

*Scientific Bulletin of Chełm*  
*Section of Pedagogy*  
*No. 1/2019*

**SEXTING AMONG PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS  
AND ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS PREVENTION  
IN SLOVAKIA BASED ON THE SCHOOL PREVENTION PLANS**

INGRID EMMEROVÁ

*Catholic University in Ružomberok (Slovakia)*  
*e-mail: ingrid.emmerova@ku.sk*

TOMÁŠ JABLONSKÝ

*Catholic University in Ružomberok (Slovakia)*  
*e-mail: tomas.jablonsky@ku.sk*

**ABSTRACT:** *The study deals with sexting as a risk behaviour of pupils in elementary and secondary schools. The aim of the research was to analyse the preventive activities at schools, with special regard to prevention of sexting. The results showed that an insufficient attention is paid to the sexting issues when planning the preventive activities.*

**KEY WORDS:** *sexting, pupils of basic and secondary schools, sexual risky behaviour, prevention*

---

## **INTRODUCTION**

Sexual behaviour is subject to generally accepted moral and legal standards in all cultures. In terms of defining the normality of sexual behaviour, we find contradictions and discrepancy in the difference in the assessment of sexual expressions from cultural-specific aspects. When defining a normal sexual behaviour, different criteria can be applied, for example axiological, social (whether it is a threat to other people or society), statistical (whether it is the behaviour of majority), legal, cultural (compliance or non-compliance with customs in the country), and others.

Sexuality is a part of the identity of adolescents, while they obtain the information about it mainly from friends and the media. In this field the family often fails because the issue of sexuality and sexual behaviour is still taboo for many parents. Similarly, also school is a weak source of information on this subject.

In the school practice, we encounter a number of behavioural problems and various behavioural disorders among primary and secondary school pupils, focusing more on sexual risk behaviour. According to M. Miovský (2010), sexual risk behaviour is a set of behavioural manifestations which accompany sexual activities and which show a significant increase in health, social and other types of risks. Into the set of risk sexual behaviour of pupils can be included: early sexual life, immaturity of one or both partners, promiscuity, prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases, etc., and sexting also belongs to this category.

## **THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM**

Primary and secondary schools are attended by pupils who are part of the “Z Generation” (born after 2000) or the “Alpha Generation” (born after 2010). These do not remember a world without modern technologies, without computers and the Internet. Often, they master the modern technologies much better than adults - their parents, teachers or educators. They can work effectively with information, they practice multitasking, but they live in a virtual world (they have a lot of friends on the social media, but not in the real life, they communicate more over the computer than face to face).

The Internet is a real part of the life of children and youth. According to the findings of the Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology (2011), adolescents (primary school pupils) spend mostly one to two hours (31.8% of respondents) and two to three hours (24.8% of respondents) per connection. Up to 63% of adolescents connect to the Internet multiple times a day. Thus, we can say that more than 50% of elementary school pupils spend on the Internet at least an hour daily. They also found out (2015) that 80.4% of children aged 11 to 13 and 96.5% of adolescents aged 15 to 18 have a profile on a social network. These data confirm that they perceive the Internet and information technologies as a normal part of the life and they actively use the Internet services.

Cyberspace undoubtedly brings many advantages and benefits, but also certain risks. New technologies can endanger children, teenagers or adults. There are also risks that are a common part of our lives: cell phones, text messages, the Internet, e-mail, chatting, computer games, etc. A serious problem today is the technological addictions that arise from their excessive use of these technologies, or from the content mediated by the modern technical means and technologies itself. Apart from the addictions, we can include among other risks also the negative impact on physical and mental health, desensitization, cyberbullying, weakening contacts with family and peers, and other. From a pedagogical point of view, an excessive spending of free time on a computer at the expense of other more appropriate leisure activities or at the expense of the school duties cannot either be assessed positively. Many authors point out the risky impacts of modern technologies (Hoferková, S., Bělík, V., 2017; Hollá, K., Fenyvesiová, L., Hanuliaková, J., 2017, Van Ouytsel, J., Ponnet, K., Walrave, M., D'Haenens, L., 2017).

Primary school pupils perform different forms of risk behaviours in the Internet environment. One type of risk behaviour is sexting, the possible negative consequences of which young people do not realize. Sexting is the electronic distribution of text messages, custom photos, or custom videos with sexual content. Most often, it is the distribution of erotic photos or videos between the partners.

K. Hollá (2016) found out that boys and girls in the Slovak Republic between 12 and 18 years of age do send their intimate photos, a significant increase in sexting in the form of sending their naked and half-naked images was proven at the age of 12-17 years.

According to the current research (2017) from the Czech Republic, 15% of children and young people aged between 8 and 17 commit sexting (Kopecký, K., Szotkowski, R., 2017).

The reasons why children and youth commit this form of risk behaviours are many. According to K. Kopecký (2012) it can be boredom, children and youth perceive sexting as part of a romantic relationship, it emerges as a product of social pressure (of a group), sexting is the product of a consumer society, and becomes a tool of self-expression, sexting as a tool of revenge.

Sexting can be considered a form of risk behaviour. The distributed sensitive material can be easily misused, e.g. after a breakup, one of the partners may distribute these materials via cell phone or the Internet.

A serious risk is also the fact that the sensitive material can also be sent to a strange person (the anonymous environment of the Internet allows you to pretend to be e.g. a classmate, to elicit an intimate photo by extortion, etc.).

According to some authors, there is a close relationship between cyberbullying and sexting (Davis, N., Schmidt, C., 2016; Hinduja, S., Patchin, J.W., 2012, Holla, K., 2016). A disclosure of misused intimate materials on the Internet hurts the victim and may cause a repeated harm.

J. Chromý (2010) points out to a partner violence among youth. It can be considered a serious problem for the following reasons: young people have less competence to cope with conflict situations, young people do not know where to search for a help in a case of threats, adults underestimate the partnerships among youth, young people have little confidence in themselves and are poorly orientated in the issue of intimate relationships. Partner violence among youth is hidden from the public, what prevents the solution: young people lack sufficient experience in partnership, young people seek to build parental independence, have romantic ideas of partnership, young people compete with each other in creating partnerships. The partner violence can also take the form of sexting.

Sexting provides to the sexual deviants (predators) a relatively easy access to the information that will help them to gain the trust of a child or juvenile, and to blackmail him/her. It may be related to the dangerous phenomenon we call sextortion. Sextortion means forcing someone to sexual services or favours, the online blackmailing of the victim. K. Kopecký (2014), based on an analysis of real cases, developed a model of perpetrator behaviour:

- Phase 1 Establishing a contact with the victim (after first contacting, where s/he acts under the same gender identity as the victim, the offender convinces the child to provide him/her with personal, or even intimate information).
- Phase 2 Manipulation by flattering (the attacker evaluates positively all the received materials, by which s/he gets the trust of the victim, the child yearns for admiration and recognition).
- Phase 3 Verifying the true identity of the child (the offender needs to make sure that s/he actually communicates with the child and that the photographs are authentic, using the method of photographing with a particular inscription, current newspapers, etc.).
- Phase 4 Intimacy gradation (the intimacy of the photos that the victim and the perpetrator are exchanging usually escalates, the photos of the attacker are scams and s/he gets them from foreign portals, the child then begins to perceive the distribution of intimate materials as something ordinary and sends his/her own shots to the attacker).
- Phase 5 Multistage blackmailing (when the victim decides to quit, the attacker comes with a threat that s/he would publish and forward the material s/he has received).

The perpetrator can with the help of the obtained materials force the victim to a personal meeting, blackmailing may develop into a forced prostitution.

Sexting clearly is risky behaviour that involves many dangers. It is committed by elementary and secondary school pupils, which results in the need for an effective prevention. Each school should have a preventive action plan drawn up for the current school year, eventually a preliminary prevention coordinator work plan. This plan must be upgraded annually. It is important for the author to know the real risks that threaten the pupils. It is necessary to monitor the problem behaviour.

## **METHODOLOGICAL BASES AND METHODOLOGY**

### **OF THE RESEARCH**

The current state of realization of prevention at primary and secondary schools in the Slovak Republic is presented based on an analysis of 50 preventive action plans from the school year 2017-2018. When choosing them, we used a random sample. There were 25 primary schools plans and 25 secondary school plans (grammar schools and secondary vocational schools, there was no plan from a music academy in our ensemble). The research has been broadly conceived, we only present a part of it in this study.

### **RESULTS**

Sexting involves two broad areas of risk behaviour: risk sexual behaviour and risk behaviour bound to the modern technologies. That is why we have focused on the preventive activities targeting to ICT-related risk behaviour (in this sense, whether sexting is explicitly referred to in the plan) and preventive activities aimed at sexual risk behaviour when analysing preventive action plans.

The major shortcomings of the assessed plans include these: they are too general and non-specific, for all the "planned activities" is responsible the "prevention coordinator" or "all teachers", the planned activities are referred to as "wide" - that means they do not distinguish the age-specific characteristics of pupils, they only focus on the prevention of selected types of risk behaviour, most often a drug addictions and bullying. The problem is also the fact, that the plans for preventive activities are not being updated, only the school year is changed (in the introduction of one analysed plan, there was a reference to a strategic document, that has been invalid for 10 years).

None of the evaluated preventive action plans contained an issue of prevention of sexual risk behaviours. This is also being pointed out by K. Janis (2012), according to who there is a gradual attenuation of similar topics in the school environment.

The issue of the risks of the virtual space was found in 19 plans, while in the next 2 the issue of cyberbullying was also mentioned in the area of bullying. So the prevention of the cyberspace risks was planned by 21 schools, representing 42% of the schools we assessed. Out of the 19 plans with a special attention to cyberspace risks, only 3 explicitly mentioned sexting.

## DISCUSSION

The occurrence of sexting among pubescents and adolescents is confirmed by various domestic and foreign researches. In addition to the above-mentioned research, another research among respondents aged between 12 and 17 found out that 4% of teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 sent their own sexually suggestive naked or almost naked images to others by a text message and 15% of teenagers at the age of 12 to 17, reported having received sexually suggestive naked or almost naked photos from someone they also know through the text messages (Lenhart, A., 2009). The results of the research carried out by the Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology in Bratislava in cooperation with eSlovensko, c.a. in 2010 (2011), show that 11.1% of girls and 7.8% of boys have already published photos on the Internet in a "sexy pose". They also found out that 3.1% of girls and 6.4% of boys also published photos in their underwear or with exposed body parts (Gregussová, M., Tomková, J., Balážová, M, 2011). In a survey carried out in 2015 by M. Lee, T. Crofts, A. McGovern, and S. Milivojevic (2015), a sample of 2 243 respondents aged between 13 and 18 reported that up to 49% of respondents had sent their own photo or a video with a sexual theme to others, and 67% of the respondents received a photo or video with a sexual theme from others.

Since sexting as a form of risk behaviour is widespread among elementary and secondary school pupils, it is possible to perceive negatively that in our preventive activities, sexting issues occurred only rarely (in only 3 plans, being 6% of schools). Similarly, prevention of risk sexual behaviour, which did not occur in the evaluated plans, can be considered inadequate. Schools pay attention to the risks associated with the cyberspace, but at a different width and depth.

A plan of preventive activities, or a prevention coordinators' work plan can be considered a strategic educational document on prevention. It can be assumed that if preventive activities are listed and planned, they are also in fact realized. Of course, there may be a case where the plan is precisely worked out, but it will not be realized. On the contrary, there may also be a situation where the plan of prevention of sexting is not mentioned, but e.g. counselling staff would offer such activities to schools and they would take place on a professional level. The occurrence of sexting among pupils and, in particular, the implementation of school prevention opens up space for further exploration.

## CONCLUSION

In the area of prevention of risk use of the modern technologies among primary and secondary school pupils, it is necessary to inform the pupils about the risks associated with their use respectively to their age, and to organize attractive preventive actions on a given subject, e.g. on the “safer Internet day”. There is a need to teach pupils to protect their identity (e.g. when creating an online profile, publishing photos and personal data) and emphasizing the danger of personal encounters with the Internet contact people, adhering to the principle of not continuing in conversation with a sexual context.

The Pedagogical and Organizational Guidance of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic also draw attention to prevention, in the school year 2018-2019 it recommends the prevention of risk behaviour of pupils as an integral part of the educational process. It is necessary to examine the offered preventive activities and programs to head off any unwanted influence of lay and non-professional activities, as well as the harmful impact of cults, networks or extremist organizations on pupils. They recommend a continuous monitoring of pupil behaviour and changes in suspected cases of violation of their healthy personal development to ensure their protection and to resolve the problem in a timely manner in cooperation with the school management and the child's legal representatives. It is necessary to pay special attention to the topic of security on the Internet. It is recommended that the school management, prevention coordinator and the class teacher should inform the legal representatives on the preventive activities of the school and also to inform them about the possibilities of a professional help.

In connection with prevention, the role of media education can also be mentioned. Media literacy is a systematic and purposeful process of acquiring media competencies and raising the level of media literacy, whose main goal is to promote a responsible media use and to develop age-appropriate critical attitudes towards the media content with an emphasis on moral principles. Media education is most often implemented as a cross-cutting theme and it is integrated into school curricula of other subjects (as a separate optional subject it occurs at schools only rarely). The Pedagogical and Organizational Guidelines for the school year 2018-2019 recommend the schools to pay more attention



to developing critical thinking of pupils, distinguishing hate speech, especially on social networks, and considering its implications for their lives.

In order to prevent pupils' risk sexual behaviour, the emphasis should be placed on encouraging and cultivating responsible behaviour of pupils, decision making and communication in situations related to their sexuality, and that the process of their maturing was accompanied by a responsible approach to their health and the establishment of a family. It includes the prevention of sexual offenses, too, and it also plays an important role in the fight against child abuse and sexual criminality, including the prevention of the danger of sexually transmitted diseases, and so on. In prevention it is necessary to be aware of the possible danger of social networks on the Internet for the purpose of sexual harassment and abuse of pupils. The emphasis should be placed on the risks associated with their use. According to M. Hrušková and T. Mrhálek (2017), an increasingly widespread prevention of the risk behaviour of adolescents, but qualitatively differentiated at a particular age of risk, is necessary.

In addition to the prevention among primary and secondary school pupils, it is necessary to educate teachers in the field of modern technologies and cyberspace risks.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

- Chromý, J. (2010). Kriminalita páchaná na mládeži. Aktuální jevy a nová právní úprava v České republice. Praha: Linde.
- Davis, N., Schmidt, C. (2016). Cyberbullying and cyber abuse intervention: The three-tiered model for schools. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*; 11 (3-4): 366 – 377.
- Gregussová, M., Tomková, J., Balážová, M. (2010). Dospievajúci vo virtuálnom priestore. Záverečná správa z výskumu. Bratislava: VÚDPaP, 2011. [online] <http://www.vudpap.sk>
- Hinduja, S., Patchin, J. W. (2012). Cyberbullying prevention and response. Experts perspectives. New York: Routledge.
- Hoferková, S., Bělík, V. (2017). Risky behaviour in adolescents in the East Bohemian region. *Kontakt*; 19 (2): 139 – 145.
- Hollá, K. (2016). Sexting a kyberšikana. Bratislava.
- Hollá, K., Fenyvesiová, L., Hanuliaková, J. (2017). Measurement of cyberbullying severity. *The New Educational Review*; (1): 29 – 38.

- Hrušková, M., Mrhálek, T. (2018). Risky behaviour in older school children. *Kontakt*; 20 (1): 83 – 91.
- Janiš, K. (2012). Sexuální výchova v kontextu společenských změn od druhé poloviny minulého století do současnosti. *Speciální pedagogika*; (4): 295 – 305.
- Kopecký, K. (2012). Sexting among Czech preadolescents and adolescents. *The New Educational Review*; (2): 39 – 48.
- Kopecký, K. (2014). Stručný úvod do problematiky online vydírání českých dětí se zaměřením na tzv. sextortion. *Pediatr pro praxi*; (6): 352 – 354.
- Kopecký, K., Szotkowski, R. (2017). Sexting a rizikové seznamování českých dětí v kyberprostoru (research report). [online] [www.e-bezpeci.cz](http://www.e-bezpeci.cz)
- Lee, M., Crofts, T., McGovern, A., Milivojevic, S. (2015). Sexting among young people: Perceptions and practices. [online] [http://www.aic.gov.au/media\\_library/publications/tandi\\_pdf/tandi508.pdf](http://www.aic.gov.au/media_library/publications/tandi_pdf/tandi508.pdf).
- Lenhart, A. (2009). Teens and Sexting. [online] <http://www.pewinternet.org/2009/12/15/teens-and-sexting/>.
- Miovský, M. (2010). Definice hlavních typů rizikového chování, na které se ve školské prevenci zaměřujeme. In: Miovský, M., Skácelová, L., Zapletalová, J., Novák, P. (ed.) *Primární prevence rizikového chování ve školství*. Praha, p.75 – 77.