that people not only reject cyberbullying behaviours, but they are also able to express themselves appropriately in the Internet because they have high quality interpersonal relations. Thus, developing personal growth strategies is considered the best way not only to detect but also to prevent cyberbullying and any form of online violence (Dans, *et al.*, 2019, p. 190).

### 3.1. *Strategies for developing online social skills to fight bullying*

Adolescents' socialization process currently takes place to a great degree online (Suárez-Álvarez, *et al.*, 2020, p. 14; Ortega Ruiz, 2020, p. 74), even to the extent that «young people construct their social identity on the basis of diverse and abundant interactions with their peers and other members of the online community» (Segovia, *et al.*, 2016, p. 156). Terms such as *digital coexistence* (López and Sánchez, 2019) or *cyber-coexistence* (Ortega Ruiz, *et al.*, 2012) are now commonly used to explain how civic responsibility develops in young people. This means that the social media not only form part of adolescents' recreational space, but that it is precisely in these networks where they construct their identity and learn to relate to others (García, *et al.*, 2020, p. 9).

One cyberbullying prevention strategy is online ethics literacy (Albert, *et al.*, 2017, p. 199), for both educators and for young people. However, no matter how up-to-date educators are on the topic, the fact is that adolescents will try to find a way to «get around the rule», or they often find themselves in a situation of «digital orphanhood» (Suárez-Álvarez, *et al.*, 2020, p. 25) devoid of any criteria at all. Dans, *et al.* (2019, p. 184) note that young people are usually initiated into the use of social media through their peer group, which means that by the time parents become aware of the risks and threats involved, they are «too late». Therefore, in addition to understanding how to correctly use the Internet, it is important to emphasize the relevance of fostering comprehensive education for adolescents based on groundwork done in early childhood, «through proper emotional and social literacy and the organization of prevention within the family and educational institutions» (Castro, 2013, p. 68).

In this regard, Yubero, *et al.* (2017, p. 104) highlight the role of mediation through ICTs and training in communication resources as *proactive* strategies in

the prevention of cyberbullying. *Active/evaluative* mediation in which parents offer guidance — in the form of dialogue — on Internet use is a good option. This kind of communication, which takes place in the family setting, is essential because this is where adolescents find an ideal space to develop their own criteria, a space in which trust and openness become key factors, thus also becoming factors that protect against cyberbullying (Machimbarrena, *et al.*, 2019, pp. 49-50).

What an adolescent communicates in the virtual world and how he/she does so can provide clues as to how he/she establishes interpersonal relations and what concept he/she has (or does not have) of them. Here, one essential strategy on Internet use entails suggesting skills for adolescents to learn how to express themselves and interact with others adequately, without turning to violence. This is only possible if strategies that encourage a reflection on empathy, the true meaning of friendship, respect for differences, equality and diversity are also added to the training on the use of the Internet (Albert, *et al.*, 2017, p. 190). The meaning of friendship will not be discussed here, since it falls outside the scope of this study, but it is true that young people often do not have a clear idea of what it means to be a friend, or the difference between friends and acquaintances (Del Río, *et al.*, 2010, pp. 124-125; Bohórquez and Rodríguez-Cárdenas, 2014, pp. 327-328). This can lead to a certain disorientation as to where the limits of intimacy are or whether the Internet is an appropriate place to share this intimacy. In this regard, the family must provide criteria to adolescents, helping them reflect on the true meaning of intimacy and friendship.

It is important to note that in the Internet, a user name creates an identity, thus transmitting how one wants to be seen or known by others. This information is often very selective and may not even be true (Caro, 2015, pp. 190-194). Sometimes, the image conveyed arises from low self-esteem, a poor self-concept or a sense of inferiority (Garaigordobil, 2011, pp. 245-246), which may attract possible bullies (Giménez-Gualdo, *et al.*, 2015, p. 18). It is also important here to offer guidance that enables adolescents to reflect on how they want to be perceived, how they portray themselves in the Internet and what they are really like, because social media help to «blur the lines between the personal-private, and the public-collective» (Segovia, *et al.*, 2016, p. 162). The proper place to develop these strategies is within the family (Grusec and Hastings, 2007), where the person is loved for who he/she is, not for his/her appearance or way of acting.

In this regard, as Simkin and Becerra (2013, pp. 127-130) note, the earliest cornerstone of socialization skills is acceptance of the child as a person. Beyond the basic affective and emotional upbringing (Suárez and Vélez, 2018, p. 189), when one feels accepted and cared for, one learns to communicate as a result of this trust, which encourages people to express themselves. This first takes place within the family and later it is consolidated in personal relationships beyond this setting.

### 3.2. *Character-building as an element in the prevention of cyberbullying*

Another fundamental factor in the appearance of hate and violence in the Internet may be immaturity, defined as a lack of virtue in the personality. By virtue, we mean a habit that is good for the person. Habits foster personal growth and «consolidate the personality of each individual and strengthen their character» (Suárez and Vélez, 2018, p. 184). Virtue inclines one towards goodness, helping the person to act in a way that is good for him/her, thus forging a mature personality (Martínez Priego, 2018, pp. 155-156). Parents want the best for their children and their optimal growth, and for this reason the family is where character and a mature personality develop: it is the ideal place to acquire virtues. Virtues become one of the strongest strategies for preventing cyberbullying because they foster the development of the person in the virtual environment (Harrison, 2016). Hastings, *et al.* (2015) noted that pro-social abilities that prevent violence include empathy, sympathy, compassion, altruism, and the ability to console, help, share, cooperate, volunteer and donate. All of these may be expressions of a mature character.

Some virtues in particular prevent the appearance of violence. Firstly, strength or resilience make one prone to reject any violent actions and avoid perpetrating abuse, either because the person witnesses that abuse in other people or because he/she suffers from it (Montero and Cervelló, 2019, p. 137). Temperance is another virtue that fosters a tolerance for frustration and delayed gratification of actions, both of which are essential in preventing cyberbullying. The study by López, *et al.* (2003) shows the negative relationship between delayed gratification and anti-social and criminal conduct in adolescents. Prudence —or *cyber wisdom* (Dennis & Harrison, 2020)— is an interesting antidote in the prevention of all forms of violence (Rumayor, 2008, pp. 85-93). This virtue helps the person reflect on the consequences of his/her acts (Ahedo, 2021, pp. 54-55), thus enabling adolescents to express themselves appropriately in the Internet and to reject violent situations. In turn, justice fosters quality interpersonal relations by encouraging empathy: putting oneself in the other person's place. Casas, *et al.* (2013, pp. 583-585) concluded that empathy helps in recognising the value of personal dignity and makes people reject all expressions of cyberbullying.

In addition, Montero and Cervelló (2019, pp. 137-138) point out that the formation of a moral identity through moral reasoning is the second element — along with empathy — that fosters justice. This moral identity is an element in the prevention of cyberhate because it allows adolescents to create a code of values that upholds their moral judgements and conduct. Naval and Arbués (2015, pp. 42-49), in their study on the Civic Parliament Project, add respect, responsibility and solidarity to justice as other social virtues that contribute to civic development and thus, to preventing cyberbullying.

In sum, virtues are one of the elements with the greatest value in preventing cyberbullying that are learnt in the family, because they foster the development of

a mature character capable of rejecting and responding to any sign of violence in the Internet.

### 3.3. *Forgiveness as a personal growth strategy in response to cyberbullying*

Within the strategies of personal development, in addition to character-building, forgiveness is proposed as an act that prevents cyberbullying (Dans and Muñiz, 2021, pp. 19-20). In this regard, the Arendtian perspective on forgiveness is considered particularly suggestive in relation to the prevention of cyberhate, as explained below. Forgiveness has often been confused with *submission*, which is one of the reasons why it must be returned to its original meaning and values. According to Hannah Arendt, talking about and striving for forgiveness is what allows there to be an authentic regeneration of personal relations, even when seemingly irreparable damage has been done. «The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility (...) is the faculty of forgiving» (Arendt, 2005, p. 256).

Forgiveness is a fundamental requirement, not only in consolidating a mature personality but also in enabling the person to live a full life. While forgiveness may be understood as a mere formal gesture, it should not be reduced to this. Therefore, the *restorative* meaning of forgiveness must first be distinguished from its complementary side, a sense of *regenerating* social relations. In this regard, forgiveness is encouraging (González and Fuentes, 2012, p. 487) to those who have harmed others, prompting a new start, or enabling a new birth, as Arendt would say (Bárcena, 2006). Furthermore, forgiveness also *regenerates* the victims of cyberbullying, offering them a different perspective on reality.

Only when one recognises a person's dignity can one ask for forgiveness and forgive. The discovery of human dignity is based on what a person *is*, not on what a person *does*. Arendt (2005) notes that love «possesses an unequalled power of self-revelation and an unequalled clarity of vision for the disclosure of who» (p. 260) and makes authentic forgiveness possible. Forgiveness is learnt primarily within the family, where one is recognised as *who* in a radical way. This learning is what fosters interpersonal relations based on respect and therefore, it prevents violence.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The general aim of this article was to suggest strategies for personal development in adolescents in order to combat phenomena of online aggressivity, especially cyberbullying. To do this, the factors giving rise to the appearance and development of violence were explained. Like all multi-factor phenomena, cyberbullying is the result of interacting individual and environmental aspects on a person. In terms of environmental aspects, the role of the family setting was addressed in particular in the development of violent behaviour in adolescents in the Internet. In this regard,

democratic parenting, good family communication and proper parental support represent factors that protect from aggression and also victimization.

A series of personal growth strategies is offered, focusing on acquiring personal maturity as one of the most effective means of preventing cyberbullying. Family upbringing is present in all these strategies, although they could also be supplemented and strengthened in school settings. While it is true that certain elements such as *serious games* help reduce cyberbullying, it is important to get to the roots of this violent behaviour in order to truly be able to prevent this phenomenon.

First of all, this means supporting the family in their socializing role, given that shortcomings in this process often lead to violent behaviour. These prevention strategies are related to parents' unconditional acceptance of their children. This gives rise to appropriate communication within the family about Internet use and about the meaning of friendship and how the adolescent wants to be perceived and validated by others. Families in which the children are accepted and loved for who they are offer an ideal setting in which young people can create their own identity in the social media and present themselves to others in these media. If, on the other hand, children do not feel sufficiently validated by their family, this can lead to a sense of insecurity and frustration, which generates situations of abuse of others and also makes them prone to such abuse.

Teaching emotions is often one of the most important aspects in preventing cyberbullying, as observed in the programs reviewed. However, this study focused on the development of virtues because they foster stronger personal growth, as stable character traits. The promotion of character-building in the family is linked to the development of a mature personality. Thus, secondly, cultivating virtues such as strength or resilience, temperance, prudence, justice and empathy was proposed, given that these can be highly effective in preventing the appearance of violence and are related to features of a mature personality.

Finally, forgiveness was proposed as a personal growth strategy not only for repairing the harm done in cyberbullying situations but also to regenerate the people affected and to consolidate their personal maturity. The family, where radical human dignity is learnt, fosters the respect required in interpersonal relations and in the prevention of violence.

Given the limited number of studies and proposals relating to forgiveness as a character-building element within the family for the prevention of violence in adolescents, it would be interesting to discuss the influence of forgiveness on cyberbullying. Hence, it is deemed necessary to develop programs on educating in forgiveness as a strategy for personal growth to combat hateful phenomena in the Internet.

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