



Building healthy digital habits in adolescents

Construyendo hábitos digitales saludables en adolescentes

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ABSTRACT

This final degree project presents an intervention plan aimed at addressing the risks associated with inappropriate use of social media (SM) and the internet among adolescents. The project will be implemented at Instituto Santa Ana, a private bilingual school in the city of Córdoba, focusing on first-year secondary students. The primary purpose of the plan is to educate and raise awareness among adolescents about the safe use of SM and the internet, in order to reduce and prevent risky behaviors associated with their improper use. This intervention design includes the development and implementation of three educational workshops for adolescents aged 12 and 13. Various sources indicate that this age group is a key moment for initiating the use and adoption of virtual platforms, and it is also described as a period of heightened vulnerability due to clear emotional, physical, and psychosocial immaturity. It is expected that, following the intervention, students will acquire self-care strategies for a fulfilling life, establish healthy relationships, and use SM responsibly and safely.

Keywords: Adolescents; Risky Behaviors; Social Media.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo final de grado, presenta un plan de intervención destinado a abordar los riesgos del uso inadecuado de las redes sociales (RS) e Internet entre los adolescentes. El proyecto se llevará a cabo en el Instituto Santa Ana, un colegio bilingüe de gestión privada de la ciudad de Córdoba, enfocándose en estudiantes de primer año de nivel secundario. El propósito fundamental del plan reside en educar y concientizar a los adolescentes sobre el uso seguro de las RS e Internet, a fin de reducir y prevenir conductas de riesgo asociadas a su utilización inadecuada. Este diseño de intervención presenta el desarrollo e aplicación de tres (3) talleres educativos para los adolescentes de 12 y 13 años ya que, como de mencionará en el marco teórico, esta franja etaria se señala como momento de iniciación en el uso y apropiación de las plataformas virtuales, como así también describen esta etapa del ciclo vital con mayor vulnerabilidad donde hay una clara inmadurez, emocional, física y psicosocial. Se espera que, tras la intervención, los estudiantes adquieran estrategias de autocuidado para una vida plena, establecer relaciones saludables y usar las RS de forma responsable y segura.

Palabras clave: Adolescentes; Conductas De Riesgo; Redes Sociales.

INTRODUCTION

This final undergraduate project for the Bachelor's Degree in Psychology falls within the thematic line "Vulnerability and risk behaviors today" and consists of an intervention plan focused on addressing the dangers that Social Networks (SNs) and the Internet pose during adolescence when used inappropriately. The intervention will be carried out at Instituto Santa Ana, a privately managed school located in the northwest of the city of Córdoba. Specifically, the work will involve first-year secondary school students.

The general purpose of this intervention plan is to educate and raise awareness among adolescents aged 12 and 13 about the safe use of SNs and the Internet. This intervention is expected to reduce and prevent the occurrence of risk behaviors associated with these platforms, such as exposure to negative content, cyberbullying, grooming, sexting, among others.

A total of 95 % of adolescents in Argentina have Internet access, and 75 % of young people aged 13 to 17 have a profile on at least one social network. In addition, they connect to the Internet daily for between 1 hour and a half and 3 hours, showing a high degree of participation in these platforms.(1)

A statistical report prepared by INDEC (2) on Internet access by type, category, and jurisdiction in 2023 compared with 2022, including quarterly comparisons, shows that there has been an increase in the percentage of both fixed and mobile Internet access.(2)

The above underscores the importance of considering the dangers associated with the inappropriate use of SNs. Various negative effects have been documented, including addictions, social isolation, stress, depression, low self-esteem and anxiety, as well as breaches of privacy and security, among others.(3,4,5,6)

This intervention plan begins by contextualizing the selected thematic line and defining the concepts of vulnerability and risk behaviors, as well as describing the educational institution where it will be implemented. Subsequently, the problem addressed in this study is delimited, together with the objectives guiding the development of the activities and the plan to be implemented. A justification section is also included, in which the importance of addressing this topic is discussed. This is followed by the theoretical framework underpinning the project, covering the concept of adolescence, its stages and characteristics, social networks, problems associated with their inappropriate use, benefits, legal aspects, and the measures to be implemented.

The action plan is then described, detailing the activities to be carried out with the adolescents. A schedule summarizing the timing of the intervention is also included. At the end of the section, the resources and budget required to implement it are detailed. This is followed by the evaluation section, which identifies the indicators for measuring the effectiveness of the intervention, and the expected results of its implementation.

Finally, the conclusions provide an overall assessment of the plan, including its strengths, limitations, and future improvements. The Appendix and supplementary material are presented at the end. Thematic line: vulnerability and risk behaviors today

This final project consists of an intervention plan through which evidence-based and critical solutions are proposed for a specific problem. Specifically, the thematic line "Vulnerability and risk behaviors today" was selected.

This intervention plan seeks to address the consequences of the inappropriate use of Social Networks (SNs) in different aspects of students' lives. To conceptually define the selected thematic line, various authors and their respective studies are considered. Van Ruymbeke et al.(7) state that the concept of vulnerability refers to a group that is more exposed to risks than would normally be expected.

Consistent with this idea, Arora et al.(8) state that young people may be exposed to various risks that place them in this position of vulnerability, including deprivation, abuse, violence, and exploitation. The authors also mention the role of parents in protecting children and adolescents, since the absence of one or both parents is a determining contributor to their vulnerability.

Skinner et al.(9) address the topic from a human rights perspective, stating that children and adolescents in vulnerable situations are those who are unable to exercise their basic rights. This view emphasizes material aspects, such as money, food, and shelter; emotional aspects, such as love and emotional support; and social aspects, such as having role models and guidance in difficult situations. They also propose factors such as chronic diseases and lack of resources as criteria for determining vulnerability. These authors identify several groups in vulnerable situations, including children living on the streets, those subjected to labor or sexual exploitation, and those affected by armed conflicts.

Regarding the concept of risk behaviors, Rosabal García et al.(10) define them as "voluntary or

involuntary actions performed by an individual or community that may lead to harmful consequences.” These authors have studied risk behaviors during adolescence and report that such behaviors tend to intensify at these ages. They further explain that their occurrence may be influenced by various biopsychosocial factors, such as a sense of invulnerability, the need to experiment, peer influence, opposition to parents and other authority figures, and underestimation of risks, all of which are characteristic of this stage of life. These factors are compounded by difficulties in considering the future consequences of actions because of immaturity at the brain level. Another author who addresses this topic is Salas (11), who argues that the adaptation process involved in adolescence is not always harmonious, which increases the likelihood of developing problematic behaviors such as substance use (tobacco, alcohol, drugs), initiation of sexual activity, and unsafe sexual practices.

This information is important for inferring that adolescence is an appropriate stage in which to work on preventing risk factors and acquiring healthy lifestyles.

Organizational overview

Instituto Santa Ana

Instituto Santa Ana was selected for implementation of the intervention plan. It is a privately managed bilingual school (Spanish-English) with compulsory full-day schooling beginning in the 5-year-old preschool class. The institution began operating in 1980 and became affiliated with the official education system 2 years later, in 1982. That year, the Institutional Educational Project (PEI) was also established, centered on bilingual full-day education and based on personalized teaching and the values promoted by humanism.

It is a secular school specializing in the English language and offering Humanities and Social Sciences tracks. It is located in the northwest of the city of Córdoba and is attended by 407 students, with 72 teachers distributed across the morning and afternoon shifts (Universidad Siglo 21, 2024).

History of the institution

Instituto Santa Ana originated from the initiative of a group of families who wanted Spanish-English bilingual education for their children, which was not available in the area. Initially, it was established as a corporation composed of 3 investors: 1 in the pedagogical area and the other 2 in administration. Over the years, they gradually left the company, leaving only 1 by 2008.

The school began its activities in 1980 on a property consisting of a large green area and an old house, where the classrooms, offices, and bathrooms were located. This setting was chosen in accordance with the concept of ecology and human contact with nature. Later, the main building and new spaces for the dining hall and computer room were constructed. The old house was also adapted to serve as the administrative area.

At that time, the school offered preschool, first grade, and second grade, with an enrollment of 52 students. From the outset, Santa Ana operated as a full-day school, with classes taught in Spanish during the morning shift and English during the afternoon.

In 1982, the school received the resolution allowing it to become affiliated with the official education system, and the Institutional Educational Project was developed. Its central focus is bilingual full-day education based on personalized education, a constructivist perspective, and a close relationship with the values of humanism. In 1984, a principal was appointed for the secondary level. That year, the primary school building was also inaugurated; it currently houses both primary and secondary classrooms.

Mission, vision, and values

At the time of its founding, the institution embraced the ideals of freedom and creativity as values intended to guide learning and the comprehensive development of individuals.

With regard to its vision, Instituto Santa Ana seeks for its students to become critical and active participants in society, develop self-esteem and empathy, achieve excellent command of the English language, foster healthy school coexistence, engage in dialogue, and respect established rules.

Regarding its values, the school considers each student to be unique, with their own personal history and context, which it seeks to strengthen through each student’s life project.

The institution’s objective is for its students not only to achieve academic excellence, but also to become independent, curious individuals who are interested in knowledge. For this reason, they are encouraged to observe and experiment, accepting mistakes as part of the learning process. Likewise, the school seeks to provide opportunities for diverse educational experiences by creating environments that promote different types of learning and foster critical thinking.

As stated on its website, the institution proposes “the comprehensive development of the person of the new century: education grounded in ethical values, awareness of effort as a means of personal improvement and goal attainment, and an attitude of genuine social and community commitment.”

Organization of the institution

Instituto Santa Ana includes preschool (classes for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children), primary school, and secondary school. Preschool education, which is integrated with the primary level, aims to stimulate students’ individual development and promote critical thinking, while also contributing to their physical and emotional well-being through play. Events such as “Locro patrio,” “Family Celebration,” “Movement, Color and Music Festival,” and “Celebration of the Word” are usually organized during this stage, with collaboration between the school and families.

In addition, children have contact with nature through the Farm and Vegetable Garden project. Physical Education is also integrated into projects through educational outings and swimming lessons. Classrooms are equipped with projectors and interactive screens to enrich learning in innovative ways.

At the primary level, various projects are carried out in addition to the subjects established by law, such as Environmental Education, aimed at promoting care for the environment, and Literary Initiation, which seeks to develop reading and writing skills.

In the English project, art and play are used as teaching strategies, and students take an international examination from the University of Cambridge to certify their level. In addition, in the Computer Science area they are prepared to take the Junior Operator examination of the Concejo de Informática de Córdoba. At this level, emphasis is placed on building values such as respect, tolerance, and solidarity.

Finally, the secondary level consists of a Basic Cycle, common to all tracks, and an Oriented Cycle, in which students are trained in specific subjects, each lasting 3 years. At this level, in addition to the established curricular areas, additional activities and workshops are implemented. First- and second-year students have a tutoring space that supports the transition from primary to secondary school, where they learn study techniques and emotional and cognitive aspects are monitored.

During the Basic Cycle, students may attend a creativity workshop focused on reading and writing, while in 4th year there is a workshop devoted to academic writing. The 6th year is characterized as a year of university articulation, culminating in research projects in Spanish and English that require the use of techniques learned throughout secondary school.

The Institute also promotes socio-community intervention, vocational guidance, and environmental education projects. In addition, students have the opportunity to take a 3-week trip to the United Kingdom, which gives them the opportunity to study and deepen their knowledge of English.

The institution also offers an institutional elective area called Communication, Culture and Society (CCS), in which students critically analyze mass media and advertising, carry out readings, interpret individual subjectivities, and learn about aspects of general culture. This area would be suitable for implementing the present intervention plan, encouraging critical reflection on the impact of SNs on different aspects of adolescents’ lives.

Problem delimitation

According to the Pan American Health Organization (12), between 10 and 20 % of adolescents worldwide experience mental health problems, with anxiety and depression being the most prevalent and, in extreme cases, potentially leading to suicide. In addition, a report from the Ministerio de Salud de la Nación (13) conducted research to determine the health situation of adolescents and young people aged 10 to 24 years, showing that, during the period from 2019 to 2022, most mental health consultations were related to mood, psychological distress, and self-esteem.(14)

Adolescence involves multiple physical, emotional, and psychosocial changes, as well as the search for autonomy and a personal identity, factors that make it a stage particularly conducive to the development of risk behaviors.(15,16) On the other hand, the use of Social Networks (SNs) and the Internet is a fundamental aspect of adolescents’ daily lives and is essential for communication with peers and entertainment. However, the impact of these platforms on the mental health and development of this age group cannot be overlooked.

Taking the above into account, this study will address risk behaviors associated with the inappropriate use of SNs and the Internet, such as exposure to negative content, cyberbullying, and grooming, as well as the psychological and social disturbances that excessive and inappropriate

use of these platforms may trigger. To this end, an intervention plan will be implemented with adolescents aged 12 to 13 years from Instituto Santa Ana, located in the city of Córdoba, in order to educate students about the responsible and healthy use of SNs and the Internet.

Objectives

General objective

To promote the safe use of Social Networks and the Internet among first-year students at Instituto Santa Ana through psychoeducational workshops, preventing the dangers associated with inappropriate use.

Specific objectives

1. To provide information on the responsible use of SNs and the risks of excessive or inappropriate use in order to reduce dangerous exposure.
2. To provide tools for the healthy management of the social pressure generated by these platforms.
3. To foster analytical and reflective thinking so that information can be assimilated through constructive and experiential learning.

Justification

A report published by UNICEF states that entry into the digital environment increases the vulnerability of children and adolescents, exposing them to a variety of risks such as harassment, loss of privacy, and other dangerous situations. It also creates new forms of abuse and exploitation, including made-to-order sexual abuse content and live streaming of such material. Anonymity and the possibility of falsifying one's identity also place children and adolescents in a more vulnerable situation, since abusers can contact them more easily through games and Social Networks.(17)

According to this report, these risks are classified into 3 main categories: content, contact, and conduct risks. Content risks include exposure to inappropriate material such as violent and/or sexual images. Contact risks involve dangerous communication, such as interaction with adults seeking inappropriate contact. Finally, conduct risks occur when a child contributes to risky content or contact, such as posting hateful material.

In another UNICEF report (18), Fore, from New York, states that under the shadow of COVID-19, the lives of millions of children and young people have been confined to their homes and screens. Although digital technologies and solutions provide opportunities for them to continue studying and remain entertained and connected, they can also expose them to various risks. For those already facing difficulties, increased screen time may have worsened their situation.(19)

School closures, physical distancing, reduced services, and growing pressure on vulnerable families have weakened the protective measures previously available to them. More time online means fewer outdoor activities, poorer sleep quality, increased anxiety, and unhealthy habits. Without question, the Internet will continue to be crucial for millions of children.(18)

In the field of mental health, problematic Internet and SN use has been associated with the development of psychiatric symptoms.(20) At this point, it is important to note that 1 in 7 adolescents aged 10 to 19 years has a mental disorder. These figures are higher in the 15 to 19 age group, of whom 4.6 % have an anxiety disorder and 2.8 % have depression, compared with the 10 to 14 age group, with 3.6 % and 1.1 %, respectively.(13)

Nevertheless, despite the significance of these figures, these disorders often do not receive the attention they deserve or are not treated appropriately, which may have consequences extending into adulthood, impairing health and limiting the possibility of living a fulfilling life.

Gómez Campos et al.(16) conducted a study in Chile examining the relationship between SN use and its impact on the mental health of adolescents aged 14 to 17 years. The researchers found that frequent use may be associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression. The study also revealed that adolescents who used SNs moderately showed lower levels of these problems.

According to these authors, such differences may be related to exposure to negative content that may be present on these platforms, comparison with others, and a lack of meaningful social interactions. These results highlight the importance of limiting their use.

Likewise, the review conducted by Guillén (21) identified the existence of certain online communities on Facebook and Instagram that promote eating disorders by idealizing thinness as a beauty standard. The research showed that adolescents exposed to this type of negative content

experienced higher levels of body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and depression and were more likely to develop eating-related risk behaviors.

Arab (6) describes the wide range of negative effects that excessive use of SNs and technology may have, particularly during adolescence. These effects are associated with depression, insomnia, poor academic performance, psychosocial problems, and impaired decision-making. In addition, factors such as anonymity and the possibility of falsifying one's identity online may facilitate inappropriate behaviors such as grooming, cyberharassment or cyberbullying, and sexting.

According to the Ministerio de Educación de Argentina (22), in view of the risks and problems described above, implementing preventive actions among adolescents and within educational institutions is essential. Schools are settings where adolescents spend a large part of their time and therefore constitute privileged spaces in which to develop preventive actions. They provide an appropriate environment for critically examining the dangers associated with inappropriate use, as well as for promoting self-care skills and critical thinking in response to them.(22)

In this context, the pedagogy of care is discussed as a perspective that makes it possible to conceive of the school as a setting capable of addressing complex situations and building pedagogical relationships that promote students' well-being.

This highlights that adolescents constitute the age group most connected to the Internet, a fact that exposes them to various types of risks to their physical, psychological, social, and sexual integrity. For these reasons, an intervention plan that provides information about online dangers and offers self-care strategies for the responsible use of SNs is essential for promoting their well-being and safety.

However, Arab (6) states that controlled use of SNs and the Internet may provide several benefits. Internet use stimulates different brain regions, helps improve working memory, and enables attention to multiple stimuli simultaneously. In addition, individuals who have grown up using digital technologies from an early age appear to have a greater ability to make rapid decisions and greater brain development. Likewise, creating and managing blogs, videos, and websites promotes feelings of competence.

Other benefits include the creation of educational resources, strengthening offline relationships, sexual education, and health promotion and prevention related to tobacco, alcohol, drugs, and eating habits. Significant support for academic achievement has also been observed, with a high percentage of people finding SNs useful for assignments and learning.

Prats et al.(23) provide a highly valuable contribution that can serve as a reference point for this study. These Spanish professionals designed and implemented an educational intervention plan aimed at promoting appropriate use of the Internet and SNs. Workshops were held at 8 secondary and upper-secondary educational institutions in Catalonia, involving not only adolescents but also their parents and teachers.

The workshops addressed various topics, including the characteristics of technological addictions and signs that help identify grooming and cyberharassment; the importance of verifying the accuracy of online content; respect for other people's privacy when sharing information on SNs; and the risks of posting content without considering the consequences.

The workshop also included parents and teachers, who were provided with tools to support adolescents in the responsible use of the Internet and SNs, including education about online safety, the risks of anonymity and exposure to negative Internet content, and ways to address these problems.

The intervention yielded favorable results, as it increased awareness of the safe use of these platforms and generated demand for further training in this area.

The literature review did not identify similar interventions at the national level, although information was found from different organizations addressing the management of SN use among adolescents in the school context. For example, the Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires developed a series of curricular documents designed to integrate content from different subject areas and proposing the consideration of various aspects, such as virtual relationships and the role of SNs and the Internet in them, cyberbullying, and care practices that are important to implement in this context.(24,25)

At the local level, the Unión de Educadores de la Provincia de Córdoba developed educational booklets aimed at addressing different aspects of Comprehensive Sexual Education (ESI). Specifically, the booklet *Amar en tiempos revueltos (de redes sociales)* seeks to critically analyze and reflect on relationships established in the digital world and the forms of violence that may occur there.(26)

In addition, the Defensoría del Pueblo de Córdoba developed a series of talks for secondary schools entitled "Navegación Segura por Internet." These talks seek to raise awareness and provide adolescents with information about the risks associated with the everyday use of new technologies

and the current problems arising from these practices.

With regard to developmental processes, Prats (23) states that at 12 years of age adolescents have less awareness of possible negative repercussions and greater immaturity in conflict resolution. These are the underlying reasons why this intervention will be carried out with first-year secondary school students, in order to address risk behaviors through preventive actions from their early stages.

These authors note that, between the ages of 12 and 13, adolescents begin using the Internet and social networks to socialize and satisfy their curiosity. They seek to communicate more freely than in face-to-face interactions and share personal details to strengthen their identity. During these years, they begin to encounter more advanced aspects of social networks and the Internet. For example, they start accessing websites and social networks that are age-restricted but find ways to bypass these restrictions.

The proposal to implement this project at Instituto Santa Ana is consistent with its objective of promoting the comprehensive development of its students. Moreover, because it is framed within the elective area Communication, Culture and Society (CCS), where students are already developing critical skills in the analysis of media and advertising, this initiative will complement their education by addressing various risks associated with the use of SNs and the Internet. Implementing this program will enable critical reflection on the impact of SNs in different areas of life, fostering a school culture that values constructive dialogue and respect in digital environments and thereby contributing to the development of ethical and responsible citizens in their use of technology.

In this way, implementation of the project at the school will not only contribute to students' comprehensive education but will also provide them with tools to address the risks of today's digital world and promote respectful school coexistence.

DEVELOPMENT

Adolescence: a transitional stage

Papalia et al.(27) conceptualize adolescence as a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood that involves various physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. It is currently considered to extend from 10 to 21 years of age and is divided into 3 stages: early adolescence, from 10 to 13 years, characterized mainly by the changes occurring during puberty; middle adolescence, between 14 and 17 years, in which family conflicts predominate and risk behaviors may occur; and late adolescence, from 18 to 21 years, during which family values are reaffirmed and the responsibilities associated with maturity are assumed.(28)

Changes during adolescence

Regarding physical development, puberty involves what is colloquially known as the pubertal growth spurt, during which various physical changes occur, such as increases in weight and height and changes in body shape. Strength and muscle mass also increase, particularly in males.(29)

At the brain level, large numbers of cells and neural connections are produced and unnecessary cells are eliminated, which improves cognitive abilities. Another change occurring during this stage is the development of primary and secondary sexual characteristics during puberty until sexual maturity is reached in late adolescence.(27)

In cognitive development, according to Piaget, the most advanced stage of cognitive development is reached at around 11 years of age: the formal operational stage. The most significant milestone of this stage is the ability to think abstractly, which makes it possible to handle information more flexibly, understand concepts such as historical time, use symbols to represent other things, formulate possibilities and hypotheses, and understand metaphors.(27)

Working memory, processing speed, and executive functions such as decision-making and inhibitory control also increase. Language develops as well, and adolescents expand their vocabulary and learn to adapt their discourse depending on the person with whom they are communicating.(27)

In the psychosocial domain, adolescents seek independence from their families as relationships with friends become increasingly important, particularly during early and middle adolescence; during late adolescence, they seek to reconcile with their families and form intimate relationships. Adolescents also deal with their body image, the perception of which changes from initial insecurity toward greater acceptance by the end of this stage.(28)

In addition, they often maintain a critical attitude and experience emotional fluctuations, as well as a need to establish values and future goals.(29)

It is during middle adolescence that young people face greater vulnerability. Relationships with friends and the desire to fit into certain groups may have negative consequences. In addition, the desire to experiment may lead to problematic or risky behaviors.

Characteristics of adolescents aged 12 to 13 years in the use of the Internet and Social Networks

Prats et al.(23) note that, at this stage, adolescents begin using the Internet and social networks to socialize and satisfy their curiosity. They seek to communicate more fluidly than in face-to-face interactions, keep up with trends, and share personal details to strengthen their identity. During these years, they begin to encounter more advanced aspects of social networks and the Internet. For example, they begin accessing websites and social networks that are restricted for their age but find ways to circumvent these restrictions.

Regarding developmental processes, these authors state that at age 12 the trial-and-error approach predominates, meaning that adolescents have less awareness of possible negative repercussions and greater immaturity in conflict resolution. For example, they may not realize that having a Facebook profile without properly configuring privacy settings can have negative consequences. In addition, they often act impulsively, taking risks before understanding their effects. However, from this age onward adolescents begin to develop abstract thinking and hypothetical-deductive reasoning skills, which allow them to reflect more before making risky decisions.

Social networks

According to Fernández Sánchez (30), Social Networks (SNs) are conceptualized as structures that connect individuals or organizations through interpersonal ties, which may be based on friendship, kinship, or shared interests. Currently, online SNs consist of platforms that allow people to share content, which may vary depending on the type of platform, as well as establish relationships with others regardless of time and space.

Boyd and Ellison conceptualize them as online communities among people with common interests, activities, backgrounds, and/or friendships. Most SNs operate on the Internet and allow users to create profiles, share text, images, and/or videos, and interact with others in various ways.(31)

Over the years, increasing use of SNs has been observed. According to the Encuesta Nacional de Consumos Culturales (ENCC), recently conducted by the Ministerio de Cultura de la Nación (32), which surveyed the cultural habits, preferences, and consumption of the Argentine population between 2013 and 2022, this increase has been substantial. In 2013, 57 % of the population used SNs, compared with 95 % in 2022. The most widely used platforms were WhatsApp (92 %), YouTube (82 %), Facebook (72 %), and Instagram (58 %), followed by TikTok (34 %) and, to a lesser extent, Twitter (now X, 16 %), Telegram (14 %), and Twitch (9 %). The most frequent activities were viewing other people's posts, sharing content, and uploading one's own content. In addition, 44 % of the population reported watching live streams. Regarding video games, 33 % of respondents reported playing them in 2022. A higher percentage was observed in the 13 to 17 age group, particularly among males, at 44 %, compared with females, whose percentage was approximately 25 %.

Problems associated with inappropriate use of SNs

Risks of excessive use

Excessive use of SNs poses significant risks to users, such as addiction, loss of productivity, and social isolation. The mechanism underlying substance addictions may also explain how technological addictions operate.(4)

In this regard, it has been proposed that in both cases the dopaminergic circuit of the reward system is involved, including the hippocampus and nucleus accumbens. This perspective is known as the Biopsychosocial Model of Addiction, according to which any behavior has the potential to become addictive if it continuously activates the reward system in pursuit of gratification.(4)

A publication in La Voz (33) states that children and adolescents are more vulnerable to the negative effects of intensive social network use, which may lead to anxiety, depression, and irritability. In this regard, it cites a report by Muthy, the U.S. public health chief, who notes that social networks may pose a risk to the mental health of children and adolescents because their brains are still developing and because of the number of hours they spend using these platforms. He warns that social network use among minors is almost universal, since 95 % of young people aged 13 to 17 use a social network and more than 1 third use them almost constantly.

In the same article, Pedrouzo, from the Sociedad Argentina de Pediatría, explains that cons-

tant use of social networks by children and adolescents occurs because online interactions activate a reward system, in which notifications, comments, or gaining followers act as positive reinforcement and generate motivation to repeat the behavior.

Arab (6) defines problematic use of SNs and the Internet as a “behavioral pattern characterized by loss of control over Internet use” (p. 10), which may lead to negative consequences such as social isolation, neglect of social relationships and general health, and neglect of academic, work, or recreational activities.

In addition, Reinecke et al.(5) state that uncontrolled Internet use is associated with high levels of procrastination, which has a negative psychological impact, causing stress, sleep disturbances, and lower satisfaction with the relationship with parents.

Privacy and security problems

Adolescents’ safety in the digital world may be affected by different problems, such as grooming, cyberbullying or cyberharassment, and sexting. Grooming is defined as the strategies used by adults to gain the trust of children and/or young people online for the purpose of committing sexual abuse. This process involves establishing a false friendship in order to psychologically manipulate the victim.

Cyberbullying or cyberharassment involves the use of technology to harass, humiliate, or intimidate others. Finally, sexting consists of sharing sexually explicit images, whether one’s own or those of others, through the Internet. When these images are shared and disseminated without consent, the victim’s image is publicly exposed, which may lead to short- and long-term consequences.(6)

In addition, the emergence of the digital era has changed the way adolescents manage their privacy and identity. This increase in digital self-representation, which is more visual and public, entails privacy risks. The authors observe a redefinition of expressive privacy, which was previously associated with protecting intimate aspects but is now publicly exposed and exploited.(34)

Argentine legislation regarding the Internet

Law No. 26.388 on cybercrime, enacted in 2008: this law, better known as the “Computer Crime Law,” amended the Criminal Code. It added offenses involving the distribution and possession of child pornography by any means (Art. 128); interception of communications and computer systems (Art. 153); unauthorized access to a computer system (Art. 153 bis); publication of private correspondence or electronic communications (Art. 155); and access to personal databases (Art. 157 bis), among others.(18)

Law No. 26.904: incorporates Article 131 into the Criminal Code and establishes the offense of grooming or sexual cyberharassment, punishable by imprisonment from 6 months to 4 years for anyone who, through ICTs, contacts a minor for the purpose of committing any offense against that person’s physical integrity.

Law No. 25.326 together with Article 43 of the National Constitution (habeas data): the personal data protection law protects personal information of any kind relating to identified or identifiable natural or legal persons and establishes the confidentiality obligations of those responsible for processing such data, including protection of privacy and intimacy on the Internet.

Regarding the impact on mental health and well-being, it has been explained that excessive use of SNs has been associated with various disorders (depression, ADHD, insomnia) and educational difficulties (poor performance, grade repetition, school dropout). Likewise, difficulties in decision-making have been observed in people with video game addiction.

A study conducted by Cataldo et al.(35) examined the relationship between SN use and the emergence of psychiatric disorders in young people, finding specific patterns of psychological disturbances associated with such use. These included anxiety disorders, depression, and behaviors associated with eating disorders. The researchers explained that the negative impact of excessive SN use may be more pronounced given the characteristic plasticity of the adolescent brain.

On the other hand, Acar et al.(36) studied the association between SN addiction, emotional problems, and self-esteem in adolescents. The results showed that adolescents with greater emotional problems also had lower levels of self-esteem and greater addiction to SNs. In turn, higher levels of addiction were associated with lower self-esteem in this population. The researchers suggest that emotional problems may foster excessive use of SNs, which in turn may have a negative effect on self-esteem.

Benefits of appropriate use of SNs

Weigle (37) states that SNs and the Internet can provide multiple benefits for adolescents when used appropriately. These platforms contribute to social interaction, allowing adolescents to strengthen their social relationships and develop communication skills. They can also provide a supportive space in which adolescents can explore their interests and preferences. This author mentions other tools, such as blogs, which can help develop creativity and writing skills, while forums promote debate and the exchange of ideas. He also explains that through SNs adolescents can present themselves to others and receive validation and acceptance from their peers, which contributes to improving their self-esteem.(38)

Likewise, SNs and online information can contribute to learning by supporting the completion of school assignments. In this regard, access to information is also fundamental in areas such as health. Through the Internet, adolescents can find information and resources on mental health, sexually transmitted diseases, and other topics in a more discreet manner.

The workshop as an intervention strategy

A device is a set of components that establishes the conditions necessary to carry out a task. Each group device is configured around specific objectives and goals and therefore employs different theoretical models and techniques to achieve its purposes. Although these devices operate within an institutional framework, they create an intimate environment that facilitates contact and connection among members.

A distinctive characteristic of group devices is the spatial arrangement of participants, which facilitates visual interaction among them. During these meetings, individuals undergo transformations and a process of identification is generated within the group context. The group provides a space in which each member can express themselves while sharing experiences, fantasies, and feelings.(39)

The workshop is a pedagogical strategy that combines theory and practice, fostering meaningful learning through collaboration, decision-making, critical thinking, and assertive communication, with the active participation of the coordinator. Workshops are characterized by the use of various techniques, such as initiation, group production, mediation, and control techniques.

Ander-Egg describes the workshop as a teaching-learning method in which something is worked on, created, and transformed for subsequent use. It is a group learning process based on practice and collaboration. Designing a workshop involves constructing a tool that makes it possible to intervene in a specific social setting, grounded in encounter and joint reflection.

Action Plan

Activities

This intervention plan provides for the implementation of 3 psychoeducational workshops. Each workshop is a device that addresses a specific topic through opening, development, and closing stages; therefore, students could participate in any workshop independently of the others. The workshops will be conducted with first-year students, approximately 30 students in total.

The workshops will be held within the institutional elective area called Communication, Culture and Society (CCS). Each workshop will last approximately 2 hours and will be held once a week.(40)

Regarding the working modality, dynamic and interactive workshops were designed to promote adolescents' participation and reflection. Thus, the workshops were conceived to foster dialogue and create an environment in which open communication is valued, seeking to make adolescents feel supported and understood.

Table 1. Navigating social networks safely

General objective	To promote the safe use of Social Networks and the Internet among first-year students at Instituto Santa Ana through psychoeducational workshops, preventing the dangers associated with inappropriate use.
Specific objective	To provide information on the responsible use of SNs and the risks of excessive or inappropriate use in order to reduce dangerous exposure.
Agents	Psychologist, group coordination professional, and students from the institution.
Operational objectives	To provide accurate information about the main dangers of inappropriate and/or excessive use of SNs and the Internet. To raise students' awareness of the dangers of excessive SN use. To reflect on self-care for a full and healthy life.
Opening	Activity 1 - Introduction to the workshop (10 minutes): Welcome participants and present the workshop objectives. Record attendance (Supplementary Material A - Attendance Sheet). Activity 2 - Questionnaire administration (10 minutes) Explain and administer the pre-workshop questionnaire to assess students' initial level of knowledge and attitudes regarding the use of Social Networks and the Internet (Supplementary Material B - Questionnaire on knowledge and use of the Internet). For this activity, students will be asked to answer the questions individually using a printed photocopy and a pen. ACTIVITY 3 - Dialogue space: "Social networks: what do we know?" (10 minutes) A brainstorming session will be conducted based on a prompting question: Which networks do I use, and how does using social networks make me feel? The responses will be written on the board. The issues emerging from the brainstorming session will be discussed and reflected upon. PPT presentation "Learning together" (10 minutes). A brief presentation will be shown covering the definition of SNs, the most common types, and the main use of each. The risks associated with them will also be presented, including cyberharassment, grooming, privacy and security issues, and exposure to inappropriate and/or negative content. The benefits of appropriate use will also be explained (connection with others, access to information, expression) (Appendix A - PPT 1: Learning together).
Development	Activity 4 - Group work: "Are social networks a safe place?" (40 minutes).
	Participants will be divided into 6 groups of 5 students. Cards with statements related to addiction to SNs and the Internet will be distributed, and students will have to judge them as true or false. It is possible to become addicted to social networks. Social networks can have a negative impact on mental health. Information shared on social networks is true. If I am not on social networks, I will miss important things. If I do not post on social networks, my friends will forget about me. Social networks are the best way to stay informed. There is nothing wrong with sharing personal information on social networks. Each group will justify its point of view on a poster provided to the group. Each group will briefly present its ideas (5 minutes per group, 30 minutes in total). Activity 5 - Break and shared snack (15 minutes).
Closing	Activity 6 - Audiovisual space: "Reflecting together" A short film produced by the Asociación de ayuda a familias con menores (AFAVAL), which supports families with minors who display addictive and/or problematic behaviors, will be shown. The film addresses ICT addiction (Appendix B - Video 1, Short Film on Technological Addiction) (5 minutes). Activity 7 - Reflection space: (20 minutes). (We continue working with the same groups.) We reflect on the short film.
	What did you observe in the short film? What would self-care for a healthy life involve? Learning about self-care - PowerPoint presentation This closing activity is intended to provide space for free expression, reflection, and awareness of everything learned in the workshop (Appendix C - PPT 2 - Learning about self-care).

Table 2. Beyond the screens

General objective	To promote the safe use of Social Networks and the Internet among first-year students at Instituto Santa Ana through psychoeducational workshops, preventing the dangers associated with inappropriate use.
Specific objective	To provide tools for healthy management of the social pressure generated by these platforms.
Agents	Psychologist, group coordination professional, and students from the institution.
Operational objectives	To make visible the difference between real life and what is shown in virtual life. To identify the social pressure of having to belong, be, or have what social networks show us. To raise awareness of the importance of self-worth and mutual respect. To foster interaction and the ability to enjoy in-person team games.
Opening	Activity 1 - Introduction to the workshop (10 minutes): Welcome participants and present the workshop objectives. Record attendance (Supplementary Material A - Attendance Sheet).
	Activity 2: "Is what we see on social media real?" (prompting question, inviting participants to share their opinions) (10 minutes) Participants will be invited to watch the following short film, "Are you living an insta lie?" (Appendix D - Video 2) (5 minutes). Discussion space (15 minutes) Free expression about the short film will be encouraged through questions about the message it conveys: How is it related to social pressure? What is your opinion about what the Internet shows and what actually happens in reality? Scenes from the short film will be captured, and what people show on social networks versus what actually happens will be written on the board. The group will discuss the need to avoid comparison and the search for approval in this context.

General objective	To promote the safe use of Social Networks and the Internet among first-year students at Instituto Santa Ana through psychoeducational workshops, preventing the dangers associated with inappropriate use.
Development	Activity 3 - "Seeing each other is better" (15 minutes) 3 hypothetical situations will be analyzed, identifying the problems and emotions involved in each. Students will be divided into 6 groups (5 students each). The following hypothetical situations will be provided on cards (Appendix E - Situation Cards). Situation 1: A group of students posts photos from a party they attended without inviting Juan. When Juan sees the photos, he feels excluded and sad. (2 groups will analyze this situation.) Situation 2: An influencer posts a photo showing a perfect body and receives many positive comments. When Sofia sees it, she feels insecure about her own body and begins comparing herself with the influencer. (2 groups will analyze this situation.) Situation 3: A group of students shares a meme that ridicules a classmate. When Carlos sees it, he feels offended and decides not to speak to the group for a while. (2 groups will analyze this situation.) For this activity, 6 posters and 6 markers will be provided. Reflection space (30 minutes, 5 minutes per group). Each group will be invited to present its reflections on the assigned hypothetical situation. The development of effective ways of coping with these situations will be encouraged, emphasizing the importance of clearly expressing feelings and thoughts, critical thinking, setting boundaries, and seeking support. Activity 4 - Break and snack (15 minutes)
Closing	Activity 5 - "Offline activities" (30 minutes) A charades game is proposed. The same groups will continue working together. Each group will choose a movie or television series in order to foster interaction and the ability to enjoy games together in a shared, face-to-face setting. They will designate 1 or more representatives to act out the title while the other groups try to guess it. The team that guesses the most movies or series wins. An hourglass will be used to measure the time for each performance. (3 minutes for each team.) "Reflection space." Participants will be invited to reflect on the importance of the quality of time shared through direct experience. They will be encouraged to mention other activities that bring them satisfaction.

Table 3. Taking care of myself and each other on the Internet

General objective	To promote the safe use of Social Networks and the Internet among first-year students at Instituto Santa Ana through psychoeducational workshops, preventing the dangers associated with inappropriate use.
Specific objective	To foster analytical and reflective thinking so that information can be assimilated through constructive and experiential learning.
Agents	Psychologist, group coordination professional, and students from the institution.
Operational objective	To provide tools for addressing the risks of the digital world. To raise awareness of the importance of protecting privacy and the personal information shared on social networks.
Opening	Activity 1 - Introduction to the workshop (10 minutes): Welcome participants and present the workshop objectives. Record attendance (Supplementary Material A - Attendance Sheet). Activity 2: "Your digital footprint" (15 minutes) Exchange of ideas: the activity will begin with a prompting question: What do you know about the concept of a Digital Footprint? It will then be explained that the Digital Footprint consists of the information that other people could access if they search for us on the Internet. Its potential impact on people's lives will also be addressed, revisiting concepts from the first workshop concerning grooming, cyberbullying, and sexting. Activity 3: "Myself on social networks" (10 minutes) For this activity, students will be allowed to conduct a search on their mobile phones. Each student will search Google for their first name, last name, and national identity document number (DNI). Anyone who wishes to share the search results may do so freely. They will discuss among themselves whether the results are appropriate for protecting their privacy and security.
Development	Activity 4: "The Internet: a dangerous environment?"
	Group work: "Did you know...?" Students will work in groups of 5 (6 groups in total). Each group will receive a real-life story in printed format. On a sheet of paper, each group will describe what these adolescents could have done to avoid being placed at risk (Appendix F - Real-life stories). (10 minutes) Each group will briefly tell the others what they thought and felt. (5 minutes per group, 30 minutes in total) Activity 5 - Break and shared snack. (15 minutes)
Closing	Activity 6: "Making the most of the benefits and limiting the dangers" (30 minutes) Participants will sit in a circle. Each student will receive a brochure, which will be read using the following dynamic: the person reading selects the next reader. As the brochure is read, questions will be clarified and participants will be able to freely express what they think and feel (Supplementary Material D - Brochure). The group will reflect on the importance of being aware of these risks, and resources and tools will be shared for reporting risky situations and seeking help, first and foremost from parents, teachers, and school administrators. Evaluation activity (15 MINUTES) Content evaluation (Supplementary Material B - Questionnaire on knowledge and use of the Internet). Satisfaction evaluation (Supplementary Material C - Workshop satisfaction questionnaire).

Resources and budget. Material resources: (for 30 students)

Stationery materials: 30 pens \$2400. Photocopies (40) \$4000. 12 posters, \$12000. 6 markers, \$4800. 2 whiteboard markers, \$3200. 3 poster boards, \$1800. 6 color photocopies, \$1500. Brochure \$24 000.

Total material resources: \$53 700

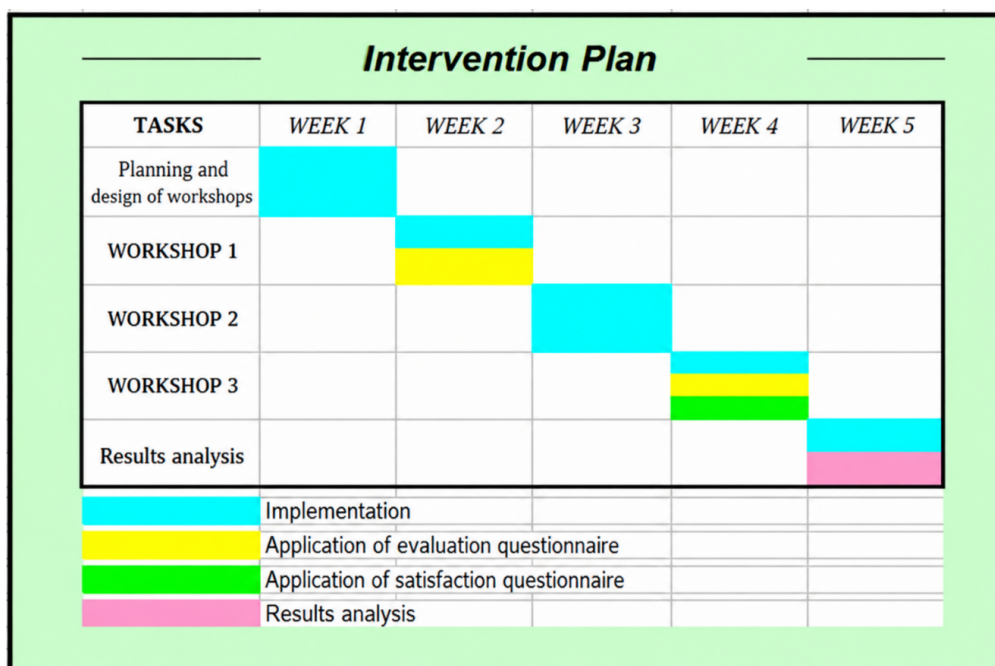
Human resources:

The fee corresponding to the area of educational psychology is used.

Promotion and prevention, item 6D (CPPC 2023).

• 1 workshop coordination professional \$20 800 per hour. (Workshop design 30 hours: \$624 000).

Figure 1. Gantt chart



Workshop implementation (6 hours: \$124 800).

- 1 group coordination professional \$16 200 per hour (\$97 200). This item may be replaced by a teacher from the CCS area provided by the institution.

Total human resources: \$846 000 (\$748 800). Final budget: \$899 700 (\$802 500).

Evaluation

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention plan, the following indicators are proposed.

- Attendance: attendance at each workshop will be recorded, and the expected percentage of participants will be compared with the percentage actually attending. A 90 % attendance rate will be established as the expected benchmark for the activities.
- Satisfaction with the intervention: participants' level of satisfaction with the activities and workshops will be assessed using a scale from 1 to 5. The intervention will be considered satisfactory if most participants rate the workshops between 4 and 5. To collect this information, a paper questionnaire will be distributed at the end of each session.
- Knowledge acquired: another indicator will be a change in the level of knowledge regarding the topics addressed in the workshops. For this purpose, participants will be asked to complete a paper questionnaire before and after the intervention.

Expected results

Implementation of the intervention plan at Instituto Santa Ana is expected to enable adolescents to develop competencies for the appropriate use of digital platforms. They are also expected to demonstrate increased knowledge about the use of SNs and the problems associated with them. This aspect will be measured through pre- and post-intervention questionnaires.

In addition, adolescents are expected to acquire tools for managing self-care and social pressure. For this purpose, their opinions or group reflections on the topic will be requested after the closing stage of each workshop.

Regarding the expected benefits, students are expected to become more aware of the dangers associated with inappropriate use of SNs and acquire tools to avoid them, which should reduce the incidence of risk behaviors such as cyberbullying, grooming, exposure to inappropriate or negative content, succumbing to social pressure, and psychological consequences, among others.

Related to the above, students are expected to experience an improvement in their emotional and psychological well-being by acquiring tools to understand the difference between virtual reality and real life, feel greater safety and protection, and strengthen values of mutual respect.

At the end of this intervention plan, adolescents are expected to be able to maintain healthier

interpersonal relationships both within and outside the digital environment.

The proposed actions, to be carried out in workshop format, are designed to capture adolescents' attention through dynamic activities that promote critical thinking and meaningful learning. In addition, the use of a participatory methodology and diverse resources would contribute to the effectiveness of the interventions.

Although specific interventions aimed at educating adolescents about the responsible and appropriate use of SNs exist at the local level, they are not formally integrated into education. For this reason, the intervention plan proposed in this final project helps fill a gap in academic practice.

This project seeks to equip adolescents with skills to use SNs safely and healthily, focusing on strengthening their self-esteem and preventing mental health problems related to inappropriate use of technology. This includes psychoeducation on the responsible management of online information, promotion of a positive self-image, and teaching strategies to cope with the social pressure to be, belong, and possess through constant comparison with difficult-to-attain lifestyle standards.

The objective is for adolescents to develop an appropriate relationship with these platforms, minimizing the risks of inappropriate use and promoting their benefits for daily life.

CONCLUSIONS

This final undergraduate project proposes addressing a fundamental aspect related to the thematic line of vulnerability and risk behaviors today: the dangers posed by SNs in different areas of adolescents' lives. This is particularly relevant because these types of harmful behaviors are more likely to occur during adolescence.

Working with this population and such a current problem is essential, particularly by beginning the psychoeducational intervention when adolescents first enter the world of these platforms. Although this study will be applied to first-year students, it is known that these behaviors are occurring much earlier, with a concerning degree of prematurity, because risks increase with greater emotional immaturity and lack of information.

The selection of Instituto Santa Ana, after analyzing its particular characteristics, was based on the fact that the institution has an institutional elective area called Communication, Culture and Society (CCS), in which mass media and advertising are critically analyzed. This area is ideal for addressing topics related to SNs and the Internet and reflecting on their impact on adolescents' lives.

On the other hand, it is a school serving a middle-to-upper-income population, which means that adolescents are more likely to have technological devices and daily access to an Internet connection.

The above does not imply that this problem does not occur in other social strata; on the contrary, there may be even greater risk because of higher vulnerability.

The delimitation of the problem began with recognition of an issue that crosses borders and is considered a global problem. For this reason, UNICEF is among the institutions that has expressed the greatest concern and made significant contributions.

The literature review showed that the figures are truly concerning, both in terms of time spent exposed to the Internet and the risks this entails, particularly addiction; the incidence of mental disorders such as anxiety and depression; and the high risk of serious problems such as cyberbullying or cyberharassment, sexting, or grooming.

This last problem is particularly concerning today because, according to the Defensoría de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes de la Provincia de Córdoba, 4 in 10 adolescents are targeted and abused.

The design of the intervention plan also emerged from the literature search and the decision to use as a reference an intervention plan implemented in Catalonia, Spain, which proved effective in the 8 educational institutions in which it was carried out.

Despite the differences from the plan implemented in Catalonia, which was interdisciplinary and also involved parents and teachers, this plan selected almost all of the topics addressed in the Catalan workshops. Although this proved somewhat ambitious, priority was given to addressing multiple aspects, all considered important for prevention given their seriousness, rather than exploring a single topic in depth.

Despite the importance of working with adolescents, it is essential to include families and teachers in other stages of intervention, since they are potential agents for preventing risk behaviors at this age. Including these 2 populations (parents and teachers) becomes vital for addressing parental controls, safety measures, and legal issues. Therefore, the outcomes of this intervention would likely be more effective if these 2 populations were included at another stage.

After analyzing the proposed project, a set of strengths and limitations was identified. Among

the strengths are the use of participatory and interactive methodologies that foster exchange and engagement among adolescents, as well as resources that encourage reflection and dialogue, such as short films that reflect the motivations and current context of adolescents' lives and searches for their own digital footprints on Google. Finally, the comprehensive approach proposed for addressing both the risks and benefits of SN use is noteworthy, as it acknowledges the interests, tastes, and preferences that adolescents currently choose for entertainment and interaction without dismissing them, while motivating healthier use.

The institution also has the necessary material resources, such as projectors, sound equipment, and physical space, to carry out the intervention. Part of the institution's mission is for students to develop critical thinking through the analysis of mass media and advertising, and in this regard the intervention plan is aligned with that purpose.

Another important factor to consider is that the institution's population belongs to an upper-middle socioeconomic stratum, which increases the likelihood that a high percentage of students have electronic devices and unlimited data access.

Another relevant factor is the high level of family participation and commitment in school activities, a characteristic that could support this initiative from home by providing the necessary support and openness to address the topic.

Regarding limitations, some students may resist participating in the workshops or changing their habits regarding SN and Internet use. In this regard, support from the school's management team would be very useful in conveying the importance of participating in the project.

Finally, regarding possible adjustments or improvements in future implementations of the plan, it is suggested that the proposal be adapted to other socioeconomic contexts, which could increase its applicability. In addition, the intervention could be extended beyond Instituto Santa Ana and opened to the community, since this is a problem affecting adolescents in general. Experts from other disciplines, such as computer science and digital security, could also be invited to participate in order to enrich the program's content and methodology through an interdisciplinary approach.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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