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RISK ASPECTS OF ONLINE ACTIVITIES IN VICTIMS OF CYBERBULLYING

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This study focuses on the risks of online activity within the social network sites used by primary and secondary school pupils, with regard to bullying in cyberspace. Questionnaires were used to collect the empirical data. In the first scale, an exploratory factor analysis related to the online activity of pupils was used. It indicated four factors, namely: passive use of social networking sites, active communication on social networking sites, access to high-risk media content, and searching for self-development media content. In the second scale that focused on the forms of cyberbullying, two factors were indicated, namely: bullying through online communication and bullying through visual aggression. The study identified 189 respondents out of 931 pupils from the research sample who had been repeatedly cyberbullied. The research was conducted with pupils of secondary schools and high schools in the Slovak Republic. A relationship between the frequency types of social networking sites' usage and the extent of bullying in cyberspace was observed. The research confirmed the existence of a direct dependence between the frequency of active communication on social networking sites and the extent of bullying through online communication. No statistically significant connection was confirmed between the other factors.

Keywords: online activities, risks, social networking sites, victim, cyberbullying

1. Introduction

Technological progress in information and communication technologies contributed to the acceleration of global changes at the end of the second millennium and affected almost all parts of human social life. Most of our responsibilities, interests, and social interactions were transposed into the virtual environment. This led to individuals restructuring their usage of time in the 21st century which, to a considerable extent, affected children and young people. It has attracted scientific interest

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in young people's activities undertaken by using the Internet and in the possible related risks that may result.

Cyberbullying has been confirmed as one of the most frequent hazards of the virtual world by empirical studies of authors on national and international levels. BREWER and KERSLAKE (2015) point out that unlike the obvious characteristics of victims and aggressors involved in typical bullying, in cyberbullying the characteristics are not so clear. According to PARK and colleagues (2014), some cyber-attacks result from the individual online activities of children and young people. Adolescents spend a lot of time online and participate in various activities and interactions which may trigger bullying in cyberspace. Based on empirical evidence, WALRAVE and HEIRMAN (2011) emphasize the risks of online activity. They highlight that a greater number of victims of cyberbullying can be seen among those who participate in written online communication or disclose personal information.

The stated typology is accepted on the global level and by many authors, including WILLARD (2005) DOMONKOS (2014), ŠMAHAJ (2014), JEDLIČKOVÁ et al. (2017), HUDECOVÁ, and KURČÍKOVÁ (2014). Based on different theoretical concepts, the stated forms of cyberbullying can be described as follows:

1.1. Flaming

The aggressor tries to provoke the victim through vulgar messages and comments. Usually, flaming takes part in public communication between two people or in small groups. It lasts for a short period of time and the participants are on equal communication, argumentation, and social levels. It is important to emphasize that *flaming* can develop into *harassment*. This can happen in case *flaming* is prolonged and one of the participants suffers from serious emotional or social damage, or they are no longer able to argue with the aggressor.

1.2. Harassment

It usually includes offensive, humiliating, and threatening messages repeatedly sent to the victim through various communication channels in cyberspace. Sexual harassment represents a specific form of harassment. The victim receives photos or messages with sexual content.

1.3. Impersonation

Its specific feature is that the main actor pretends to be a victim of cyberbullying. It has several stages. The first stage consists of befriending the victim. The second stage includes the deliberate coaxing of the victim to release passwords and personal information in order to use the victim's identity. In the third stage, the aggressor assumes the victim's identity to send threatening messages to a third person while copying the victim's style of writing and thinking. There are two basic types of impersonation

victims: the primary victim is the person whose identity has been stolen and misused; the secondary victim is the person receiving threatening messages from the aggressor pretending to be the primary victim.

1.4. Outing

It involves taking photos and making videos of victims in embarrassing situations (such as while changing their clothes, practicing personal hygiene, using the toilet) and publishing them on the Internet. Sometimes, the perpetrators may even try to blackmail the victim for cash or other personal benefits.

1.5. Happy slapping

It is a relatively new phenomenon which connects bullying and cyberbullying. The attack on the victim is unexpected, recorded on a mobile phone or a similar device and subsequently published on the Internet. Both the attack and its record are real. However, from the long term perspective, the fact that the footage has been published online is more important and devastating for the victim than the primary act of aggression. The record poses another danger – it may encourage viewers to further aggression.

2. Methods

2.1. Research group

On a theoretical-empirical level, online activities of pupils who could be potential victims were analyzed. The research aimed to determine whether the victims of cyberbullying were inclined to be passive or active users of social networking sites. Furthermore, it focused on the way the research subjects handled their personal data and information in virtual space as well as the length of time they spent online.

The research group was comprised of 390 primary school pupils and 541 secondary school pupils. The research sample was divided by gender as follows: girls $n^1 = 517$, boys $n^2 = 414$. Pupils of the 6th and the 7th grades at primary schools and pupils of the 2nd and the 3rd grades at secondary schools were specifically included in order to observe the specificities of cyber bullying in pre-pubescents and adolescents.

2.2. Research methods

The research data were collected from April to September 2016 using a questionnaire of our own design. To select the respondents, a two-stage random multiple sampling was used. In the first stage, three self-governing regions were drawn in which the research was taking place. In the second stage, a list of primary and elementary schools in each self-governing region was made. The size of the research set was determined using the data published on the Informatisation Development of Regional

Education (RIRS) website. Schools for pupils with special educational needs and primary art schools were not included.

Afterwards, four primary schools and four secondary schools from each self-governing region were selected using systematic sampling. Every 55th school from the basic set was selected for the research sample. The original selection had to be slightly modified due to the unwillingness of certain schools to cooperate.

In order to meet the research goal, we designed and created a questionnaire. Two scales have been developed for the research study. The first one consisted of 14 items describing the pupil's online activities on social networking sites. The pupils could choose one of the six possible answers to each question to indicate how much time they dedicated to individual activities: *not at all – less than 1 hour – 1–2 hours – 3–4 hours – 5–6 hours – 7 and more hours*.

The exploratory factor analysis was used to verify the research tool. The method of varimax-rotated principal components proved to be the most useful and showed a relatively high data variability (58.66%). The value of Bartlett's test of sphericity disproved the hypothesis that the correlation matrix corresponds with the identity matrix ($0.000 < 0.001$). The KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.712) implied that the factor analysis was a suitable tool to analyze the acquired data. The minimum factor loading item for its inclusion into one of the factors was 0.40. The item should not have a factor loading higher than 0.40 simultaneously in two or more factors. The exception was the item 'Writing statuses on social networking sites' where we took into account its higher factor loading in one of the factors. We excluded two items based on content which did not fit into the dimensions (chat with friends, shopping), but this did not affect the value of the Cronbach alpha. We excluded the third item (watching movies/serials online) because it had a higher factor loading than 0.40 in two factors at a time.

Table 1
Frequency of different uses of social networking sites (rotated factor matrix)

<i>Online activities</i>	<i>Passive use of social networking sites</i>	<i>Active communication on social networking sites</i>	<i>Access to high-risk media content</i>	<i>Searching for self-development media content</i>
<i>Viewing friends' profiles on social networking sites</i>	0.793	0.155	-0.132	0.075
<i>Viewing other people's profiles on social networking sites</i>	0.761	0.189	0.008	0.088
<i>Downloading other people's photos</i>	0.527	0.056	0.331	0.029
<i>Writing blogs</i>	-0.140	0.761	0.056	0.307
<i>Publishing other people's photos/videos</i>	0.200	0.662	0.204	-0.110
<i>Adding comments to contributions and photos of friends</i>	0.358	0.618	-0.070	-0.058
<i>Writing statuses on social networking sites</i>	0.410	0.541	0.021	-0.010

<i>Playing online PC games</i>	0.006	-0.031	0.781	0.028
<i>Watching pornographic content</i>	0.020	0.161	0.764	-0.013
<i>Searching for information related to school work</i>	0.156	-0.094	-0.200	0.786
<i>Searching for information related to personal interests</i>	0.013	0.134	0.212	0.761

Based on the factor analysis results, four factors (subscales) were identified: passive use of social networking sites, active communication on social networking sites, access to high-risk media content, and searching of self-development media content.

The first subscale – passive use of social networking sites – consists of the following items: viewing friends’ profiles on social networking sites, viewing other people’s profiles on social networking sites, and downloading other people’s photos. It corresponds to 16.97% of the total variability of data. The Cronbach’s Alpha showed a subscale value of 0.597. When choosing the subscale name, the fact was considered that the pupils’ activities are not connected to a direct social interaction and can happen without the awareness of other participants on the social networking sites.

The second subscale – active communication on social networking sites – consists of the following items: writing blogs, publishing photos, adding comments to contributions and photos of friends, and writing statuses on social networking sites. It corresponds to 16.44% of the total variability of data. The Cronbach’s alpha showed a subscale value of 0.618. The considered items are related to direct interpersonal communication in the social networking sites environment.

The third subscale – access to high-risk media content – consists of the following items: playing online PC games and watching pornographic content. It corresponds to 13.23% of the total variability of the data. The Cronbach’s Alpha showed a subscale value of 0.505. In this case, the pupils view potentially risky media content.

The fourth subscale – searching for self-development media content – consists of the following items: searching for information related to school work and searching for information related to personal interests. It corresponds to 12.02% of the total variability of data. The Cronbach’s alpha showed a subscale value of 0.418.

Throughout the research, only the passive use of social networking sites and active communication on social networking sites subscales were used, with the Cronbach’s Alpha showing the highest values, indicating a higher reliability.

The second scale monitors the forms of cyberbullying from the victim’s point of view (consisting of 10 items). It contained ten statements: *never – once – 2–3 times – 4–5 times – more than 5 times*.

Again, the exploratory factor analysis was used. The method of varimax-rotated principal components proved to be the most useful once more, and showed a relatively high data variability (55.38%). The KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy showed 0.810 and the results of Bartlett’s test of sphericity showed 0.000, implying

the suitability of using the factor analysis. The minimum factor loading item for its inclusion into one of the factors was 0.40. The item should not have a factor loading higher than 0.40 simultaneously in two or more factors. The exception was the item ‘Taking photos and making videos of victims in embarrassing situations and publishing them on the Internet’ where we took into account its higher factor loading in one of the factors. We excluded two items based on content which did not fit into that dimension (‘The photo I was ashamed for was published on the Internet’; ‘An unknown person I met through a social network turned into a personal meeting’) but did not affect the value of the Cronbach alpha.

Table 2
Bullying in cyberspace (rotated factor matrix)

<i>Cyberbullying forms</i>	<i>Bullying through online communication</i>	<i>Bullying through visual aggression</i>
<i>Publishing insulting or mocking statuses</i>	0.763	0.087
<i>Threats and insults during chat</i>	0.754	0.130
<i>Insulting comments on photos from friends or classmates</i>	0.741	0.141
<i>Sending threatening or insulting emails</i>	0.610	0.291
<i>Vulgar insults in simultaneous online communication</i>	0.606	0.260
<i>Online publishing of photos or videos of victims being hurt</i>	0.009	0.885
<i>Taking photos and making videos of victims in embarrassing situations and publishing them on the Internet</i>	0.467	0.641
<i>False profile creation using the name of the victim</i>	0.213	0.580

Two factors (subscales) of cyberbullying forms were identified using the factor analysis: bullying through online communication and bullying through visual aggression.

The first subscale, bullying through online communication, consists of the following items: publishing insulting or mocking statuses, threats and insults in the chat, insulting comments of photos coming from friends or classmates, sending threatening or insulting emails, and vulgar insults in simultaneous online communication. It corresponds to 33.78% of the total variability of data. The Cronbach’s Alpha showed a subscale value of 0.753. The subscale was named on the basis of the two forms of cyberbullying it covers – flaming and harassment. These forms of cyberbullying are typical in written communication.

The second subscale, bullying through visual aggression, consists of the following items: online publishing of photos or videos of victims being hurt, taking photos and making videos of people in embarrassing situations and publishing them on the Internet, and false profile creation using the name of the victim. It corresponds to

21.59% of the total variability of data. The Cronbach's Alpha showed a subscale value of 0.587. The subscale was named on the basis of the non-written forms of cyberbullying – outing, happy slapping, and impersonation.

3. Results of the empirical research

Cyberbullying is a serious social and educational issue. Its consequences may considerably undermine children's and young people's healthy psychosocial development. The research focused on identifying the possible relation between the frequency with which the pupils use social networking sites and the extent of bullying in cyberspace.

We analyzed the research results in a comprehensive way. The relevant data for the problem studied was for us the age of pupils surveyed and not the type of school.

The results are presented in *Table 3* and *Table 4*. The Spearman's correlation coefficient was used, since based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, the data set failed to show a normal variable distribution. The results of the research were evaluated by the SPSS 19.0 statistical programme.

Table 3
Relation between the frequency of pupils using social networking sites and the extent of their bullying in cyberspace

<i>Frequency of active communication on social networking sites</i>	<i>Bullying through online communication</i>						<i>Spearman's Rho</i>	<i>P-Value</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Me</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>		
<i>1 – 1.25 (low)</i>	96	2.11	0.68	1.80	1.60	5.00	0.152	0.049
<i>1.26 – 1.5 (medium)</i>	39	2.08	0.67	1.80	1.60	4.80		
<i>1.5 and more (high)</i>	35	2.38	0.75	2.20	1.60	5.00		
<i>Frequency of passive use of social networking sites</i>								
<i>1 – 1.25 (low)</i>	42	1.95	0.36	1.80	1.60	3.00	0.074	0.340
<i>1.26 – 1.5 (medium)</i>	41	2.20	0.55	2.00	1.60	3.60		
<i>1.5 and more (high)</i>	87	2.24	0.86	2.00	1.60	5.00		

Table 3 confirms the existence of a statistically significant relation between the frequency of pupils using social networking sites and the extent to which they are bullied in cyberspace ($0.049 \leq 0.05$; $r_s = 0.152$). The subscale bullying through online communication shows a higher average score in respondents using social networking sites for online communication more frequently ($AM = 2.11$; 2.08 ; 2.38). This is also confirmed by the median value ($Me = 1.80$; 1.80 ; 2.20).

Table 3 further denies any statistically significant relation between the frequency of passive use of social networking sites and the extent to which they were bullied in cyberspace.

Table 4
Relation between the frequency of the individual methods of using social networking sites and the extent of bullying through visual aggression

<i>Frequency of active communication on social networking sites</i>	<i>Bullying through online communication</i>						<i>Spearman's Rho</i>	<i>P-Value</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Me</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>		
<i>1 – 1.25 (low)</i>	31	2.04	0.62	1.67	1.67	3.67	0.106	0.403
<i>1.26 – 1.5 (medium)</i>	13	2.18	0.89	2.00	1.67	5.00		
<i>1.5 and more (high)</i>	20	2.22	0.85	1.84	1.67	5.00		
<i>Frequency of passive use of social networking sites</i>								
<i>1 – 1.25 (low)</i>	15	1.98	0.48	1.67	1.67	3.33	0.116	0.361
<i>1.26 – 1.5 (medium)</i>	13	1.93	0.36	1.67	1.67	2.67		
<i>1.5 and more (high)</i>	36	2.26	0.91	1.84	1.67	5.00		

The results stated in *Table 4* show no statistically significant relation between the frequency of active communication on social networking sites and bullying through visual aggression. Furthermore, there is no statistically significant relation between the frequency of passive use of social networking sites and bullying through visual aggression. Both subscales show similar average results regardless of the frequency of online activities on social networking sites. This is also confirmed by the median value.

4. Discussion

The digital environment offers children and young people a broad spectrum of possibilities: from communication, relaxation, and games, to education in the area of the user's interests, and their schoolwork's completion. Accessibility, anonymity, as well as the absence of social control may encourage risky behavior or potentially dangerous online activities. Hence it has become more and more important to monitor the activities of children and young people on the Internet. In the last decade, many experts – including KUSS and GRIFFITHS (2009), HADDON and LIVINGSTONE (2012), LIVINGSTONE and colleagues (2014), ŠMAHAJ (2014), GREGUSOVÁ and DROBNÝ (2010) – focused on these issues. The Internet and its potential dangers represent diverse and difficult issues, making it impossible to embrace everything in

a single research task. Therefore, it forces the experts to concentrate on individual aspects.

The research focuses on a specific group of dangers posed by the Internet – dangers to pupils resulting directly from their online activities on social networking sites. The distribution of the cyberbullying victims in the research set was identified as follows: online communication – 169 (18.15%); visual aggression – 64 (6.87%); out of both subscales, 47 (5.05%) of the pupils experienced both forms of online aggression. Based on their empirical research, WALRAVE and HEIRMAN (2011) formulated the most common predictors of bullying in cyberspace:

- Participation in cyberbullying as an aggressor,
- Disclosing personal information on the Internet,
- Communication in open and closed chatrooms.

Reviewing the data collected from our research sample, it can be assumed that some of the victims who are passive Internet users may also participate in cyberbullying as aggressors (viewing profiles, downloading photos). However, no statistically significant relation between the frequency of passive use of social networking sites and bullying in cyberspace was found in the subscales.

However, active participation in online communication seems to represent a different case. A statistically significant relationship between active communication and bullying through online communication was found. The results are presented in *Table 3*.

Based on a meta-analysis of 77 studies, GUO (2016) also considers how communication or other activities in the virtual environment can act as the predictors of cyberbullying. He identified 15 key factors that represent potential threats for children and young people.

5. Conclusion

Cyberbullying poses a serious social issue resulting from the development of modern information and communication technologies. The EU KIDS Online research project in 2014 also confirmed its growing trend. In 2010, 16% of children were victims of bullying, 8% of children were cyberbullied on the Internet and 5% were bullied through their mobile phones. In comparison, 9% of children were bullied face to face and 12% of them experienced cyberbullying in 2013 (LIVINGSTONE et al. 2014).

Cyberbullying results in serious trauma and affects its victims in the psychosocial realm. The victims of cyberbullying tend to have a lower academic performance, a higher inclination to depression, anxiety, self-harm and feelings of loneliness. Their sleep regime may be disturbed and eating habits changed, which significantly disrupts their mental and social development (CRAMER & INKSTER 2017). Cyberbullying is a phenomenon that can take place anytime and anywhere, both in school and outside it. The need to emphasize its prevention and also to seek solutions in the academic environment has been pointed out by many experts, including EMMEROVÁ

(2016), JEDLIČKOVÁ and colleagues (2017), SAMNOEN (2016). The goal of primary prevention, in which the form teacher and other teachers as well as specialized school staff (particularly social pedagogy experts) play an indispensable role, is to highlight the possible dangers when using information and communication technologies. It is necessary to point out the importance of media education as a form of prevention and to incorporate it in the teaching process. The point of media education is to teach pupils how to evaluate, select, and use information, as well as how to develop their social competences and critical thinking, in particular; it employs a non-directive approach and can take the form of a cross-sectional topic or a separate course. In schools in Slovakia, prevention of risk behaviors is carried out through pedagogical means via prevention coordinators and teachers, etc., as well as vocational training employees (social pedagogue, school psychologist, etc.). In the area of prevention, the social pedagogue's work, as noted in Section 24 of Act No. 317/2009 on teaching staff and vocational training employees (*317/2009 Z. z. ZÁKON z 24. júna 2009 o pedagogických zamestnancoch a odborných zamestnancoch a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov*), is particularly effective in schools. More details about the individual work activities of the social pedagogue are given in the Minister's Instruction no. 39/2017 (*Pokyn č. 39/2017, ktorým sa vydávajú profesijné štandardy*) which provides professional standards for individual categories and subcategories of pedagogical employees, vocational training, and school facility employees. Currently, a number of projects and preventive programmes exist through which teaching staff and vocational training employees can provide risk behavior prevention for pupils in the virtual environment. The best known are *zodpovedne.sk*, *ovce.sk*, *medialnavychova.sk*, *internetovazavislost.sk*, *pomoc.sk*, *stipline.sk*, and others. An important project is the *zodpovedne.sk* project, which offers a wide range of methodological manuals and guides for social pedagogues, prevention coordinators, teachers, and parents of children involved in risk behavior prevention in the virtual environment. Project *Zodpovedne.sk* focuses on responsible and safe use of modern technology, especially the Internet and smartphones. Awareness of threats and risks related to the use of the modern technology is spread through the project. Teachers can draw inspiration from the publication named *Mediálna výchova v predmete etická výchova* [Media Education as a Part of Ethical Education] (ČIŽMÁROVÁ & POLÁKOVÁ 2017), which is a part of the APVV project No. 14-0176 *Didaktické prostriedky uľahčujúce implementáciu vybraných prierezových tém do vyučovania etickej výchovy na druhom stupni základných škôl* (*Didactic Means for Easier Implementation of Chosen Cross-section Themes into Ethical Education in Second Level Education at Primary Schools*). It is a multimedia teaching tool for educators that facilitates a more flexible and interactive cooperation with the pupils. It is also very important to develop the pro-social behavior in pupils to prevent aggressive behavior. NIKLOVÁ and colleagues created worksheets for elementary school (NIKLOVÁ et al. 2017; NIKLOVÁ & STEHLÍKOVÁ 2018) as well as the methodological material (NIKLOVÁ & STEHLÍKOVÁ 2017) for teachers. It is a multimedia didactic material allowing teachers to work with students in a more flexible and interactive way.

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