

## AGGRESSION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS GENERATED BY CYBERBULLYING IN HIGHER EDUCATION – PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION

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**Summary:** This paper addresses the issue of aggression and psychological effects generated by cyberbullying in a Higher Education environment. Developed in the Open Education System (SEA, for its initials in Spanish) of the Universidad Veracruzana (a major public university in southeast Mexico), this study shows that aggression, violence and cyberbullying go hand in hand. Particularly, it identifies how a group of educational actors playing a key role in daily school life participate in aggressions and violent acts through social networks and access to Internet connectivity, thus generating psychological effects on students; hence, a number of actions and recommendations that can prevent their effects becomes evident, especially when these transgressions are reported and the university acts upon them in due time.

**Key words:** aggression, cyberbullying, university students, violence

### Introduction

Violence has become an object of analysis un educational institutions due to its presence as well as its complexity, and consequently over the years several authors, such as Guillotte (2003), Onetto (2004), Sanmartín (2004), Boggino, (2005), Díaz (2011), Mejía (2017), Fast (2019) and Arendt (2020), have discussed, studied and analyzed this phenomenon, highlighting its importance and demonstrating that it negatively impacts on human relationships and educational environments. Therefore, its current incidence should not be ignored but exposed, including its new manifestations in different contexts so as to find possible solutions.

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Guillotte (2003) argues that there are differences between violence and aggressiveness, referring as well to other terms such as cruelty, sadism, hatred, aggression, conflict, and so forth, all of which conforms violence. As Chesnais (1981, as cited in Guillotte, 2003) in his *Histoire de la violence* describes it, violence is the direct corporal attack against people involving three main features: brutality, exteriority and painfulness, and is characterized by the voluntary material use of force and ruthlessness exerted upon an individual to their detriment.

For Guillotte (2003), violence is an undesirable individual quality. It has also been defined as out-of-control aggressivity, which results into hypertrophied aggressivity (Sanmartín, 2004). Sanmartín (2004) also notes that most times violence is the result of learned broadly-speaking cultural behavior, which alters the natural balance of aggressivity. He explains that this type of learning occurs along the individual's personal experiences in life and is conditioned by multiple factors; some of which relate to their individual characteristics, others to their family, and others to social structures, such as school, work, neighborhood or even a group of colleagues or friends. Sanmartín adds that there are also factors related to those prejudices, preconceptions, ideologies, principles and values that shape the individual's cosmivision at particular moments in their lives.

Furthermore, Díaz (2011) points out that aggression is a manifestation of the individual's behavior that is defined as an articulated problem between aggression and violence explained by different scientific fields where the emotional, behavioral and cognitive, among other, elements are analyzed. Additionally, Díaz argues that defining aggression is complicated both within humanistic disciplines and behavioral sciences since it is not a strictly observable fact, but the interpretation of multiple behaviors. In this sense, aggression is an act committed by one person towards another, while violence is an individual's attribute that can become a personality trait, in other words, an "internal aggressive potentiality" (Bizouard, as cited in Guillotte, 2003).

Díaz (2011) continues to explain that violence is generally associated with any event that implies an extraordinary force. When it comes to social interactions, he adds, there are two conditions to be considered: one, intense aggression exerted upon a person or their property entailing considerable damage, and the other, the use of detrimental force against what is considered natural, fair, moral or legal. Díaz contends that in any case, it violates a social convention, and that violence necessarily implies aggression, but aggression is not always violent; violence involves a harmful or destructive assault upon subjects and objects by threatening, damaging or breaking social and cultural norms.

To access knowledge about violence, one must try to identify the signified inseparably linked to the signifier that a violent act involves (Guillotte, 2003), which requires the analysis of two dimensions: symptom and language. According to Guillotte (2003), symptom refers to a primary, rudimentary and natural language where lying is not possible, nor hiding what is happening to those who know how to read the signs.

On the other hand, he asserts, language refers to a more elaborated representation of language activity; it entails an elaborated language, specifically human, a “strategic” language with which it is possible to show something different than what it actually is and hide the underlying interactions in the awareness of the great cost or benefit that it may result from the attributed meaning to what is done or said

We may say then that an act of violence, whether physical or virtual, communicates, offers information, sends messages, intimidates and harasses through different platforms and social networks, and thus it must be analyzed in depth and very carefully so as to access what is hidden, something invisible to the naked eye, but which psychologically affects the actors of education, mainly students. Therefore, we should aim at being able to know, analyze, intervene and seek possible solutions in a timely manner at university environments.

## Methodology

This study conducted at the Universidad Veracruzana (UV), a major public university located in the State of Veracruz, Mexico, used non-probability sampling, with 1887 students from the SEA participating in it. The regions involved were Xalapa, Orizaba, Poza Rica, Veracruz and Coatzacoalcos, and the bachelor degrees were Law (39.1%), Accounting (35.4%), Administration (15.1%), Pedagogy (9.4%) and Sociology (0.9%). The student population was 63% female and 36% male. They were divided into age ranges: 17 to 19 years old (22.7%), 20 to 25 (47.1%), 26 or more (29.9%), and 0.3% who did not answer. The average age was then 20 to 25 years old.

The instrument used was a questionnaire consisting of 19 closed and open questions, administered at the end of the year 2022 and analyzed throughout 2023. For its administration, a QR code was created, which saved paper and made it quicker, only a few minutes, for the participants, university students, to answer. The students, in their classrooms, used their cell phones, or any other device connected to internet available to them, to scan the code and answer the questionnaire. Some of them shared the code with other students via their WhatsApp groups. This procedure was repeated in several classrooms where students were taking classes. The data was immediately sent to a database in charge of the Center of Opinion and Analysis Studies (CEOA, for its initials in Spanish) of the university, using the Voswiever software, thus allowing a real and instantaneous count of those who responded.

For one of the open questions in particular (*If you would like to share a cyberbullying experience during your undergraduate studies, write your anecdote as follows*), an analysis using IraMuteq software (Molina-Neira, 2017) was used to create a word cloud synthesizing the information captured from the university students’ subjectivities. It is also important to mention that, during the analysis procedure, data were treated in an artisanal manner to account for the realities experienced by students in this Higher Education context.

## Study group: general information

The students participating in this study belong to the different regions where the university has campuses (Table 1). The region of Xalapa stands out with 24.9%, followed by Orizaba with 22.5%, Poza Rica with 19.3%, Veracruz with 17.1%, Coatzacoalcos with 15.9% and only 0.3% did not answer this question, for a total of 1887 students.

Table 1. Region

Region	Frequency	Percentage
Xalapa	470	24.9%
Orizaba	424	22.5%
Poza Rica	365	19.3%
Veracruz	323	17.1%
Coatzacoalcos	300	15.9%
Did not answer	5	.3%
Total	1887	100.0%

Source: own

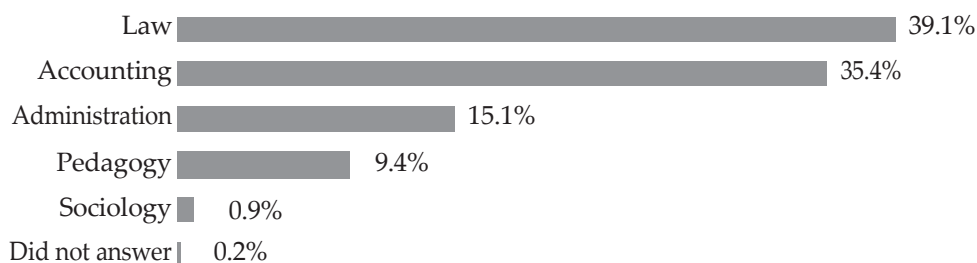


Figure 1. Bachelor degree

Source: own

The participating students are enrolled in different bachelor degrees offered by the SEA of the university (Figure 1). The majority are from Law School, then Accounting Administration, Pedagogy, and finally Sociology. Regarding the participants' age range, 22.7% are from 17 to 19 years old; the 20-to-25-year-old range constitutes a 47.1%, 29.9% are 26 years old or more; that is, 5 out of 10 are between 20 and 25 years old.

Three of the bachelor degrees belong to the area of Humanities, and adding these percentages (Law, Pedagogy and Sociology) results in a 49.4%. For the Economy-Administration area, it was a 50.5% of total participation adding Accounting and

Administration percentages. Thus, a difference of only 1.1% shows a balance between the sampled areas.

School experience theory was necessary to consider in order to interpret the data. Dubet and Martuccelli (1998) affirm that the successive learning roles proposed to students are no longer the only shaping factor for individuals, they also need to develop the ability to manage their successive school experiences. These, they explain, are built from the subjective perspective of the school system combining how actors understand this system and connect its elements: school culture integration, school market strategy construction, and the successive handling of their knowledge and culture. In this sense, it is important to look into the students' experiences in relation to violence, which will allow us to account for the realities invisible to the naked eye. It is only through this approach that we will be able to take appropriate measures in search of a possible solution, and above all, continue to visualizing acts, actions and situations that harm students and make them suffer.

In order to understand what the school produces, it is necessary to understand as objectively as possible how individuals' subjectivity is constructed, individuals who are what the school (university) has made of them, as well as considering everything escaping its control even when they are manufactured by it (Dubet & Martuccelli, 1998). Dubet and Martuccelli (1998) explain that experience is not only social because of its group-sharing nature, but also because of the social relationships connecting and opposing individuals, where it is important that the testimony of these main actors is developed within the these relationships in which they are confronted through a sociological intervention resulting in the construction of a common experience.

It is then important to know and understand these experiences that a university student faces so as to understand him and identify the resulting emotions both positive and negative. Blair, as cited in Mejía (2017), argues that emotions in social interactions must be properly self-regulated to be able to successfully adjust to society and achieve early success in school, where verbally communicating one's needs, wishes and thoughts is essential, as well as other elements such as sustained attention, enthusiasm for and curiosity about new activities, impulse inhibition, the capability to follow instructions, turn-taking and sensitivity to others' feelings.

Davidson and Begley (2012) propose that we must understand what life holds as something fundamental that allows us to join efforts to cultivate noble aspects of the human condition, such as well-being, kindness, mindfulness, attention, empathy, cooperation, mutual help, recognition of others and of our own individual strengths, which should be a source of personal satisfaction.

The National Survey on Availability and Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ENDITIH, for its initials in Spanish), reported by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (2022), indicates that 20.8% of the population aged 12 and over who used the Internet were victims of cyberbullying. Nationally, this is equivalent to 17.4 million people using the internet through any device during 2022 (7.6 million men and 9.8 million women), which is very serious as 2 out of 10 people are

being victims of attacks. At the UV, particularly in the SEA modality, 63.38 are being abused, that is, 6 out of 10 students have experience an attack on social networks.

As a university, it is necessary to work more towards actions that modify negative, aggressive and violent practices. We must not continue to ignore what happens, since students are undoubtedly suffering and are emotionally affected when they experience aggression and violence in social networks in its various manifestations.

## Data analysis

Below are some testimonies shared in the research instrument by university students (Table 2). They give an account of their emotional experiences and the consequences generated by the set of aggressions and violent actions exerted upon them.

In these testimonies, we can observe violent actions in social networks (Table 2). Regarding the consequences, only a few mention serious and less serious consequences, others do not mention any, suggesting that there is some annoyance, anger, discomfort due to something that has happened to them that they did not provoke or wished for. These are unauthorized actions that affect the university students. Most recognize their social networks attackers: classmates, friends, former partners, but also professors and authorities part of the university community. There were also mentions of strangers as the aggressors.

The most common acts that students highlighted when suffering from cyberbullying were stalking, aggression, harassment, awkwardness, exposing, being made fun of, threats, abuse, attacks, defamation, intimidation, being ignored, being called names, trash-talk, preventing from doing things, isolation, frowning upon, exclusion from activities related to class and teamwork, and in some cases, being beaten.

Table 2. Testimonies (manifestations) about aggression in social networks, its affectations and decision making

No.	Testimony
1	One person in class edited images to make it seem I had sent her harassing messages and made me lose face among my friends; they distrusted me because they trusted more the images that were shared than my word.
2	I was sent a Facebook comment with a photo, and as it was from a friend from university, I opened it and it was a virus that started sending pornographic content on my behalf. I was so annoyed and had to deactivate my Facebook account for a while and report it to the Facebook security group.
3	I had a friend, and there was a “confessions” page in which they said that I was harassing her, and several people attacked me at sight, and this made me feel so bad. Even when my friend denied it all afterwards, I thought about killing myself.

The aggressions that were identified were the sending of harassing messages, photos, virus, and pornographic content; comments and insults via Facebook; exposure of body and intimate parts; comments criticizing the body, personality and way of thinking; breaching devices and data security; asking for content; inciting sex; leaving the microphone on; editing images later shared; and discussions in an online class in front of university users. All in all, these actions are embarrassing and vexatious; moreover, they are evidence of the humiliation exerted upon another human being in a virtual environment, being Facebook the main platform, followed by WhatsApp and Instagram, and to a lesser extent Tik Tok, Twitter and YouTube.

Some of the aforementioned cyberbullying actions can be classified as serious, some of which even incite death, since according to the testimonies of three students, they manifested suicidal thoughts. According to Fast (2019), suicide is actually the third main cause of death among adolescents, with an estimated 50% being the result of intimidation. Let us have a closer look at the following participants' mentions:

*I had a friend, and there was a "confessions" page in which they said that I was harassing her, and several people attacked me at sight, and this made me feel so bad. Even when my friend denied it all afterwards, **I thought about killing myself.***

*The feminists exposed me, and **I tried to kill myself more than once** because the whole society frowned upon me and I was insulted in Facebook a lot, and the worst of all is that I am innocent.*

*Cyberbullying is normalized among young people, they think it is funny and make fun of people, and the victims fall into severe depression and **this results in their suicide.** It is very important to address this type of issues.*

Violent actions in social networks	Aggressor	Affectations	Decision making
Editing images Harassment messages Shared images	Classmate	Losing face among friends Distrust	None
Comment via Facebook Photo Virus Pornographic content	Allegedly a friend	Annoyance	Suspending Facebook Reporting the event
Harassment Aggression	Friend	Feeling terrible Thinking about suicide	Disproving accusations



No.	Testimony
4	In a virtual class, the quality of my video camera was not adequate. I explained this to the teacher and participated in class so as to demonstrate I did pay attention. However, the teacher was not empathic at all and we argued the video camera issue in front of the class. In the end, I dropped the course; this was very unpleasant, especially because all my classmates witnessed everything; it was very awkward.
5	A classmate harassed me showing photos where he exposed his body and private parts, proposing to date in a harassing manner.
6	On one occasion, at the beginning of the pandemic, a group of classmates made comments about my body, as well as my personality and way of thinking, creating distance and excluding me from class activities, teamwork and even friendly chatting. It got to the point where I no longer wanted to attend, what they said made me feel bad, I distanced myself from them, eliminating them from my social networks and decided to have no contact with them at all. However, this did not prevent repercussions with other people around me, my partner and other friends also started to say non-sense things about me and made fun of me, and others just ignored me. The COVID-19 pandemic went on and the problem grew bigger to the point where I had to change my contacts, I completely changed my social networks because everyone was talking about me and publishing things about me. Eventually I no longer gave any importance to this.
7	I remember that during the pandemic I received messages from people who, because I was a single parent, talked trash about me or called me names, it was depressing to know they only did so because I had a child and was a bit older than my classmates.
8	Cyberbullying is normalized among young people, they think it is funny and make fun of people, and the victims fall into severe depression and this results in their suicide. It is very important to address this type of issues.
9	A former partner stalked me for months and harassed me, which prevented me from going on with my routine and isolated me.
10	The feminists exposed me, and I tried to kill myself more than once because the whole society frowned upon me and I was insulted in Facebook a lot, and the worst of all is that I am innocent.
11	Some classmates have harassed me, making me feel awkward because they ask for content and they do it in the most obnoxious way.



Violent actions in social networks	Aggressor	Affectations	Decision making
Argument with a teacher in a virtual class	Teacher Classmates	Lack of empathy Unpleasantness Extreme awkwardness	Dropping out the course
Photos Harassment Offering body parts photos Exposure of private parts Asking out in a harassing manner	Classmate		None
Comments about body, personality and way of thinking Exclusion from class activities Exclusion from teamwork Being verbally abused Being made fun of Being ignored Verbally abuse someone Ignoring someone	Classmates Friends	Not wanting to go to university Feeling bad Distancing oneself Repercussions with partner Repercussions with friends	Removing from social networks No contact (aggressors) Change of contact Change of social networks Eventually giving no importance to it
Messages Trash-talking	Classmates	Depression	None
Cyberbullying Making fun of somebody	Young people	Depression Suicide	Addressing this type of issues
Stalking Harassment Preventing people from doing things Isolation	Former partner		None
Exposing someone Frowning upon someone Insulting via Facebook	Feminists The whole society	Suicide attempts	Being innocent
Harassment Awkwardness Requesting content obnoxiously	Classmates		None

No.	Testimony
12	A classmate sent me messages inciting me to have sex, and even after telling him this was wrong, he insisted. I ended up blocking him.
13	A classmate, not realizing his microphone was on, began to talk trash about me, that I was a jerk, a stuck-up person, and that he didn't like me. I didn't even know him and didn't know how to react, so I only pretended not having listened to him. Later on, the teacher made us bury the hatchet. To date, it is not that I don't like him, but I can't say I like him.
14	The university violated and breached the security of my devices and data with the help of authorities, professors and other students. I was assaulted, threatened, tormented, attacked and defamed by them using my information.
15	A teacher insisted I went out with him (when we were still in confinement) to have sex. When I refused to do so, he told me he could give me money. After his constant phone calling at nights until 5 in the morning, he finally stopped insisting, but now that we are back to face-to-face classes, he is very rude to me when we bumped into each other at the university facilities.
16	Two years ago I learned that two classmates made negative comments about me, and teamwork became difficult for me because many of my other classmates started to distrust me.
17	My then boyfriend (now ex) threatened to send intimate photos to my family and university just to ensure my loyalty to him, pretending to be someone else, and he also spied on my [social] networks.
18	A stranger created fake accounts to send me messages insulting me, criticizing my body. The messages were so offensive and frequent, I decided to report and block them.
19	A student caused sent WhatsApp messages inciting my classmates to beat me, which they later did, just because I didn't share the same opinion about a classroom topic in a session, during which they offended me and insulted me in front of the teacher.

Source: own

Violent actions in social networks	Aggressor	Affectations	Decision making
Sending messages Inciting sex	Classmate		Telling them their wrongdoing Blocking them
Leaving the microphone on Trash-talking	Classmate	Not knowing how to react towards someone one doesn't know Indifference (not hating someone but not liking them either)	Not knowing how to react Pretending not having listened The teacher made them bury the hatchet
Violating Breaching devices and data security Assaulting Threatening Tormenting Attacking Defaming	Authorities Professors Students		None
Insisting to go out to have sex Giving money Constant calling Rudeness	Professor		Rejection
Negative comments Losing trust Comments during teamwork	Classmates	Difficult to work in teams	None
Threatening to send intimate photos to family and university Pretending to be someone else Spying on [social] networks	Ex-boyfriend		None
Sending messages Insulting Body criticism	Stranger		Reporting Blocking
Beating Offending Attacking	Student Classmates		None

These comments were shared by university students that were victims of a social networks attack. People make important life decisions based on their emotional needs and their desire of maintaining a relationship with other individuals, and someone who feels unbearably lonely may find no meaning in their life and may see suicide as a solution to this loneliness (Fast, 2019).

Based on the statistical data of this study, 92.2% of students between 20 and 25 years old consider that cyberbullying triggers suicidal thoughts. This percentage is quite alarming, it is proof that this affectation resulting from aggressions, attacks and harassment is very serious. Should these suicidal thoughts cross the border to reality, we would be facing an irreparable and irreversible situation that everyone would regret (university, family, society).

The study also identified less serious, but no less important to be mentioned, cyberbullying actions that damage the psyche and inner peace of every university student, such as depression, distrust of others, feeling bad or awkward, isolating yourself, losing face among friends, repercussions with their significant other (partner) or friends, dropping out a course, and not wanting to attend school. The student population has identified classmates, friends, other students, professors, university authorities, feminists, former partners and even strangers as those who attack them and make them feel vulnerable, most of whom are people coexisting with them on a daily basis at university facilities. These people may pretend to be friendly in 'real' life, but in the 'virtual' world they show their true colors, their evilness and wickedness, their lack of principles and moral hidden in anonymity, impersonation and fake online profiles

The following word cloud depicts the aforementioned affectations (Figure 2):



Figure 2. Cyberbullying affectations word cloud (Original in Spanish and English language adaptation)

Source: own

From this word cloud, created with the IRaMuTeQ software, it can be seen that the students believe cyberbullying generates affectations, among them depression, distrust, isolation desires, feelings of being criticized and ignored, and a great lack of empathy. They describe cyberbullying as something unpleasant and awkward which affects relationships with their partners and at work. Moreover, in several cases they recognize the person causing the victim's harassment as an alleged friend. The presence of suicidal thoughts is particularly noteworthy, although there are no reports of this at institutional level.

Evidently, all of this generates repercussions with friends and significant others. Additionally, many participants acknowledged not knowing how to react to these situations when it is their friends who are instigating cyberbullying against them. Mejía (2017) affirms that friendship is a very important social practice as it impacts the individuals' feelings and thoughts towards others, defining the relationships they establish with them. However, friendship is these days confused, as it is used to get to know the students well, obtain reliable information about their likes, preferences, family and love life, relationships and social ties, and then create content that destroys, intimidates, harasses, violates and transgresses the individual, damaging their psychological and emotional integrity.

The four feelings and emotions that cyberbullying evokes in students are annoyance, dislike, awkwardness and depression. This is important to consider since, as Fast (2019) suggests, even when the individual's mind has decided to hide their true feelings and remain silent, the body seems to have the need to express them, and thus these powerful emotions would often be expressed through 'steps to the act', even for the most hermetic individuals.

It is also necessary to consider what Davidson and Begley (2012) state regarding mood and emotional profiles. They explain that a feeling becomes a mood when it persists without losing consistency for minutes, hours and even days, for example "today he's in a bad mood; and when a characterizing feeling persists not days, but years, it becomes an emotional trait. An emotional profile, they add, is a consistent way of responding to life experiences, and it influences certain emotional states, traits and moods.

Similarly, regarding annoyance and other feelings associated to cyberbullying consequences, Watt (2022) observes that being a bit annoyed is feeling a bit offended when losing face during certain events, for example, when we receive a "second hand" present instead of a "high quality gift", or a practical joke gets out of hand and we feel offended. Even when this is a temporary feeling, it is a serious one. The problem, Wyatt points out, is that showing your annoyance makes you look like a fool, as if it was an almost irrational defensive attitude while it should be acknowledged as a valid feeling with subtleties in disillusion and confusion due to disappointment. Moreover, annoyance, even anger, is felt when we are insulted and this feeling allows us to focus on our 'enemy' to defend ourselves (Davidson & Begley, 2012). On the other hand, depressed people have little energy to achieve their goals; they sometimes do not notice

new opportunities, let alone have the will to pursue them, as others individuals may; and they tend to lack perseverance (Davidson & Begley, 2012). In this sense, depression is considered an emotional mood disorder (Davidson & Begley, 2012).

University students, despite being of legal age and able to express their annoyance, displeasure and discomfort towards certain experiences, they do not usually report this type of incidents. They prefer to remain silent and do not take the corresponding measures despite knowing that there will be consequences for something of which they are innocent. This could be related to the fact that we mix our feelings with expectations and ideas from our culture, where hatred, anger and desire are associated with untamed animal instincts, even when they can be triggered by those features that make us human, such as language and concepts used to understand our bodies, our religious convictions and our moral judgements, and fashions, policies and economies of our modern world (Watt, 2022).

Nonetheless, when university students do make decisions about it but such decisions involve, for example, dropping out a course, they are damaging themselves, because they are not making progress towards obtaining their degree, and they even risk to fail or affect their grades and average. What is more, this also affects the university as an institution, as the university is then responsible for not being able to educate, for not passing by the legacy of policies destined to cultivate a culture of peace and non-violence; they are responsible for ignoring the signs that the students are showing.

Therefore, this phenomenon must be understood from a pedagogy approach to identify what students personally experience when they are victims of violence in social networks. Hence, our task is to look into it so as to help transform or redirect their emotional profiles with academic activities that generate not only meaningful learning but also emotional well-being, that help them recover their emotional balance and guide them towards obtaining the qualities of a good leader or a good professional with a positive attitude. As Davidson and Begley (2012) explain, it is more feasible for a human being to focus and figure out social networks in a new job or a new school and open our minds to creatively integrate diverse information and keep interested in a task when a positive emotion fills us with joy.

Consequently, students should be supported to recover from psychological affectations resulting from cyberbullying, by showing them that it is possible to face adversity by confronting it, by assessing what is worth and what is not. It is necessary to foster positive emotions that allow students face adversity and be resilient, and to improve their environment and change those violence situations so that they enjoy being university students and live meaningful learning experiences that fill them with pride and satisfaction. In order to do so, the university should promote among the student population the desire of being an example of success in sport, art, music and science, and a worthy representative of the university. They should promote and award scholarships for those with the highest averages, foster national and international academic stays, encourage the obtention of achievement diplomas, inspire to be

respectful of the integrity of the university community and maintain an impeccable behavior as professionals, as well as caring, loving, respecting and being empathic with those we call friends.

In the present study, it was possible to identify a group of university students who were victims of aggression in the form of cyberbullying, and who chose to perform a series of positive actions to overcome this situation. Among these actions, they mainly mentioned deactivating their Facebook account; eliminating, rejecting or blocking the aggressors from their social networks maintain zero contact with them; changing their social networks and contacts; and denying untruthful claims and telling the aggressors about their wrongdoing (confronting). Others opted for pretending not to listen and eventually stopped giving importance to it.

Failure to intervene also has a negative impact on society, as there are students who may continue to be victims of violence and who may not be able to complete their studies, graduate or obtain a university degree. They are then people who will hardly join the expected professional market or pursue postgraduate studies. They are young people who, as a result of the damage caused by cyberbullying, see their professional, personal, family and couple relationships future limited.

This is a difficult but not impossible endeavor, so we must encourage more presentations and workshops aimed at raising awareness about cyberbullying, its consequences and effects on students and the way it makes them feel: depressed, angry, harassed, annoyed, intimidated, violated, ignored, excluded, threatened, exposed, criticized, mocked, criticized, and insulted, in some cases even physically beaten. They are also evidently morally damaged that affects them psychologically. Therefore, it is necessary to know what to do in case of virtual bullying, cyberbullying and violence in social networks, and provide legal advice on the General Law for the Prevention of Bullying in the State of Veracruz, and on the *Olimpia* Law that recognizes digital violence and punishes crimes that violate the sexual intimacy of people through digital media, also known as cyberviolence or digital violence, and on the law for women's access to a life free of violence in the State of Veracruz, which includes comprehensive measures for the prevention, attention, punishment and eradication of gender violence.

Arendt (2020) asserts that "all arts and handcrafts" are helpful in transforming ideas into actions, meaning students can be oriented to spend time and focus their attention on the creation of art, and thus contribute to the transformation of communities that share creativity-centered thoughts, or to participate in sports and the multiple expressions of the dissemination of culture, which may very well have an impact on the evolution and improvement of mankind according to valid norms and measures (Arendt, 2020) shared by society, fostering a more effective human coexistence. These days, more should be said about the consequences and psychological effects of cyberbullying and more should be done to encourage the proper use of social networks; otherwise, we will very likely reach the point of feeling guilty about their irreversible consequences, such as suicide.



## Conclusions

The present study identified particular cases where it is assured that university authorities and professors participate in violence and aggression against students, since they also threatened, violated or defamed using private information, breaching the students' devices security. It also identified one case in which a teacher harassed a student with importunate phone calls during the COVID-19 confinement. It is thus imperative to inform the university community about these aggressions suffered by the student population; otherwise, we would be participating by omission and be complicit in not addressing, solving and making it visible. Moreover, it was also identified that few professors participate in stopping the violence detected in social networks, which is then an issue that still needs to be addressed within the university community.

Regarding peers and friends, they were identified as the main responsible actors generating cyberbullying. The most salient aggressions involve the editing of images and sending content via Facebook making others distrust, negative comments regarding the body and way of thinking, the sharing of pornographic content, harassing, assaulting, offering photos sharing exposing intimate body parts, stalking, making harassing sexual proposals or sending messages inciting to sex, instigating the exclusion from teamwork, making fun of somebody or negative comments, trash-talking someone in a digital platform with the microphone open, the creation of fake accounts, obnoxiously asking for content, instigating the beating of someone with a different opinion, and so forth.

Feminist groups and the significant others were also identified as aggression actors. Feminist groups were pointed as participants in harshly criticizing, insulting and frowning upon people (allegedly innocent), and sentimental partners as the main responsible actors in harassing the victims. Evidently, it is observed that no one from the university community can be excluded as a main actor in exerting acts of violence in different ways, degrees and intensities.

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