



**Save the Children**



# PROJECT DATE

(Develop Approaches and Tools to end online teen dating violence)

DESK REVIEW



This project is co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union

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## Introduction

The DATE project is a project funded by the European Union within the Rights, Equality, and Citizenship programme. It spanned 24 months (January 2021-December 2022) and involved partners Save the Children Italia (project lead) and Centro Studi Erickson. The project aims to tackle teen dating violence (TDV) - with particular regard to abusive behaviour implemented through digital technology - Online Teen Dating Violence (OTD), considering it is impossible to distinguish between online and offline life when we speak of the experience of teenagers.

The project entailed the active participation of the Reggio Calabria and Venice SottoSopra groups of Save the Children's Movimento Giovani who were involved in several fundamental project actions, providing their point of view that will be shared with social and educational care professionals and will form the foundations of training toolkits for professionals. The group of teenage boys and girls will also communicate project contents through dialogue with their peers at organized events and through digital communication.

DATE aims to open up dialogue on OTDV between the adult world (healthcare professionals) and that of teenagers (aged 14/18), raising awareness and providing tools to prevent, recognise and counter it.

To do this, an initial project phase entailed research on relevant national and international projects and literature was performed by researcher Dr. Federica Bastiani, resulting in this Desk Review. At the same time, the opinions of teenagers, aged 14 to 22, were gathered on Online Teen Dating Violence through an online consultation: the results of this consultation are also reported herein.

The Desk Review and the result of the online consultation provided material for engaging professionals and teenagers in Mutual Learning Workshops mediated by expert facilitators and trainers. What emerged from these meetings will form, along with other materials produced so far, training packages to

be used during the online training of social and educational care professionals and during face-to-face trainer training of social and educational care professionals in the territories of Reggio Calabria, Ancona, and Venice. The following events will also be organized to disseminate the project results: peer-to-peer events in the territories of Venice and Reggio Calabria; events targeting adults (professionals, local stakeholders, parents) in the territories of Reggio Calabria, Ancona, and Venice, and a final national event. In addition, a peer-to-peer communication campaign will be carried out through Movimento Giovani's digital channels.

The DATE (Developing Approaches and Tools to End Online Teen Dating Violence) project emerges from the international indications of the Lanzarote Convention on sexual abuse against minors, and the Istanbul Convention, on domestic and gender violence, ratified by Italy respectively in 2012 and 2013.

Violence against women in Europe, including domestic violence, is alarmingly widespread.

One in five women in the European Union has been subject to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous partner, since the age of 15 (ISTAT, figures from 2019).

Lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic increased the exposure of women and girls to violent partners and families.

The Convention of the Council of Europe on the preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, is a revolutionary treaty that provides clear indications on how states can work to free their countries from gender violence. Likewise, the sexual abuse and exploitation of minors, which females are more likely to experience, has reached alarming proportions, in particular regarding the increasing use of information and communication technologies by minors and perpetrators. Again in this case, the phenomenon has experienced an acceleration consequent to COVID-19 and a transition from offline life to online life, also known as "onlife", a neologism coined by Floridi in 2017.

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## ONLINE TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

Adolescence is the period where we transition from childhood to adulthood and where the boundaries of chronological age have become increasingly more fluid. Conventionally, puberty used to begin at around the age of 12, and adolescence at 15 years of age, ending at around 18 to 20 years old. Nowadays, we have begun to speak about the start of adolescence as young as around 11 years old, while the end of adolescence is now around the age of 20. However, the limits are not clearly defined, and rather than a chronological factor, we must consider the physical, emotional, and relational factors that characterize this sensitive period of life.

The definition that best represents adolescence could be identified as the search for one's individuality. It is in this period of life that boys and girls begin to move away from their parent figures and seek their own place in the world as individuals with thoughts and ideas that are independent from their context of origin. The construction of their own identity begins with the big physical changes that characterize this phase of life: growing, developing, and transitioning into adults as childhood is left behind.

Along with physical changes, a whole series of emotional changes occur: teenage boys and girls experience a whirlwind of emotions that derives from their condition of no longer being children, but not yet adults; from having to face the world in an increasingly autonomous manner, and from encountering an adult world which is not always able to be supportive and to listen to their needs.

This is the phase of life where we start our first sentimental relationships, and want to share intimate moments with others. Sentimental relationships hold an important role in the development and evolution of oneself, if based on respect and dialogue, and allow young people to build their self-esteem and validate a positive image of themselves.

Unfortunately, things do not always go as well as possible and relationships can also be fertile ground for abuse and violence. This is Teen Dating Violence and it refers to violent situations involving teenage couples. Teen Dating Violence was defined by Mulford and Giordano in 2008 as a "series of behaviours that range from physical and sexual abuse to forms of psychological and emotional violence that occur in teenage couples".

The behaviour related to a definition of violence within an intimate relationship between young people can be summarized as follows (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014):

- **Physical violence:** this occurs when a partner is pinched, hit, pushed, slapped, punched or kicked;

- **Psychological/emotional violence:** threats, insults, shaming, bullying in a group of peers, deliberately embarrassing another, isolating another from friends and family;
- **Sexual violence:** forcing a partner to take part in sexual acts without their consent; forcing a partner into unwanted sexual activities; forcing a partner to not use contraception;
- **Stalking:** intrusive behaviour of monitoring, control, and seeking unwanted contact.

Vast literature has investigated the phenomenon over the past 15 years. In 2012, Euripses and Telefono Azzuro performed research to investigate the spread of violent behaviour in a sample of 1523 teenagers aged 12 to 18 in Italy: 29.1% reported to have experienced verbal aggression in a relationship; 20.9% to have been insulted by their partner and 8.7% to have been the victim of threats they'd be left if they didn't do what the other person asked them to. 5.4% of teenagers reported that their partner had threatened to hit them. Since the publication of this research, social networks and technology use have become part of everyday life, as well as a space and a tool for meeting and realizing these relationships.

Save the Children in the report "Dai Like alle Piazze: Giovani e Partecipazione Civica Onlife" published in 2020, explored the relationship between young people, digital technologies, and experiences of online civic and political participation in Italy through questionnaires and focus groups. 1690 teenagers aged 14-19 were involved. The results show how teenage boys and girls use online tools in a fluid manner, and there is no distinction from offline life. While this use facilitates communication with peers, allowing for shared experiences, increasing networks, meeting new people, and getting information, on the other hand, it increases interpersonal experiences of violence in digital environments and/or through digital technologies.

Online Teen Dating Violence or Digital Dating Abuse or Cyber Dating Behaviours indicate the set of behaviours directed at damaging a partner using digital technologies to control them, pressurise them, or threaten them (Reed, Tolman and Ward, 2017). Online violence has real emotional and physical effects and is characterized by the absence of boundaries and limits, in terms of time and space, so the victim is potentially constantly exposed to violence. Furthermore, some content (images and videos) can escape control and be disseminated and stay online for a long time.

Since few studies have investigated the specific characteristics of this phenomena and there lacks a clear, unequivocal definition of the phenomena and of the behaviours that characterize it, online teen dating violence remains much to be explored and investigated.

Digital Dating Abuse behaviours can be categorized as follows (Save the Children, 2020)

- **Behaviours directed at damaging a partner's reputation:** spreading rumours, gossip, lies, (often) doctored photos and videos, which aim to harm a partner's reputation and ridicule them.
- **Controlling behaviours:** controlling a partner's mobile phone without their consent; controlling their movements; phoning/sending messages insistently to know where a partner is and who they are with; not allowing them to use their mobile phone/social networks...
- **Aggressive behaviours:** getting threatened and humiliated; getting pressurizing to consent to unwanted sexual acts, etc. These behaviours may have both mental and psychological elements.
- **Violation of privacy:** sharing private/intimate contents with third parties without the partner's consent.

Several international studies, while from several years ago, already suggest that non-physical contact with a partner occurs at all hours of the day and night: almost one teenager in three reports to have communicated 10 times or more between 10:00 PM and midnight with their partner by telephone or SMS (Picard, 2007). 17% of teenagers declare to have communicated with their partner sending text messages 10 or more times an hour between midnight and five in the morning (Lenhart, 2012). Thus, considering that the daily activities of teenagers are now highly integrated with the use of technologies, it becomes a priority to consider this dimension when we deal with teen dating violence.

International data reports that between 12 and 17% of young people admit to having had behaviours that come under the definition of Online Teen Dating Violence and between 11% and 31.5% report having been a victim (Borrajó, Gamez-Guadix, Pereda and Calvete, 2015).

Zweig and collaborators (2013), in a sample of 3474 teenagers with teen dating experiences, revealed that one in four teenagers has been victim to "cyber dating violence".

Research performed by Teenage Research Unlimited in a sample of 615 teenagers aged 13 to 18 reported that 36% of participants reported that their partner had repeatedly checked their cell phone use; and 30% reported that their partner had ridiculed, threatened, or humiliated them using new technologies (Picard, 2007). In another study with 623 teenagers, 48% reported that their partner had checked their messages on their phone and 39% reported that their partner had checked their personal social media page to know who they had been in contact with (Baker and Helm, 2011).

The most recent research on the matter was published in 2020 by the Journal of Interpersonal Violence (Hinduja and Patchin, 2020). The study gathered the data of 2218 teenagers aged 12 to 17 that were in a relationship at the time or had been in the past. 28.1% of the sample reported they had been victim of at least one form of Digital Dating Abuse. Being a victim of online violence by a partner was highly associated with being a victim also offline, thus indicating a continuum of violence between the offline and online world: 81% of people reporting having been a victim of online violence by their partner reported to have experienced violence by their partner also offline. In the study by Hinduja and Patchin (2020), participants that reported symptoms of depression were four times more likely to be victims of Digital Dating Abuse. Other studies report an increase in symptoms of anxiety, anger, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal ideas or acts in teenage boys and girls who are victims of Digital Dating Violence (Reed et al., 2016; Zweig et al., 2013; Van Ouytsel et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2018).

The assumptions reported in the literature claim that media environments are not neutral when it comes to gender: like all aspects of human interaction, the latter are also influenced by stereotypes. The investigation "Che GENERE di Tecnologie" (Save the Children Italia, 2018) explores the relationship between teenage girls and digital technologies, identifying, through the analysis of data on online access and behaviours, the opportunities and the risks connected to teenage girls' Internet use, seeking to clarify whether technologies have a role in reinforcing gender stereotypes, and investigating violence among peers and gender violence in online relationships. From the interviews it emerges that girls often experience two types of exposure to risk: grooming attempts and exposure to violent insults, in most cases involving sexist terms.

In general, they claim to have heard about their friends' experiences of being offended, harassed, subject to forms of control and extortion via smartphone, chat, mostly by male friends, acquaintances, ex boyfriends, mainly through the unauthorized distribution of intimate images or materials to third parties to discredit, intimidate, or isolate the girl.

At present, there are few Italian studies, reports, or surveys on Online Teen Dating Violence, making it difficult to know about the phenomena, its characteristics and dissemination in the country. Consequently, there is a lack of adequate prevention and intervention tools. In a longitudinal 2015-2019 research, published in the book, *Le molestie Sessuali – Riconoscerle, combatterle e prevenirle* (Romito and Feresin, 2019), whose purpose was to investigate, through interviews with 83 people, aged 18 to 69, the dissemination and perception of sexual harassment, it emerged that the online dimension is an environment for exchanging and receiving unwanted pornographic material, where there is control and aggression also among very young people and that a great number have experienced it in the past or know someone who has been a victim.



## GOOD PRACTICES

International good practices suggest programme development should begin with the perspectives of teenage boys and girls in order to understand how they perceive violence in relationships and, based on this, dialogue can be constructed founded on the questioning of gender stereotypes that still influence intimate relationships today from a young age.

Alliances between schools and social and healthcare professionals and all the actors that, in their professional roles or informally, come into contact with teenagers, are thus a priority, to the ends of developing effective prevention and intervention programmes.

In the USA and in Europe (for example, in the UK), special 24-hour telephone lines and websites have been set up, with the purpose of helping young people, by offering them information on how to construct healthy relationships, recognize the danger signs, and how to get help if there is already a problem (Biancofiore, Grattagliano and Catanesi, 2020). In Italy, although not dedicated specifically to the phenomenon, the Department for Family Policies' 114-Emergenza Infanzia number, managed by SOS II Telefono Azzurro Onlus, offers a safeguarding service for children and teenagers.

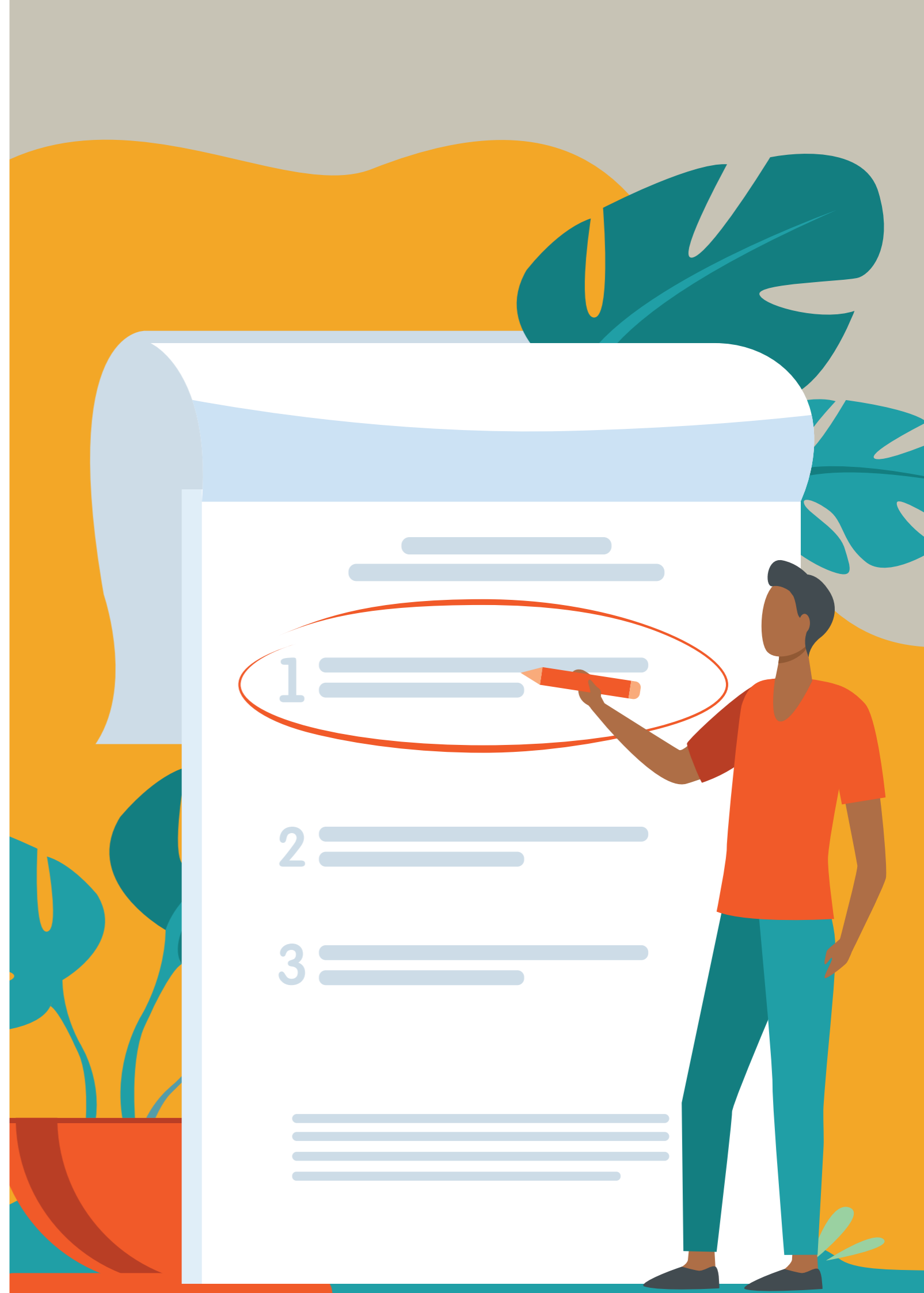
As Biancofiore and collaborators report (2020), promoting the emotional literacy of young people is fundamental: the perpetrators of violence are characterized by poor interpersonal skills, incapability of identifying with victims and recognizing the signs of suffering, lack of awareness and incapability of managing one's emotions and those of others. It is thus fundamental to promote in teenagers the development of empathy, communication and negotiation skills, tolerance, capacity to regulate their emotions, manage anger, and resolve conflict, in the context of broader gender education. It is effective to use different methods to involve young people in order to facilitate their participation and involvement in the creation of interventions to prevent these problems.

The European Commission, through the action of local institutional and non-institutional actors, funds programmes that can prevent and counter Teen Dating Violence and Online Teen Dating Violence in Italy. Some of the most well known ones are:

- The Children First program, project funded by the European Commission's Rights, Equality & Citizenship Programme, which proposes gender violence prevention and countering actions in the United Kingdom, Greece, Cyprus, Lithuania, and Italy. Its objective is to educate children and teenagers (aged 12 to 18) to prevent and tackle the phenomena from a young age, combating the gender stereotypes, norms, and roles that cause such violence. In this program, we begin with the perspectives of teenagers on these matters in order to involve them directly in the development of the project contents and tools. The programme also developed an online educational game to the ends of countering gender stereotypes and the norms that lead to violence.

- The project, Love & Respect – Preventing Teen Dating Violence, co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme used a multi-method approach to raise awareness in teenage boys and girls on these matters, also involving the tools which are most familiar to them: social media, online platforms, smartphone applications.
- The 30-month CYBERSAFE project is funded by the European Union (2019-2021). Nine partners from different European countries, including Italy, developed and promote an educational prevention programme - the CYBERSAFE kit - that includes digital educational tools based on a recreational approach and can be used in schools to tackle the issue of online and digital violence against women and young women with teenagers aged 13 to 16. CYBERSAFE promotes the development of healthy relationships and online gender equality. The CYBERSAFE kit offers information and tools to organize four workshops on the matter of online gender violence, with the purpose of increasing awareness of the matter and encouraging and helping young people to have safe, responsible online behaviour.
- The Youth4Love project funded by the European Commission's Rights, Equality & Citizenship program, and operated by ActionAid Italia, aims to develop, implement, and value an integrated educational programme in secondary schools in four European countries (Italy, Greece, Belgium, and Romania) between January 2019 and December 2020. The project intends to contribute to the prevention and countering of gender violence among teenagers and to educate teachers on the consequences of gender violence and the procedures for managing any reports. To this end, a web game was also created in order to learn to combat bullying and gender violence.
- The website <http://www2.units.it/noallaviolenza/IIProgetto.html> originates from the work performed by the research group Laboratorio di Psicologia Sociale e di Comunità coordinated by professor Patricia Romito of the University of Trieste. This site was founded in 2011 and targets teenage boys and girls, but not only. It holds a great amount of information on the dynamics of gender violence and services to contact to ask for help and support. Here, there are anonymous stories and reflections from teenage boys and girls that have experienced violent situations and it's possible to contact expert professionals to get help and support.
- The deShame programme is a project funded by the European Commission's Rights, Equality & Citizenship Programme, in collaboration with Children International, Save the Children, University of Central Lancashire and Kek Vonal, and aims to provide tools for the community to the ends of increasing awareness regarding sexual abuse and harassment and being able to effectively intervene and support teenage boys and girls that are experiencing this sort of situation.

All these programmes investigate matters relating to gender violence among teenagers and teen dating violence. The DATE project is part of this series of actions intended to prevent and counter violence in young couples and to understand the dynamics of the online context, more specifically and in more detail, since there is a lack of specific data and details for Italy.



## THE DATE PROJECT

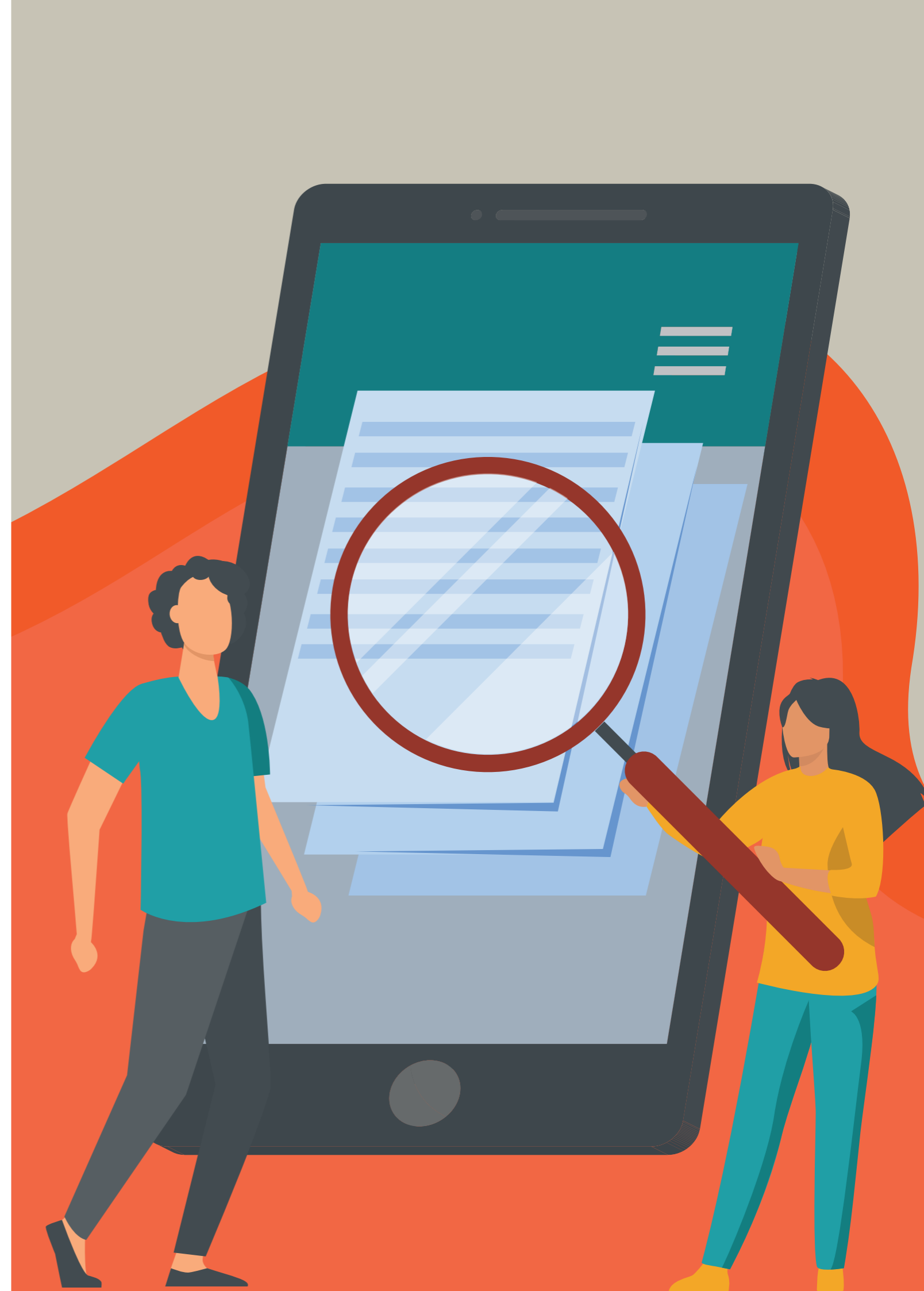
The DATE project aims to tackle teen dating violence (TDV) - with particular regard to abusive behaviour implemented through digital technology - Online Teen Dating Violence (OTD), considering it is impossible to distinguish between online and offline life when it comes to the experience of teenagers.

The first project activity entailed the consultation of teenage boys and girls aged 14 to 22 about their opinions on online gender violence among peers. To this end, a questionnaire was created, beginning with the theoretical knowledge on the matter and measuring tools adopted in international literature to detect Online Teen Dating Violence.

### The tool: The questionnaire

The questionnaire was created with the intention of gathering the opinions of teenage boys and girls on Online Teen Dating Violence. The following areas were explored:

- **Social-demographic questions:** gender; age; city.
- **Online habits:** frequency of messaging application use (Whatsapp, Messenger, Telegram, Signal, etc.) and social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter etc.); purpose for using these digital technologies.
- **Sentimental relationships:** participants were asked to list three values which are fundamental for them within a sentimental relationship; they were then asked to what extent they agreed with 9 items, to the ends of understanding aspects of freedom, equality, and trust that should characterize a sentimental relationship.
- **Online Teen Dating Violence:**
  - **Perception of the extent of frequency of online abusive behaviours:** based on international literature, a scale of 17 items was created reporting online violent behaviours that could be experienced in a teenage couples. Participants were asked to indicate how frequent the listed behaviours were in their opinion.
  - **Requests for help:** participants were asked if they would speak with someone and with who, if they were exposed to this type of behaviour.
  - **Emotional consequences:** participants were presented four hypothetical online violent behaviours by a partner and asked how they would feel in that situation, within a range of emotions: confused, indifferent, important, scared, angry, disgusted, embarrassed, worried, I don't know.
  - **Supporting others:** participants were asked if they knew of Online Teen Dating Violence situations experienced by friends, and how they would behave if they found out about such situations.





## The consultation

- The questionnaire was disseminated on social media platforms Facebook and Instagram for 20 days (10 to 31 April 2021), through the sponsoring system, via targeted ads to increase the views of the questionnaire by two specific target groups: Teenage boys and girls aged 14 to 22, in Italy that speak Italian;
- The same target that spoke English.

## RESULTS

### Who participated

The questionnaire was completed by 1276 people. Seven of these were aged below 14, 10 over 22, and 4 did not report their age. In total, 1259 teenagers aged 14-22 participated in the consultation (1106 aged 14- 18; 153 aged 19-22. Average age = 17), of which 350 males (27.8%), 882 females (70.1%) and 27 non-binary gender (2.1%) (graphic 1). It's important to highlight that the survey participants are not a representative sample in statistical terms.

As regards gender, given the few people in the "non-binary gender" group, the analysis was performed both on the whole group of participants, and on the subgroups that identified respectively as male or female. The report provides the relative data on the whole sample and on the subgroup (only male and female participants). The differences reported regard the male group and the female group.

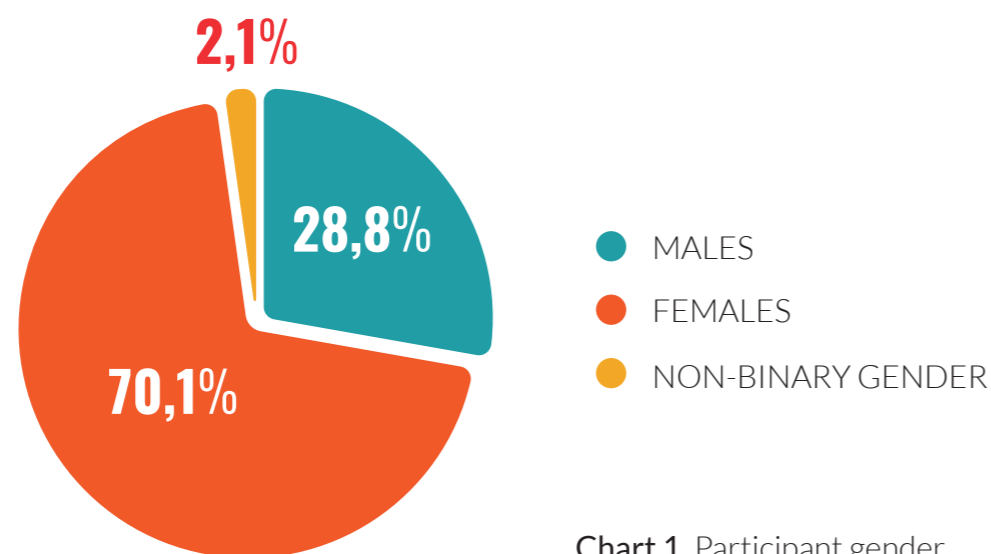


Chart 1. Participant gender

Most of the questionnaires were filled out by teenage boys and girls from Avellino (N= 263); Rome (N=289) and Catania (N= 108). This distribution could be connected to the social network algorithm, that led to greater visibility of the survey in these territories. The following table lists the cities where the questionnaire was completed by at least 10 people (table 1).

Table 1. Cities where more than ten questionnaires were completed.

City	Number of questionnaires completed
Avellino	263
Roma	289
Catania	108
Milano	32
Biancavilla (CT)	30
Napoli	30
Padova	29
L'Aquila	20
Torino	20
Crotone	17
Venezia	17
Bronte (CT)	16
Adrano (CT)	13
Ancona	13
Reggio Calabria	12
Montemiletto (AV)	11

All participants use applications to send and receive messages (WhatsApp, Messenger, Telegram, Signal etc.) and only 20 people say they do not use social media like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter etc.: 1 because they are not allowed and 19 because they are not interested in this type of technology.

The above-listed digital technologies are used above all to: chat with friends (99.5%); study or do research for school (99.4%); listen to music (99.1%); get information online (99.2%); update their home pages or check social media notifications (94.4%); interact through social networks (comment on posts) (87.4%); update their social media profiles (85.4%); play video games (80.6%) and chat with friends/acquaintances/contacts met online exclusively (73.6%). A smaller percentage used them to: chat with someone met playing video games (53%); meet new people through special apps (45.7%); write and update a personal blog (34.4%).

Comparing the age groups, certain differences emerge as regards different uses of digital technologies:

- participants aged 14-18 use applications to play videogames more often (82.2% vs 69.3% aged 19-22)
- participants aged 14-18 chat more often with people met playing online (54.7% vs 40.5% aged 19-22)

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that 46.4% of participants aged 14-18 declare to use technology to meet new people through special apps. This is the case for 40.5% aged 19-22.

These data indicate to us that it is mostly minors that use applications to communicate with people they do not know or have not met in person, and alert us to the importance of safeguarding them from the dangers of the online world.

As regards gender, new technologies are used:

- to play video games by 96% of males, 74.6% of females and 77.8% of non-binary;
- to chat with someone met playing video games by 72% of males, 45.1% of females, and 63% of non-binary;
- to chat with someone met playing video games by 76.9% of males, 71.9% of females, and 88.9% of non-binary;
- to interact on social networks by 82% of males, 89.5% of females, and 88.9% of non-binary;
- update their social media profiles by 74% of males, 90.2% of females, and 74.1% of non-binary.

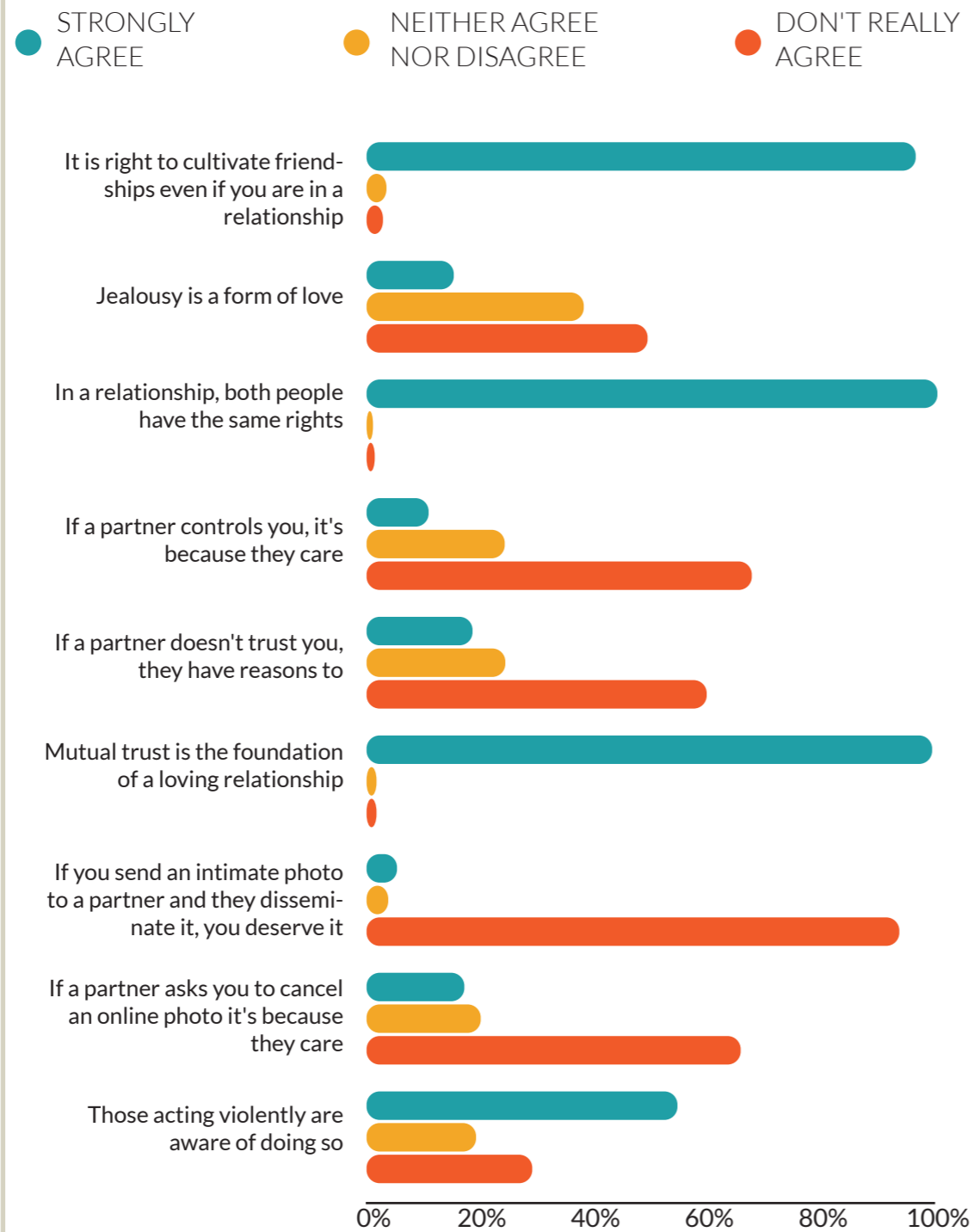
## Couple's relationships

Teenage boys and girls have rather clear ideas on how a couple's relationship should work and on which values it should be based. When asked to report three elements that a couple's relationship should be founded on, the most cited words were: love, respect, complicity, communication, faithfulness, empathy, honesty, passion/sex, attraction. In general, participants have an egalitarian idea of a couple where both members have the same rights and trust is the founding element on which to build the relationship. Despite this, a high percentage of teenage boys and girls do not have a clear opinion when it comes to forms of control that can be exercised within a relationship and that are often confused with love, such as jealousy or controlling behaviour. The position of our participants regarding the phrase "those acting violently are aware of doing so" is less clear (Table 2, graphic 2).

**Table 2.** Extent of agreement with behaviours of freedom, equality, and trust in a couple.

	Don't really agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Strongly agree %
It is right to cultivate friendships even if you are in a relationship	2,8	3,4	93,8
Jealousy is a form of love	48	37,1	14,9
In a relationship, both people have the same rights	1,4	1,1	97,5
If a partner controls you, it's because they care	65,8	23,6	10,6
If a partner doesn't trust you, they have reasons to	58,1	23,7	18,1
Mutual trust is the foundation of a loving relationship	1,7	1,7	96,6
If you send an intimate photo to a partner and they disseminate it, you deserve it	91,0	3,7	5,2
If a partner asks you to cancel an online photo it's because they care	63,9	19,5	16,7
Those acting violently are aware of doing so	28,3	18,7	53,1

**Chart 2.** Extent of agreement with behaviours of freedom, equality, and trust in a couple.



There are significant gender differences regarding extent of agreement with the behaviours listed above. From the data, it emerges that the dimensions of control and jealousy are still an important element when it comes to the conception that males have of a relationship (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Gender differences regarding extent of agreement with behaviours of freedom, equality, and trust in a couple

	Males %	Females %	Non-binary gender %
It is right to cultivate friendships even if you are in a relationship			
• don't really agree	4,6	2,2	0,0
• neither agree nor disagree	4,0	3,3	0,0
• strongly agree	91,4	94,6	100,0
Jealousy is a form of love			
• don't really agree	39,7	50,7	66,7
• neither agree nor disagree	34,0	38,5	29,6
• strongly agree	26,3	10,8	3,7
In a relationship, both people have the same rights*			
• don't really agree	3,1	0,8	0,0
• neither agree nor disagree	1,7	0,9	0,0
• strongly agree	95,1	98,3	100,0
If a partner controls you, it's because they care*			
• don't really agree	44,0	73,6	96,3
• neither agree nor disagree	31,4	21,1	3,7
• strongly agree	24,6	5,3	0,0
If a partner doesn't trust you, they have reasons to*			
• don't really agree	46,4	62,2	74,1
• neither agree nor disagree	30,0	21,4	18,5
• strongly agree	23,4	16,3	7,4
Mutual trust is the foundation of a loving relationship			
• don't really agree	3,4	1,1	0,0
• neither agree nor disagree	1,1	1,8	3,7
• strongly agree	95,4	97,1	96,3
If you send an intimate photo to a partner and they disseminate it, you deserve it			
• don't really agree	88,6	92,1	88,9
• neither agree nor disagree	4,9	3,3	3,7
• strongly agree	6,6	4,6	7,4
If a partner asks you to cancel an online photo it's because they care*			
• don't really agree	38,0	73,7	77,8
• neither agree nor disagree	32,3	14,4	18,5
• strongly agree	29,7	11,9	3,7
Those acting violently are aware of doing so*			
• don't really agree	36,0	25,5	18,5
• neither agree nor disagree	18,6	18,7	18,5
• strongly agree	45,4	55,8	63,0

## Online violence

In order to explore the perception of the frequency of online teen dating violence, participants were asked their opinion of the frequency of the 17 behaviours classified as "Online Teen Dating Violence" in the literature analysed, that can be considered in the following groups: behaviours that harm a partner's reputation; controlling behaviours; aggressive behaviours; violation of privacy.

The behaviours that are perceived as most widespread, are those regarding control by a partner.

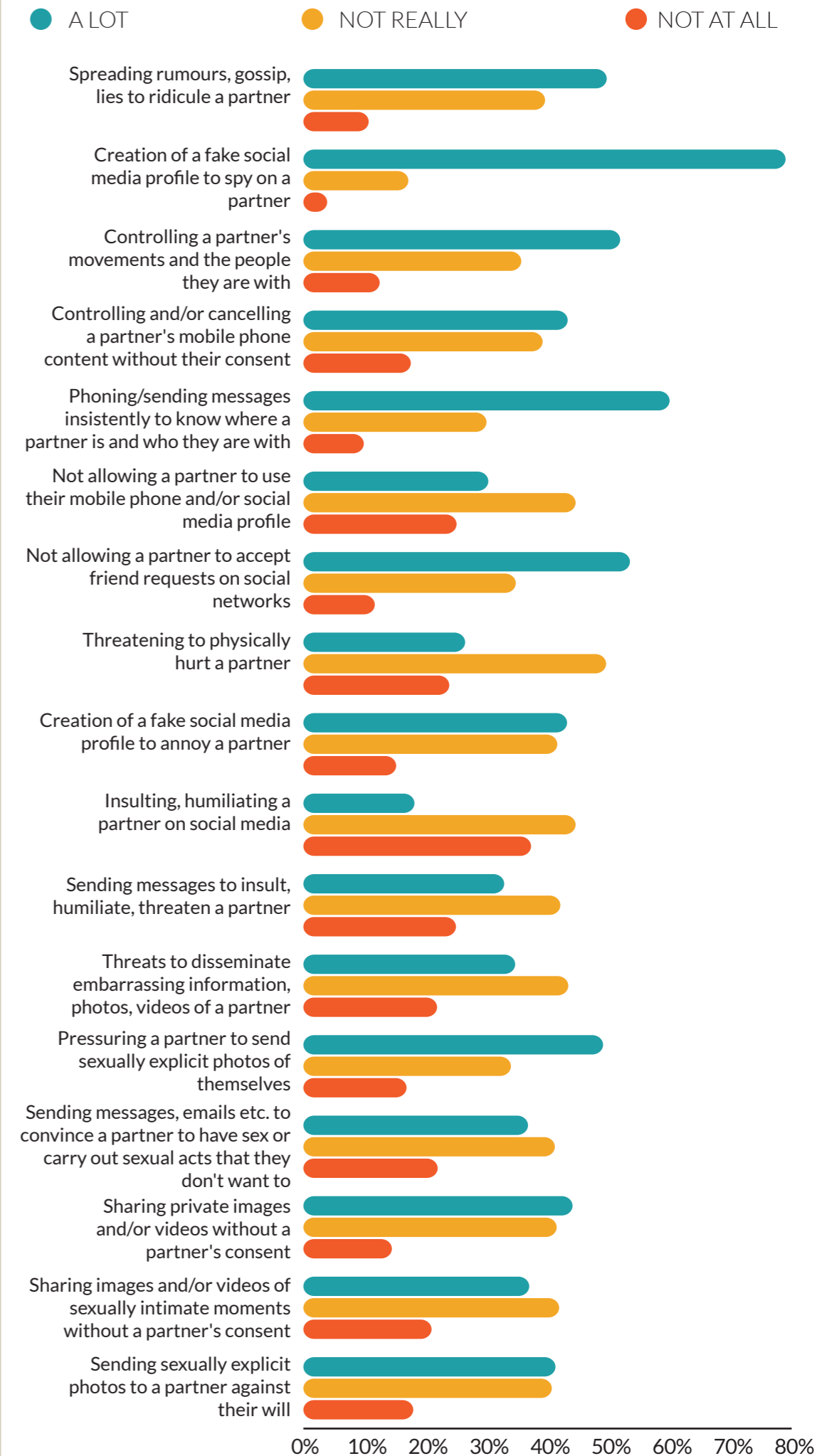
In particular, the strongest data regards "Creation of a fake social media profile to spy on a partner": only 3.9% of participants think that this behaviour is not implemented by their peers. Some other controlling behaviours perceived as frequent are: "Phoning/sending messages insistently to know where a partner is and who they are with"; "Not allowing them to accept friend requests on social networks" and "Controlling a partner's movements and the people they are with". In other categories, "Behaviours directed at damaging a partner's reputation" also frequently perceived; "Pressuring a partner to send sexually explicit photos of themselves"; "Sharing private images and/or videos without a partner's consent" and "Sending sexually explicit photos to a partner against their will".

Table 4 and graphic 3 report the data in detail.

**Table 4.** Perception of Online Teen Dating Violence

	Not at all %	Not really %	A lot %
<b>Behaviours that harm a partner's online reputation</b>			
Spreading rumours, gossip, lies to ridicule a partner	10,7	39,6	49,7
<b>Online controlling behaviour</b>			
Creation of a fake social media profile to spy on a partner	3,9	17,2	79
Controlling a partner's movements and the people they are with	12,5	35,7	51,9
Controlling and/or cancelling a partner's mobile phone content without their consent	17,6	39,2	43,3
Phoning/sending messages insistently to know where a partner is and who they are with	9,9	30	60
Not allowing a partner to use their mobile phone and/or social media profile	25,1	44,6	30,3
Not allowing a partner to accept friend requests on social networks	11,7	34,8	53,5
<b>Online aggressive behaviours</b>			
Threatening to physically hurt a partner	23,9	49,6	26,5
Creation of a fake social media profile to annoy a partner	15,2	41,6	43,2
Insulting, humiliating a partner on social media	37,3	44,6	18,2
Sending messages to insult, humiliate, threaten a partner	25	42,1	32,9
Threats to disseminate embarrassing information, photos, videos of a partner	21,9	43,4	34,7
Pressuring a partner to send sexually explicit photos of themselves	16,9	34	49,1
Sending messages, emails etc. to convince a partner to have sex or carry out sexual acts that they don't want to	22	41,2	36,8
<b>Online privacy violation</b>			
Sharing private images and/or videos without a partner's consent	14,5	41,5	44,1
Sharing images and/or videos of sexually intimate moments without a partner's consent	21	41,9	37
Sending sexually explicit photos to a partner against their will	18	40,7	41,3

**Chart 3.** Perception of Online Teen Dating Violence



As regards gender differences regarding perception of Online Teen Dating Violence, teenage girls reported a higher frequency of certain behaviours reported in Table 5.

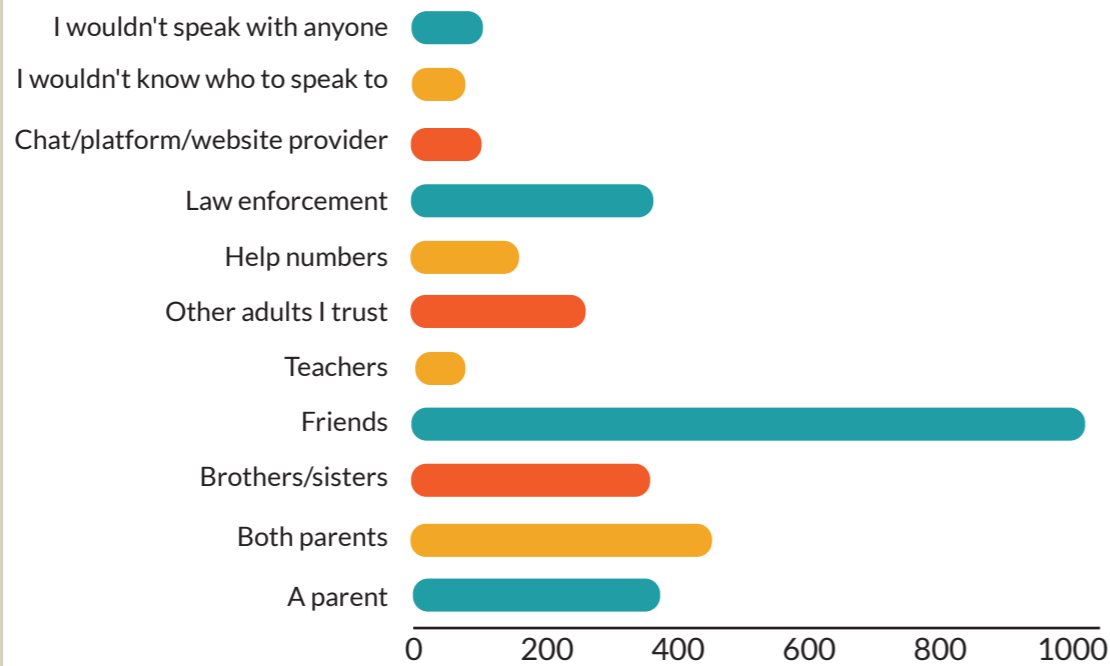
	Males %	Females %	Non-binary gender %
Spreading rumours, gossip, lies to ridicule a partner			
• don't really agree	46,0	50,8	63,0
• neither agree nor disagree	43,7	38,2	29,6
• strongly agree	10,3	11,0	7,4
Creation of a fake social media profile to spy on a partner*			
• don't really agree	34,0	46,4	59,3
• neither agree nor disagree	45,7	40,2	33,3
• strongly agree	20,3	13,4	7,4
Controlling a partner's movements and the people they are with*			
• don't really agree	40,0	56,3	59,3
• neither agree nor disagree	42,0	33,1	37,0
• strongly agree	18,0	10,5	3,7
Controlling and/or cancelling a partner's mobile phone content without their consent*			
• don't really agree	33,4	47,1	48,1
• neither agree nor disagree	44,9	36,8	40,7
• strongly agree	21,7	16,1	11,1
Phoning/sending messages insistently to know where a partner is and who they are with*			
• don't really agree	50,9	63,5	66,7
• neither agree nor disagree	35,4	28,1	22,2
• strongly agree	13,7	8,4	11,1
Not allowing a partner to use their mobile phone and/or social media profile*			
• don't really agree	18,9	34,7	37,0
• neither agree nor disagree	46,6	44,1	33,3
• strongly agree	34,6	21,2	29,6
Not allowing a partner to accept friend requests on social networks*			
• don't really agree	41,7	58,4	48,1
• neither agree nor disagree	43,1	31,3	40,7
• strongly agree	15,1	10,3	11,1
Threatening to physically hurt a partner*			
• don't really agree	18,3	29,5	37,0
• neither agree nor disagree	50,6	49,1	51,9
• strongly agree	31,1	21,4	11,1

**Table 5.** Gender differences regarding perception of Online Teen Dating Violence

Creation of a fake social media profile to spy on a partner*			
• don't really agree	67,7	83,2	85,2
• neither agree nor disagree	26,0	13,7	14,8
• strongly agree	6,3	3,1	0,0
Insulting, humiliating a partner on social media			
• don't really agree	16,9	18,9	11,1
• neither agree nor disagree	45,1	43,9	59,3
• strongly agree	38,0	37,2	29,6
Sending messages to insult, humiliate, threaten a partner*			
• don't really agree	26,0	35,1	48,1
• neither agree nor disagree	43,7	41,6	37,0
• strongly agree	30,3	23,2	14,8
Threats to disseminate embarrassing information, photos, videos of a partner*			
• don't really agree	27,1	37,2	51,9
• neither agree nor disagree	45,1	43,1	29,6
• strongly agree	27,7	19,7	18,5
Pressuring a partner to send sexually explicit photos of themselves*			
• don't really agree	33,7	54,8	63,0
• neither agree nor disagree	41,4	31,2	29,6
• strongly agree	24,9	14,1	7,4
Sending messages, emails etc. to convince a partner to have sex or carry out sexual acts that they don't want to*			
• don't really agree	27,1	39,9	59,3
• neither agree nor disagree	44,9	40,4	22,2
• strongly agree	28,0	19,7	18,5
Sharing private images and/or videos without a partner's consent*			
• don't really agree	37,7	46,3	55,6
• neither agree nor disagree	45,7	39,8	40,7
• strongly agree	16,6	13,9	3,7
Sharing images and/or videos of sexually intimate moments without a partner's consent			
• don't really agree	31,4	38,5	59,3
• neither agree nor disagree	45,1	41,2	25,9
• strongly agree	23,4	20,3	14,8
Sending sexually explicit photos to a partner against their will*			
• don't really agree	32,9	44,0	63,0
• neither agree nor disagree	43,7	39,9	25,9
• strongly agree	23,4	16,1	11,1

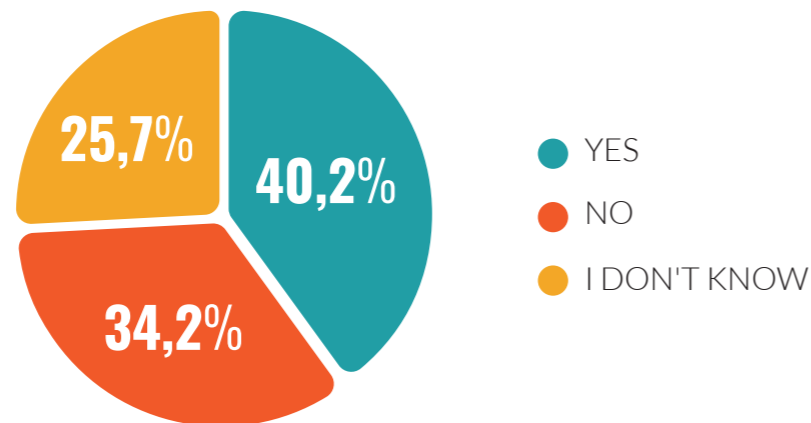
**Graphic 4.** People to ask for help if experiencing OTDV

The teenage boys and girls that participated in the survey proved to be very proactive, and most of them would speak with someone if a friend experienced this type of behaviour (76.6%). Only 49 (4%) participants report that they wouldn't speak to anyone and/or wouldn't know who to speak to if they needed help. The others would ask help from one or more people including: both parents (34.3%), only one parent (28.1%), brothers/sisters (27.2%), law enforcement (27.6%), other adults they trust (19.9%), help numbers (12.3%), chat/social platform provider (8%), teachers (5.7%).



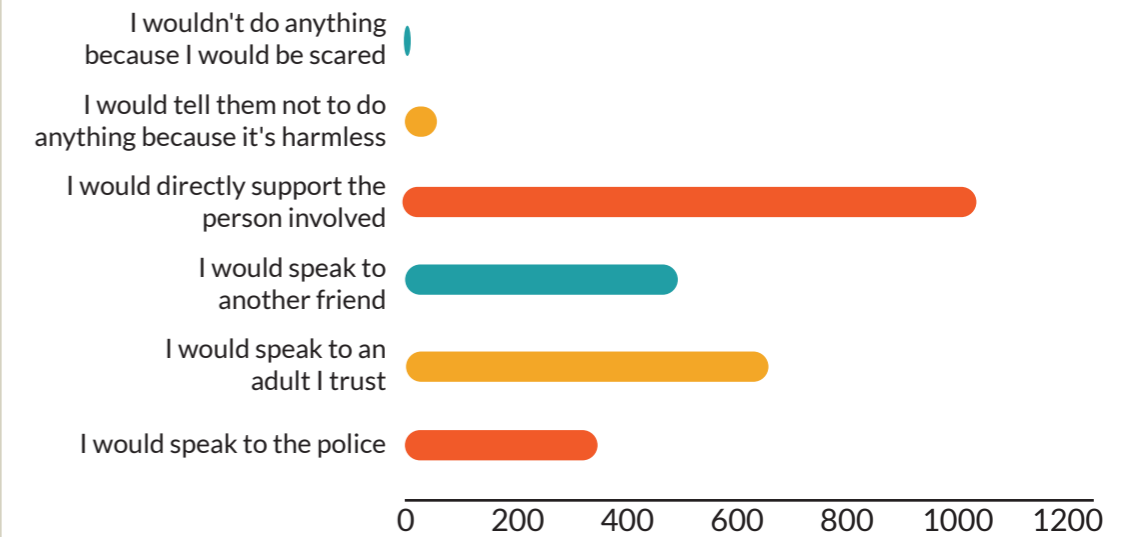
Furthermore, 40% of participants reported that friends had experienced online violence, 34.2% said no friends had experienced such a situation, and 25.7% said they didn't know if a friend had experienced this (graphic 4).

**Chart 5.** Have any of your friends experienced Online Teen Dating Violence?

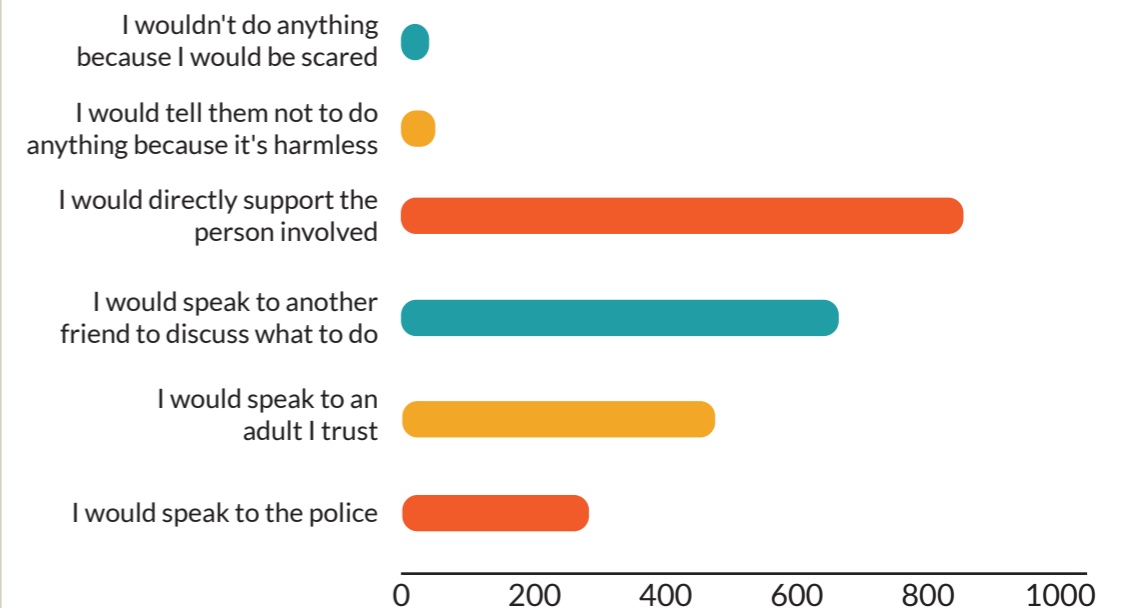


**Graphic 6.** Reaction to OTDV experienced by a friend

In most cases, participants would speak directly to the person involved (78.4%). Then they would ask an adult they trust for help (49.5%), another friend (37.3%) or the police (26.3%). Only 12 people say they wouldn't do anything because they would be scared and only 10 people say they would tell the victim to "not do anything because it's harmless" without offering other sources of help.



To the question how would they behave if they witnessed abusive online behaviour against another person, most said they would offer the person support (64.1%), then they would speak to a friend (49.9%), to an adult they trusted (35.7%) or to the police (21.3%).



**Graphic 7.** Bystander reactions to OTDV

To explore the emotions related to online violent behaviours, the teenage boys and girls were asked "How would you feel if a partner, using technology:"

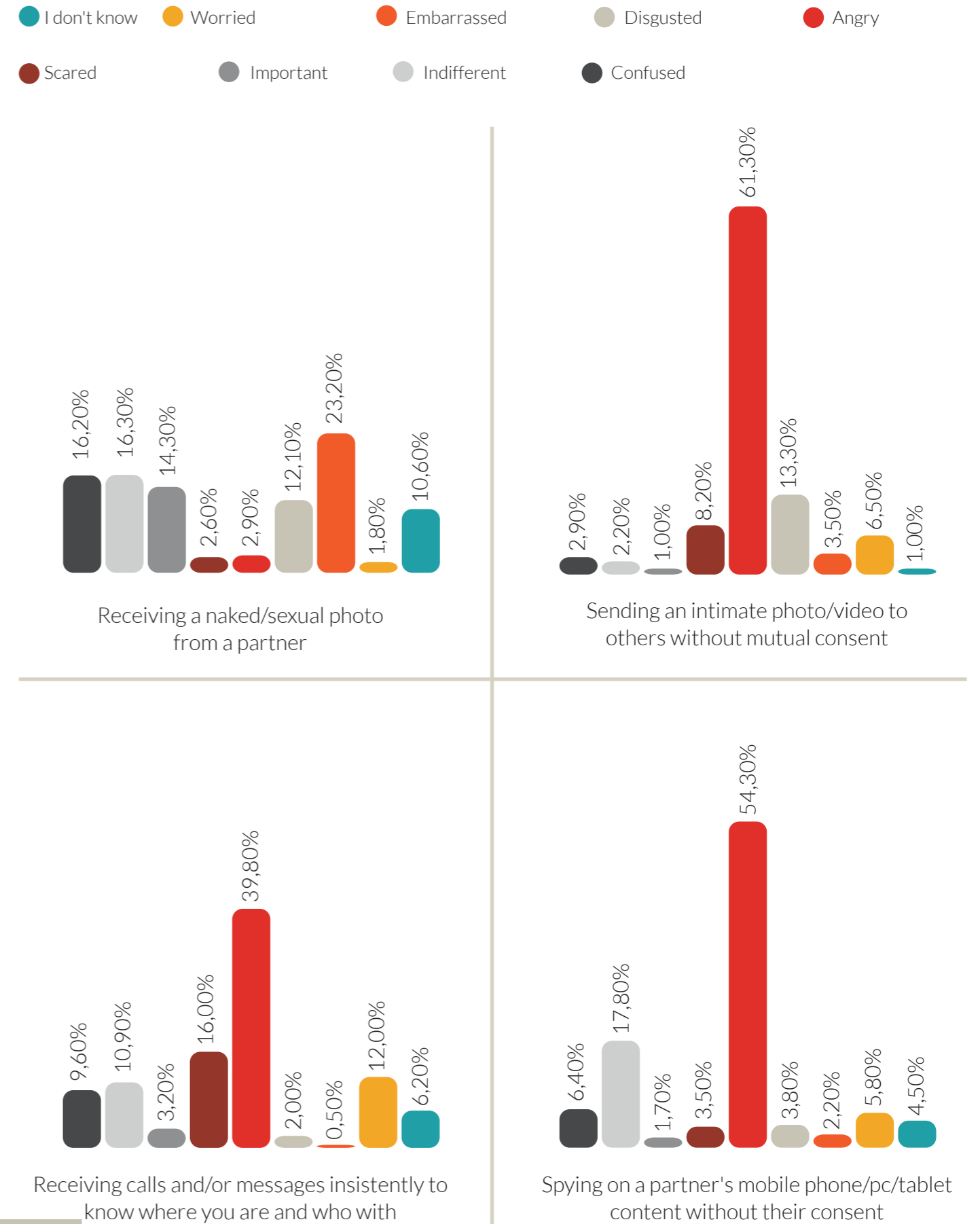
- "Sent you a naked or sexually allusive photo";
- "Sent an intimate photo/ video of you to others without your consent";
- "Called you and/or sent you messages insistently on your mobile phone to know where you are and who with";
- "Looked at the contents of your mobile phone or tablet or PC (messages, photos, videos...) without your consent".

Table 6 and graphic 8 report the results in detail. Anger is noted as the most frequent reaction. It is interesting to note that there are also high percentages for the "indifferent" group. There is a less clear reaction in the event of receiving a naked or sexually allusive photo from a partner. 23% would be embarrassed, 16% confused or indifferent and 14% would feel important for the partner.

Table 6. Emotional reactions to Online Teen Dating Violence

	Receiving a naked/sexual photo from a partner %	Sending an intimate photo/video without mutual consent %	Receiving calls and/or messages insistently to know where you are and who with %	Spying on a partner's mobile phone/pc/tablet content without their consent %
Confused	16,2	2,9	9,6	6,4
Indifferent	16,3	2,2	10,9	17,8
Important	14,3	1,0	3,2	1,7
Scared	2,6	8,2	16,0	3,5
Angry	2,9	61,3	39,8	54,3
Disgusted	12,1	13,3	2,0	3,8
Embarrassed	23,2	3,5	0,5	2,2
Worried	1,8	6,5	11,8	5,8
I don't know	10,6	1,0	6,2	4,5

Graphic 8. Emotional reactions to Online Teen Dating Violence





## DISCUSSION

The consultation performed for the DATE project provides us with important information on how teenagers perceive and experience sentimental relationships, above all regarding the online dimension.

As regards sentimental relationships, when it comes to focusing on the key elements that should characterise our relationship, teenage boys and girls express values of "respect" and "trust". Stereotype-related convictions do, however, emerge when it comes to certain behaviours and attitudes that are still too often mistaken for love: a high percentage of teenage boys and girls consider jealousy a form of love (26.3% of males, 10.8% of females, and 3.7% of people who identify as non-binary strongly agree), or do not strongly disagree with this statement. The same is valid for the perception of control that is still considered proof of a partner's interest.

28% of teenage boys and girls reported to not really agree with the phrase "those acting violently are aware of doing so", while 19% were unable to make a clear choice in terms of agreement or disagreement with this statement. Disaggregating the gender data, it emerges that this is very often the position of males. Above all for males, there is still the idea that, within the couple, the man has the right to control the partner and can consider them "his", reducing their spaces of autonomy and freedom. This suggests that there are areas of confusion regarding what is healthy and non-violent within a sentimental relationship. Control and jealousy are still considered elements which are possible and acceptable within a sentimental relationship, above all for males, and they are not recognised as elements that limit freedom and could form the foundations of violence within a couple.

This dimension becomes important when we investigate the perception of online violence in young couples. Controlling behaviours are those perceived most frequently. The behaviour that's perceived as the most frequent of all, and is normalised, is the creation of a fake profile to spy on a partner. Controlling a partner through continuous, insistent telephone calls and messages and spying on them on social networks is another behaviour perceived as widespread by our sample.

The area of privacy is also perceived as strongly undermined, above all when it comes to sharing and sending private images without a partner's consent.



Online aggressive behaviours are less frequently perceived. Within this behaviour category, the most frequently reported, according to our sample, is "pressuring a partner to send sexually explicit photos of themselves" followed by "sending insistent messages to convince a partner to have sex or carry out sexual acts that they don't want to".

These data confirm the confusion perceived between the dimensions of control and love. Furthermore, the perception of the diffusion of Online Teen Dating Violence behaviours and, specifically, of control, indicate to us how awareness raising, education, and preventive interventions on gender matters are central here.

Teenage girls, above all, indicate that many Online Teen Dating Violence behaviours are widespread. This is perhaps due to girls' greater awareness of these matters. Further, they tend not to normalise or minimise this sort of behaviour. Teenage boys and girls seem to be particularly equipped regarding the possibility of asking for help or offering support to people close to them who are experiencing online teen dating violence. This information is comforting, and, at the same time, confirms the need to train the adults that work with them: teenage boys and girls must find adults who are capable of listening to their requests for help and prepared to respond to them.

## Future developments

From the consultation, the need emerges to work on preventing OTDV, above all through awareness raising interventions and training on this matter which is yet to be studied in depth.

There is a clear, urgent need to inform and educate teenage boys and girls regarding emotions, countering stereotypes, recognising the difference between healthy sentimental relationships and behaviours such as jealousy and control, as behaviours which limit freedom and do not express love, and how these unfold offline and online.

Awareness raising in adults and teenagers regarding new technologies must also include knowledge of online platforms and responsible use of social media and digital technologies, with particular regard to safeguarding privacy and to regulations of online spreading of intimate and sexual content and images without consent.

The work of the DATE project will continue in this direction, gathering the perspectives and indications of teenage boys and girls, to the ends of mutual learning with professionals, and educating adults who work in social and educational care on the issue of Online Teen Dating Violence, promoting knowledge and facilitating the countering of these forms of violence.

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