

## EXISTING DANGERS FOR THE CHILD ON THE INTERNET

Nadezhda KRASTEVA

“Neofit Rilski” South-West University, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria  
nkrusteva@law.swu.bg

**Abstract:** *In the past few years there has been a significant increase in Internet use. Undoubtedly, the Internet reveals new opportunities for its users, but it also hides serious dangers. It was found that the most frequent Internet users are people aged 14-24. In recent years there is a fall in the lower age limit. Therefore, children, as the most active users of the Internet, are also the most vulnerable to online dangers. The subject of this research is precisely those online dangers, which threaten children in particular. They affect different social relationships, but each of them affects the proper development of children. The aim of the research is to inform the public and its individual citizens about the existing dangers on the Internet. It turns out that the most secure form of prevention here is namely awareness and training. By outlining existing dangers on the Internet and presenting them to the public, effective ways to avoid them could be sought. In this way, children can be protected from internet encroachments.*

**Keywords:** child, internet, dangers, law protection

### 1. Introduction

The use of the Internet continues to significantly grow on the territory of the European Union and offers to all citizens at a uniform extent excellent opportunities for participation, interaction, and artistry. Unfortunately, at the same time observed are drastic misuses of technologies, affecting the children's welfare. This is why it is very important to mark the specific risks and threats for children on the Internet and then seek and apply ways for their restriction and prevention. As a subject of this paper selected is the existing nowadays hazards for children in the Internet space. The objective of the paper is most of all to increase the awareness of citizens regarding the hazards of the Internet with regards to which it is necessary to increase children's protection.

### 2. Basic dangers for the child on the Internet

No doubt Internet is especially attractive for adolescents and most of them form their images for the world and life namely from it. Young people are more open and trusting, they are prone to new acquaintances and challenges. In the last years, though, observed is a significant drop of the lower limit for the use of the Internet. For example, in Bulgaria for only 6 years the age when many Bulgarian children start using Internet for the first time has decreased with 3 years – from 10 to 7 years. Troubling is also the fact that children aged between 9-11 years (about 73% of them) who shouldn't be allowed to have profiles in the social networks, actually have one. [1]

The children are especially vulnerable in Internet mostly because they are not aware of the dangers it hides. The factors for their

vulnerability are also the unfavorable family environment, social insulation, emotional instability and others. It is mandatory for the children to be appropriately familiarized with the threats the Internet hides, so they can protect themselves.

### **2.1. Sexual abuse against children**

No doubt the biggest and most serious online danger for children is the various forms of sexual abuse. In the fight with sexual abuse against children the Member States of the European Union apply the special Directive 2011/93/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 13 December 2011 on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA, whose main objective is assuring adequate legislative framework, protection and assistance of affected children.

The specialized "Cybercrime" sector at "Fighting Organized Crime" General Directorate – Ministry of Interior in Bulgaria warns that the biggest danger for children on the Internet is the contact with a pedophile. Pedophiles contact children mostly online via social networks and various dating websites. Internet provides the desired anonymity to those people, freedom of actions and opportunity to contact literally anybody. When performing this connection most often the victims themselves make and send pornographic images to the pedophile after which he starts blackmailing them for more photographs and video recordings, for performing perverse actions, and finding friends who do the same. [2] Mostly endangered from this kind of hazard are children aged between 7 and 9 – over 70% of child's pornography on the Internet involves children within this age, most often victims are girls – about 60% and the remaining 40% are boys. [3]

The development of technologies also facilitates the incurrence of new forms of sexual assault against children. In the reports

of Europol for the years 2015 and 2016 as a real phenomenon defined is the "live broadcast sexual abuse of children". [4] In its report dated 2017 Europol announces children's abuse on live from a distance where the actions of the perpetrator are dictated by the observant. [5]

The wide use of smartphones and video cameras by the children themselves also caused the so-called "individually created sexual material". Similar materials children make themselves and send to their peers, which is not a crime in itself. It is possible, however, such contents to fall into the wrong hands and be distributed without the knowledge and consent of the child, even to be used against it for blackmailing, for receiving more materials or for physical contact. This is how the new term of sexual extortion emerged – "sextortion", describing a form of extortion where the sexual information or images are used for extortion for sexual services and/or money from the victim. [6]

### **2.2. Sexual contents messages (sexting)**

The next hazard which should be paid attention to is sending sexual contents messages, the so-called "sexting". This activity is determined as exchanging messages, photographs or clips with sexual contents. [7] The danger comes from the fact that once the message is sent, it can no longer be controlled by its sender.

Sending messages, photographs or clips with sexual contents may be used for extortion, harassment, revenge, damaging the good name of the person, and other abuses. It should not be forgotten that the photos can be downloaded and used in various ways at any time. In this way, for example, it is possible for them to be uploaded online and reach an unlimited number of people.

Sexting is one of those threats that may be realized via the Internet as well as mobile phones. Experts at the "Cybercrime" department of "Fighting Organized Crime" General Directorate – Ministry of Interior in Bulgaria state that sexting is popular among adults but unfortunately it happens

with children too. Most vulnerable are children between the age of 10-18.

### **2.3. Meeting a stranger with a primary contact via the Internet**

The development of the Internet has also helped expand the opportunities for new friendships. Meeting people online can be exciting and enjoyable because it enables contacts between people from different countries by enriching the person with knowledge of new traditions, opportunities and ideas.

Meeting people online is one of the preferred ways to find new friendships among adolescents as a whole. 30% of European children between the ages of 9 and 16 who use the Internet have contacted someone who they had not met before. [8] Meeting people online also hides some risks. The main risk for adolescents from online dating is the actual encounter between the two. Of course, this can be a pleasant encounter and grow into a wonderful friendship. However, there is also the possibility that the unknown person may have hidden or even unlawful intentions. [9] Thus teenagers who are most vulnerable to the danger at stake may be not only in an unpleasant situation but also involved in the person's criminal scheme.

### **2.4. Online harassment**

The online harassment most commonly is defined as causing emotional damage to other people via the Internet. [10] This is one of the contemporary ways, widely distributed among children to insult, threaten, humiliate and shame others in front of their peers.

The online harassment has various forms and ways to be performed – through a computer device, mobile phone, email, social networks etc., including various actions – insults; threatening texts and clips; violence videos; publishing humiliating photographs or video clips without the holder's permission; uncensored images addressed to a particular person, etc.

The use of mobile phone is very easy and maybe the most distributed way among teenagers to perform online harassment

nowadays. Almost every teenager has their own telephone with an internet connection. The mobile phone may be used for online harassment through the applications Viber, Messenger, WhatsApp, etc. It is possible to include the Bluetooth technology as well.

Social networks are the ones with highest rates for online harassment for their users. Through them the respective information reaches an unlimited number of people very quickly. Online harassment has no boundaries and may hurt many people. The contradiction of it is hard. The nature of dangers changes with the child's age. The most vulnerable to online harassment are children 10-12 years of age because at this age they can freely work with internet technologies, they use the social networks for communication, they express their independence but at the same time are susceptible to foreign influence, particularly sensitive and easily harmed.

### **2.5. Violence-containing games**

No doubt the children fill in their free time by playing various video games online and offline. Many of the games, however, have inappropriate contents for the adolescents and impact their emotional development, social maturing and growth. Experts find a consistent connection between the use of video games containing violence, the increased aggressive behavior in their users and at the same time – a decrease in their compassion and sensitivity towards aggression. [11]

Experts also establish that games containing violence have an important role in radicalization of youth and in their recruitment to various terroristic and criminal groups. [12]

### **2.6. Radicalization through the Internet**

The Internet is used as the main source of information, communication and more often propaganda of extremist beliefs. It appears that the Internet is used as a tool for recruiting and radicalizing young people. The anonymity of Internet users favors the development of the radical ideologies' distribution. The Internet gives an opportunity to certain people to share

their views and attitudes undisturbed and find accomplices. The Internet allows the radicalization process to be performed without a personal contact between separate individuals. [13]

The Internet is used for attracting not only sympathizers, but also fighters. Terrorist groups are targeting the teenage generation, which is among the most common Internet users. Most vulnerable are children from troubled families who spend most of their time online looking for friends, appearances, or just to be heard. As a result of empty promises of pay and prosperity, these so-called social outsiders are ready for any "challenges".

The Internet may also be used for the fast organization of an unlimited number of people at a certain place and time for illegal actions.

One of the pieces of evidence for the growth of the set issue is the recently-adopted Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA which shall be transposed to 8 September 2018 in the legislation of separate Member States. In the Directive it is claimed that for the successful terrorism fight on the Internet it is needed a timely removal or at least blockage of the access to online contents which is a public incitement to commit a terrorist offense. In this respect, cooperation between countries is imperative. [14]

The directive shall facilitate the prevention of terroristic assault as explicitly requested is the criminalization of public incitement to terroristic crimes; recruiting people with the purpose of terrorism; providing and obtaining training with the purpose of terrorism; traveling with such a purpose; funding terrorism and similar terroristic activities.

### **2.7. Illegal gambling**

Gambling is exceptionally attractive not only for those of legal age but also for

minor and underage children due to the eventual possibility for an easy increase of money. As much as those games are interesting and entertaining, they are very dangerous. Addiction towards them may have devastating consequences for both the player and his family. The rapid loss or "easy" profit gives children a false sense of life and can also affect their future.

In recent years there has been an increase in online gambling. It creates a number of preconditions for abusive behavior by gambling operators, such as manipulating games to their advantage; credit/debit card credit card numbering; closing relevant sites for a few minutes. [15] The actual control by the organizers regarding the age of the participants is also questionable and undoubtedly not in their interest.

### **2.8. Personal data theft**

After a long debate and preparation, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is finally approved by the European Parliament on 14 April 2016 and is effective 20 days after publishing it in the Official Gazette of EU. The regulation is mandatory and applies in all member-states as of 25 May 2018.

GDPR replaces Data Protection Directive 95/45/EC and aims to harmonize the laws for protection of personal data in Europe with a view to protecting the personal life of EU citizens and changing the way organizations process personal data. As a whole, the Regulation requires assuring better and more effective cybersecurity for EU citizens. [16]

Personal data theft is very widely-distributed and is using personal data without the knowledge and consent of the respective individual for performing the crime. [17] Crimes may be done in real life as well as in digital space. Unfortunately, the act may remain hidden for a long time. For example, a very famous platform – Yahoo - kept silent for two years about a break in their database. There was a leak of millions of user emails and passwords which are then traded with the purpose of performing cybercrimes. [18]

The hazard being reviewed affects adolescents who often share personal information in every platform. Their inexperience and unawareness significantly eases the criminals. In accordance with GDPR, in case of violation of personal data security the administrator or processor has a notification obligation (art. 33). Otherwise, they are liable to serious sanctions. In case of a cyber-incident every company is considered guilty until proven otherwise.

As result of stated hazards for children on the Internet, a few conclusions may be drawn. First of all, with a view to the increasing use of the Internet and technological advance as a whole, new forms of violations against children occur. This causes the necessity of information and acquaintance in an appropriate manner for the children themselves, their parents, teachers and everybody taking care of

them with the dangers the Internet provides. Most probably namely the education and training will appear to be the best defense for the children from similar violations. [19] The state, on the other hand, shall follow subsequent and compliant policy. Undertaking new legislative measures is an integral part of the fight of online crimes against children.

### 3. Conclusion

Assuring complete and adequate defense of children from online abuse requires performing a group of measures – educational, informational and legislative ones. Pointing out main hazards for children on the Internet is of exceptional significance for undertaking the accurate measures for their overcoming. Undoubtedly, legislative changes in the field are imperative.

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