# Chapter 19
# Distance Learning and Social Issues: Opportunities and Challenges in Preventing Violence

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## ABSTRACT

*Distance learning (DL) assumes a relevant place in the scope of social sciences' approaches adopted in terms of violence prevention, through the creation and development of digital platforms addressing different types of violence. As a consequence of the wide use of information and communication technologies (ICT) by young people, the risks represented for experiencing violence, and the advantages in terms of the rapid dissemination of information, there has been an increasing use of digital tools to prevent different victimization phenomena. Although there are constraints associated with DL, it has lower costs of learning training per person, allowing a wide dissemination of information. This chapter intends to analyse and discuss how DL may address violence prevention in terms of social sciences issues specific interventions. In the expectation that others may emerge, existing practices in this area covering the most diverse types of violence affecting young people are presented and described.*

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## INTRODUCTION

With the accelerated and growing development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Distance Learning (DL) plays a crucial role in education in general, and entails multiple opportunities and varied challenges (e.g., motivation, autonomy for study and time management) which seems to be in line with the skills of the younger population, also more familiar with this type of technology (Azevedo et al., 2001). In this chapter, DL will be used to describe learning environments primarily involving ICT and/or web-based environments (Guri-Rosenelt, 2009). DL is not restricted to the formal teaching context and has been applied in other areas. It also assumes a prominent and relevant place in the scope of social sciences, specifically in the approaches adopted in terms of violence prevention (VP). The literature has highlighted the positive use of ICT to support and empower victims (Al-Alosi, 2020), considering it as a promising, effective and efficient tool at different levels (Murray et al., 2015), such as: i) disseminating evidence on research on violence and crime, rapidly and with low costs, and assisting practices for professionals whose work is related to victims support; ii) allowing quick access to essential victim support resources and services; iii) setting up online support groups for victims; iv) planning security for dealing with technology-related risks for victims and software programs in connection with support victim agencies (Al-Alosi, 2020; Murray et al., 2015).

There is also a growing research about the relevance that ICT has in promoting violence and cyberviolence. The widespread use of digital tools and internet practices (e.g., text messages, emails, messages through different social networks), particularly by adolescents, to develop or maintain any type of relationship, also triggers additional problems associated with the disinformation about the risk of using these tools. ICT make adolescents more vulnerable to interpersonal intrusiveness, contributing to encourage victimization through cyberstalking (Borrajo, 2020), cyberbullying (Vale, Pereira, & Matos, 2020), sexting (Neves, Forte, Pereira, & Castro, 2020) and digital dating abuse (Caridade & Dinis, 2020 a, b; Caridade, Ataíde, & Dinis, 2020; Burke, Wallen, Vail-Smith, & Knox, 2011), among others.

Considering the mentioned literature evidence, the wide use of ICT by young people, the risks it represents for experiencing violence, but also the advantages it represents in terms of the dissemination and rapid spread of information, there has been an increasing use of these digital tools to prevent many victimization phenomena. Although there are constraints associated with DL, as the ability to limit participants to interact with each other and reduce the opportunities to apply learning objectives to local circumstances, it has been documented that they represent lower costs of learning training per person, resulting in rapid and wide dissemination of information (Hertz, De Vos, Cohen, Davis, & Prothrow-Stith, 2008). To cite some examples, reference can be made to the Continuing Distance Education Course, the Specialization Telecourse in the Area of Domestic Violence against Children and Adolescents (TELELACRI), implemented in Brazil, and which aims to focus on the prevention of domestic violence against children and adolescents, as a distance continuing education modality (Azevedo et al., 2001). Also, the Harvard School of Public Health, the Prevention Institute, and the Education Development Center established, implemented, and assessed Partnerships for Preventing Violence (PPV), a six-part satellite training series taking advantage on the public health approach, aiming to prevent youth violence. Through a hybrid methodology combining satellite training with local, face-to-face (f2f) assistance by trained experts, PPV trained over 13,000 people, accomplishing youth VP activities and creating a unit of youth VP leaders (Hertz et al., 2008). Many other technology-based programmes have emerged in the last years, mainly to address the IPV (e.g., Anderson et al., 2019; Constantino et al., 2015; Glass et al., 2015; Ford-Gilboe et al., 2017; Hegarty et al., 2019; Sabri et al., 2019) and, as happening with f2f

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