

## PREVENTION OF DIGITAL VIOLENCE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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**Abstract:** *Rapid development of information technology makes life easier; however, negative aspects of its influence can be recognized as well. Using Internet provides series of opportunities for better communication, higher quality education and great fun but involves a lot of risk. Young people spend majority of their time using digital technologies, therefore becoming key actors in creating good or bad peer communication. The young/adolescents are also exposed to the highest level of risk on the net because they have high level of autonomy and independence, because Internet erases social brakes, gives them fake feeling of safety and power, allows users say and do things they couldn't do in face-to-face communication. The young have the feeling they aren't responsible for that kind of behavior in a way they would normally be responsible, they are sure that on the net they won't be judged by their looks; relations on the net seem safer than real relations, there are nosocial boundaries; two lonely souls can communicate without being watched. Among the most mentioned risks are various forms of digital violence, from disturbing to most severe forms of violence, exposure to inappropriate content, exposure to political, economic and religious propaganda, disinformation, privacy threat, soliciting gambling and illegal activities. One way of protection on the net in order to prevent unwanted communication is to educate students, parents and teachers about the risks of digital technology and digital literacy. Parents consider that they are sufficiently informed about what their children do online, but think they need more information and education. The role of schools in preventing digital violence is very important because it is the place where children in an organized way spend most time during the day. The educational mission of school is to promote social relationships with students, colleagues and parents, and educational task is to*

*teach about the use of modern media and technology, with special emphasis on digital literacy. Therefore, the school and its employees have an extremely important role in the prevention of abuse of digital technology.*

**Key words:** *digital technology, digital violence, digital literacy, internet, education*

## **1. Introduction**

Rapid development of information technology makes life easier, however, negative aspects of its influence can be recognized as well. Computers, internet, social networks, mobile phones have opened space for the expansion of different forms of electronic/digital violence. Beginning of the 90s brought a revolutionary innovation in communications-Internet. According to Popadic/Kuzmanovic (2012), the invention of the Internet occurred in 1969. Internet becomes the basis of currently available information, among other things, news, music, movies, books.

It also becomes a medium for mutual communication, via e-mail, chat / correspondence in real time / or internet telephony, with or without images.

According to the latest report of the UN Commission on broadband internet connection and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in the world by the end of 2016, 3.5 billion people will have used the internet, which represents 47% of world population. The number of Internet users is about 300 million higher than in 2015.

New technologies provide children and adolescents with new approaches to information, culture, communication and entertainment that was impossible to imagine 20 years ago. The young, spend a large part of their time using digital technologies and thus become the main actors in the creation of good and bad peer communication.

The results of the research show that children are beginning to use digital devices in younger and younger age and the number of children and young people who daily use the Internet is steadily increasing, both in the world and in our country (Livingstone et al., 2011).

It is undeniable that digital technology provides various opportunities for psycho-social development/finding information, learning, research, communication, entertainment, creativity development/education and social inclusion of young people. However, unsafe use of digital technology brings with it a number of risks, especially when it comes to children and young people (Kuzmanovic et al., 2016).

## 2. Digital violence

Digital violence is a relatively new phenomenon that during the last two decades have attracted more and more attention in scientific circles. There are a number of definitions of digital violence, some are more general including all forms of harassment by using digital technologies, while others are related to specific forms of digital violence.

Digital violence, according to Willard (2008) is defined as sending or posting offensive or cruel text or images using the Internet or other digital communication tools. In the Book of Rules on the protocol treatment in an institution in response to violence, abuse and neglect ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", 3/2010) digital / electronic violence means the abuse of information technology that can result in a violation of other persons and endangerment of dignity and it is realized by sending a message by e-mail, SMS, MMS, via a web site, chat, involvement in forums, social networks and so on.

Electronic/digital violence includes friendly teasing and arguing over the phone or Internet, accidentally or unintentionally causing harm and hurting.

Electronic/digital violence may include messages of sexual violence, insulting, harassment, threats

Digital violence can occur in many different forms (Popadic, Kuzmanovic, 2012.)

- Sending SMS messages of insulting and threatening content/insults, threats, bad jokes etc./
- Disturbing by phone calls/false introducing oneself, keeping silent, insulting etc.
- Taking photos by use of a mobile phone or a camera, transferring and placing images on the Internet
- Disturbing e-mails/insults, threats, inappropriate jokes and the like.
- Disturbing on social networks/Facebook etc./and on the Internet/concealing identity, false introducing, the use of other people's accounts, uploading photos and videos of others without their consent, sending of viruses etc./

- Blogs, posting on you tube, sending viruses ...

Specifics of digital violence are:

- It provides bullies with such convenience, that other forms of violence do not: anonymity
- Victims may suffer great harm, without having the ability to protect themselves / or defend
- Information that is placed via digital media are rapidly spread.

### **2.1. Cyber predators**

Digital violence is saturated with sexual content, and electronic media are a convenient means for committing sexual violence. Cyber pedophiles are using the Internet for committing sexual abuse. They use the anonymity offered by the internet and various tactics to deceive their victims. They are very patient and willing to often communicate with their victims for days, weeks, months or even years to get to the target, ie. to force the young person to meet.

A predator is most commonly an adult, experienced person who knows the mechanisms of seduction and possesses trickery, knowledge and skills to deceive a child and to engage him/her in a vicious circle which can be fatal. This form of violence is often carried over the school children in a way that the predator first becomes informed about the traits, interests and motives of the young person he is planning to threaten and then creating fake profiles in the most diverse ways, using information and communication technologies, comes into contact with the victim and gradually infiltrates the person (Kowalski et. al, 2008.).

Communication by electronic means is independent of place and time, does not require direct physical contact, and as such is extremely convenient for anonymous and productive operation of predators. Children in the school age attribute a lot of importance to their virtual environment, feel freely, safely and have the impression that they govern all phenomena of virtual environment. Their curiosity, the desire to prove themselves and acquire sound reputation in the network, often takes them to places that can 'cost them high price'.

Children are not aware of the danger of leaving their personal data on the network and often are not aware that only one information of them may reveal a few other related information. Getting to know children, using trickery, a predator can find out delicate information, and by using it later can blackmail the victim, threaten her/him, or simply frighten the victim day in day out

Children are often unconfident of themselves in these situations. They rarely ask their parents for help, they often feel ashamed of something they have already done wrong and then try to make things right by themselves, but this is very difficult. When the predator feels their fear and dominance over the victim, the victim can hardly get out from a spider web which he/she got into.

Children even less frequently ask teachers for help, because they have no confidence in them. This situation of helplessness, with constant pressure and without the help of loved ones, leads to severe depression, and can be ended in a complete loss of confidence and coming under the influence of predators, severe mental disorders and even suicide of victims.

Good communication is the key to overcoming these problems. Kids usually do not talk to their parents about their problems because they believe that parents' have no idea' of how things operate on the network. According to the children, parents have old-fashioned ideas, do not have the necessary computer knowledge, are not up to date with electronic forms of communication, so it's almost one third of children unsupervised while playing on the computer. It takes intensive education, to ensure proactive parents' action.

## **2.2. Campaigns and Researches**

To protect Internet users, primarily children, the European Commission has launched a campaign 2009-2013 under the name Safer Internet INSAFE ([www.saferInternet.org](http://www.saferInternet.org)).

Significant are also the actions and programs provided by Microsoft, which aim to prevent harmful phenomena on the Internet from unwanted advertisements to the most serious crimes.

In the Republic of Serbia, the most important initiatives to improve the safety of children on the Internet is Click safe ([www.kliknibezbedno.rs](http://www.kliknibezbedno.rs)), which operates with the support of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, a Net Patrol ([www.netpatrola.rs](http://www.netpatrola.rs)) the online mechanism for submitting applications of the Safer Internet Centre which was established for the purpose of receiving and processing reports of illegal or harmful content on the Internet.

„Children Online“ research carried out by the company Kaspersky Lab, shows that in 2014 more than two-thirds (68%) users of the Internet were faced with inappropriate or dangerous content on the Internet. More than half of the users (59.5%) of the Internet with pornography, more than a quarter of users (26.6%) ended up on sites dedicated to gambling; every fifth user was faced with sites that published the content of the weapons and almost the same number was faced with curses.

In 'Use of Digital Technology Research, risks and digital violence presence among students in Serbia' / 2012 /, participated 34 primary and secondary schools, a sample consisted of 3786 students, 1379 teachers and 3078 parents. Based on the results of the research (Popadic, Kuzmanovic, 2012) nearly two-thirds of older primary school pupils and 84% of high school students at least once during the last years have been exposed to some risks on the Internet.

The most common risky behaviour is accepting the invitation to friendship from an unknown person /a half of primary school pupils and three-fourths of tested secondary school students./

One third of parents tested whose children are ten years old do not have a good insight into what their kids are doing on social networks, or know only what their children tell them.

### **3. The role of schools in preventing digital violence**

With increasing use of the Internet and modern communication abilities definitely the rate of abuse and electronic violence among children is growing, too. Teachers often do not approve of such behavior, or, in situations of violence detection via the Internet or mobile phone, as a rule, they feel powerless. One of the more common reactions of employees in schools is not to wrestle with this type of abuse because it happens outside the school environment, thus the possibility of control of children's behavior is reduced. The school as an educational and training institution has an extremely important role in the prevention of abuse of the Internet and prevention of digital violence.

Five key areas for effective prevention of violence, according to Vuckovic, Zajeganovic (2011) are:

1. Highlighting the positive use of digital technology
2. Understanding and talking about modern ways of communication, the dangers and risks of digital violence.
3. Establishing new rules and finishing the existing rules and consequences/ restitution /
4. Detailed procedures of reporting digital violence
5. Monitoring and evaluation of the effect of prevention activities

Although digital violence is not solely related to the school environment, but can happen anywhere and at any time, the role of schools in the prevention and intervention is of great importance. Research results (Popadic, Kuzmanovic, 2012) show that more than half of teachers believe that schools do not have enough capacity to cope with digital violence, but also think they need extra support when it comes to prevention. It is disturbing that more than half of teachers have said that schools do not teach students how to protect themselves on the Internet. Also, two-thirds of teachers think that school alone can not cope with 'new' challenges and that parents are the most important in this matter.

#### ***3.1. Information and education of students, teachers and parents***

Preventive role of the school is primarily about informing students, teachers and parents on digital violence/ forms, phenomena, good sides, hazards, risks, consequences, preventive measures). Realization of education of teachers, parents and students is an extremely important step when it comes to prevention, as well as the realization of the themes of digital violence

within regular classes: Informatics and Computer Science, Sociology, Civic Education, Religious Education, Psychology ...

Lectures and panel discussions which are desirable to be organized by schools, certainly, should include experts in the field of violence prevention, as well as police inspectors from the Department of High-tech Crime.

### ***3.2. Highlighting positive use of technologies***

It is necessary to make the students use 'good places' on the internet, as well as the contents that are appropriate to the developmental and psychological needs of children, to encourage them to use the Internet to gain knowledge, solving the tasks for school (Popadic, Kuzmanovic, 2012). The school plays an important role in the promotion and encouragement of rules of good behavior, safety on the Internet and digital knowledge. Also, research and encouragement of safe ways of using the Internet is an important role of schools, because this way ensures self-affirmation, assertiveness, participation and developing relationships with the students.

### ***3.3. Proper communication and digital literacy***

Establishing response procedures /intervention/ and gaining knowledge about them in cases of digital violence with a message that an active attitude is required and also taking the initiative by all employees in the schools, students and parents (Dunjic-Mandic, Karanac, Papic, 2014). Teachers should pay particular attention to teaching students the digital literacy as a key competence for the entire lifetime education and active participation in society (European Parliament and the Council, 2006). In most European countries, digital literacy is integrated into the compulsory curriculum, and in Serbia in 2013 were defined the standards of general cross-curricular competencies for the end of secondary education (Quality Education Institute, 2013). A child needs to be explained the basic rules of communication on the Internet, the risk of leaving personal information/phone number, address, school, sports club, etc./ at various sites, as well as the way in which to protect their own privacy and respect the privacy of others.

It is important to establish a relationship based on trust, which means to inform of any experience in the virtual world, which children can be concerned about and to explain to them that they should be as careful on the Internet as outside the virtual space.

### ***3.4. Response procedures /intervention/***

It is important to do the following in cases of violence and abuse:

- If you know who is the person responsible for disturbing content, ask him/her to remove it;

- Contact the Internet provider to make a request for the said content to be removed, but before that save the link from which the disturbing content has been forwarded;
- If some students have sent messages of inappropriate content, ask them who they have sent the messages to;
- In cases of violence, be sure to inform parents and to contact the police, who can determine what has to be taken as evidence. It may be necessary to include the police and order the Internet service provider check the data on the other persons involved in the case
- As soon as a person who has committed violence is detected, it is necessary to take steps in order to change his/ her attitude and behavior, ie. Intensify educational work, in accordance with legislation acts.

How to help a child who has experienced digital violence in school (Vuckovic, Zajeganovic, 2011)

- If a child ask you for help or confides to you, find a quiet place to talk and listen to the child carefully. Let the child know that he/she did the right thing because of telling someone about his/her experience.
  - Please inform parents and give them instructions
  - Please inform the police in case of serious forms of violence, threatening messages or a possible criminal offense.
  - Advise the child not to respond to provocative, abusive messages and other messages that make him/her feel bad. It is important to encourage the child to feel safe and alleviate the disturbing emotional reactions.
  - Suggest some ways that could prevent the recurrence of violence: change of mobile phone number, e-mail addresses, the abandonment of Internet pages/forum, chat, vveblog .../where violence happens or change the nickname that the child uses;
  - Inform the child and the parents that within the communication programs there is the possibility of blocking and filtering unwanted messages via options 'ignore' or 'block' and prevent access to certain senders on e-mails or a child's blog.
  - Help students to save all information relevant for the investigation (eg. not to delete received messages, to save photos and to register web addresses where the abuse and harassment have occurred).

#### **4. Conclusion**

The Internet and other digital networks have created an exciting new world of information and communication for anyone with access to the network and offer young people immeasurable opportunities for learning, communication and development of their own view of the world. New



technologies provide children and adolescents with new approaches to information, culture, communication and entertainment which was impossible to imagine 20 years ago.

Communication by electronic means is independent of place and time, does not require direct physical contact and is therefore extremely suitable for anonymous and productive operation of predators. The schoolchildren attribute a lot of importance to their virtual environment, they feel free, safe and have the impression that they govern all phenomena of virtual environments. Their curiosity and desire to prove themselves and acquire sound reputation in the network, takes them to places where it can "cost them a high price".

Use of the Internet has opened up a lot of opportunities for children to quickly and better communicate with others, for quality education and good fun, but carries with it certain risks. Among the risks that are most frequently mentioned are various forms of digital violence, from harassment to extremely serious form of violence, and exposure to inappropriate content, exposure to political, economic and religious propaganda, misinformation, endangering privacy, persuading to gambling and illegal activities.

In the greatest risk on the Internet are just young people / adolescents because on the Internet they have a high level of autonomy and independence, as the Internet erases social brakes and gives a false sense of security and power, allows users to say and do things that they would not have been able to do in "face to-face communication and they have a feeling they will not be responsible for such behavior in a way that would otherwise be, they are sure that they won't be judged on the Internet according to their looks.

Relations via the Internet seem safer than real relations, no social boundaries, two lonely souls communicate to each other without being watched.

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