

Cyber-exploitation in Family Life

Wirtualna przemoc w życiu rodziny

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Streszczenie

Przemoc jest dziełem człowieka i pojawia się od zawsze w relacjach pomiędzy jednym a drugim człowiekiem. Inaczej: pojawia się w komunikacji pomiędzy ludźmi. I tak, jak komunikacja od zawsze służyła rozwojowi cywilizacyjnemu człowieka, tak też dawała mu okazję do agresji i przemocy wobec drugiego, a tym samym hamowała jego rozwój. Przemoc, przez wielu utożsamiana z agresją, jest zatem niedoskonałą formą komunikacji, swego rodzaju komunikacją nie-interpersonalną pomiędzy nadawcą – sprawcą przemocy a odbiorcą – ofiarą przemocy, gdyż nie odbywa się na poziomie równorzędnych podmiotów. W procesie komunikowania istotnym elementem są środki, jakimi posługują się nadawca i odbiorca. Odnosi się to także to przemocy w relacjach międzyludzkich. Na przestrzeni dziejów te środki zmieniały się: od werbalnych, niewerbalnych i fizycznych po najnowsze technologie informacyjno-komunikacyjne. Ze względu na masowy charakter tych technologii, możemy mówić o masowej przemocy wirtualnej (online), określanej jako cyberbullying. Niniejsza refleksja porusza temat przemocy wywoływanej przez tzw. nowe media, czyli Internet i mobilny telefon.

Summary

Violence is a human activity and has always been present in mutual human relations. Or in other words, it is present in communication between humans. And as communication has always facilitated human civilization development, at the same time it gave people an opportunity to be aggressive and violent to one another and thus impeded the above mentioned human development. Violence, identified by many with aggression, is an imperfect form of communication, because it is not realized on the level of subjects that are equal to one another. The means (mediums) used by the sender and the recipient in the communication process are important. It also applies to violence in human relations. In the span human history the means have changed, starting with verbal, non verbal through physical to the latest information and communication technologies. Due to the mass character of these technologies, it can be referred to as virtual mass violence (online), described as cyberbullying. This presentation concentrates upon the subject of violence brought about the new media, that is the Internet and mobile telephones.

Słowa kluczowe: cyberbullying, przemoc, komunikacja, nowe media, rodzina

Key words: cyberbullying, violence, communication, new media, family

Cyber-exploitation in Family Life

Violence is a human activity and has always been present in mutual human relations. Or in other words, it is present in communication between humans. And as communication, it has always facilitated human civilization development, at the same time giving people an opportunity to be aggressive and violent to one another and thus has impeded the above mentioned human development. Violence, identified by many with aggression, is an imperfect form of communication, because it is not realized on the level of subjects that are equal to one another. And besides this, violence aims to cause harm (mental or physical), a loss, grief, physical pain or moral suffering, to cause the loss of socially appreciated values or to gain advantage over others [1].

The means (mediums) used by the sender and the recipient in the communication process are important. It also applies to violence in human

relations. In human history the means have changed, starting with verbal, non verbal through physical to the latest information and communication technologies. Due to the mass character of these technologies, it can be referred to as virtual mass violence (online), described as cyberbullying, e-bullying, bullying by text messaging, mobile bullying, online bullying (*bullying* - terrorizing, threatening, oppression, a *bully* – a brutal, a tyrant). This violence, cyber mobbing or cyber exploitation (exploitation – abuse), influences the Internet users and the users of mobile phones with the Internet access. This presentation does not touch upon the subject of violence brought about by the traditional media (press, radio and television), but concentrates upon the new media, that is the Internet and mobile telephones.

The risk is the greater the younger an on-line user is. In the European Union 75% of children

aged 6 to 17 are the Internet users (63% use mobile phones), and in Poland 89% of the children (75% mobile phone users), in Germany 75% (and 63% of mobile phone users) [2].

Thus mass violence poses a risk for a large number of children and young people, and what is more, various forms of virtual violence aiming to harm another person can be spoken about. These are phishing (obtaining confidential personal data), harassment, spam (unwanted electronic mail), pharming (falsifying Internet banking interfaces), flaming (internet quarrel, war, insults), propagation of criminal type or racist content, stalking and also threats connected with sexual violence on the Internet: grooming (seducing children on the Internet), sexting (sending photographs of naked people via telephones), presentation of pornographic materials and also sex-related chats, which include cyber-rape scenarios. Virtual violence touches upon the youngest Internet users, although it does not mean that the violence does not touch upon the whole families. Weak interpersonal relations in the family make children look for other relations in virtual reality, and these relations bring about various dangers, including violence and aggression [3].

The most important group of threats comprises grooming, cyberbullying, and sexting, which have been on the increase recently.

Grooming and sexual violence

Grooming is in line with the threats connected with children's activity on the Internet and the child cyberexploitation threat. The term was coined by R. O'Connell from Cyberspace Research Unit University of Central Lancashire and means a child abuse in the Internet [4]. Grooming is an exceptional risk because a new and dangerous category of relations between adults and children is created in the Internet, the relation aiming at seduction and sexual abuse of the children [5]. According to the results of Ł. Wojtysiak's research carried out in Poland, 75% of children have had to face a direct sexual offer, and one in four children decided to meet the person they met on the Internet [6,7,8].

According to the statistics of National Center for Missing and Exploited Children published in 2000, one in five children in the USA was induced to hold a conversation about sex or to perform sexual acts when online. The statistics referred to 1500 children aged 10 – 17 [9]. During an experiment a fictitious 13 year old girl received 5 offers to talk about sex, links to Internet cameras showing masturbation of the potential offenders. According to the statistics the children aged 11 to 14 are most sought after by groomers: the children can perfectly use the computer without parents' supervision,

they can return home after a meeting with an offender, they do not have the sense of time, they are not or little engaged in family life [10]. And even more alarming fact is that children do not turn to their parents for help when they face the problem of virtual violence. According to EB in UE (in Germany 39%, in Poland 33%) only 32% of children ask their parents for help when using the Internet. To a greater extent this help is required when technical problem concerning the network arises, viruses appear or children need help in finding school material (46%). Only a small percentage refers to online harassment or online bullying, dangerous contacts with unknown people, pornographic content (3 – 4%). Children in Poland, similar to the children of the same age in other countries of Europe, if decide to meet the person they met on the Internet, they are accompanied by a friend or a sibling (46%) and only a small percentage declares their will to be accompanied by one of the parents (2%) or some other adult person known to them. In Wojtasik's research a high percentage of children declares their wish to go for such a meeting on their own – and this is as much as 49%, and this result is twice higher than the results from other European countries.

Grooming presents one the most dangerous phenomena of sexual violence children may experience. In the course of online Internet conversation children very often become the subject to sexual interest of adults. As many as 58% of Polish respondents have been involved into sexual conversations against their will. Such conversations have also been accompanied with pornographic pictures, aggression, request to send the child's picture, a suggestion to meet [8]. The threats mentioned above are also accompanied by the presence of pornographic materials on many websites children come across accidentally when looking for other information. Very often the names of fairy tale creatures, titles of films or children programs are the cover for pornographic content. Over 30% of all the Internet content in 2007 was of pornographic character and 10,5% of the content were e-commerce web pages, 7% travel-related, 6% advertisements, 4,5% sport. As S. Levingston's and M. Bobre's examinations show, children's contact with pornographic content was not intentional and was initiated through pop-up windows when viewing internet pages (38%), looking for some other content (36%) and through emails and Internet communicators containing spam (25%) [11,12].

Grooming phases

Grooming starts with an virtual meeting, and most often sex-related conversations and pornographic content exposition (also with the uses of

Internet cameras). Such situations may be accidental, when young people are driven by curiosity and desire to learn more about adult life. Then they come across pornographic web sites or community portals where sexual content is offered, or they are bombed with messages via internet communicators. Some internet seducers are on the look for their potential victims, watching how they behave in community portals, what they chat about with their peers when of discussion forums or chats. This way they gain information about a particular person, get hold of their photographs and learn how to use the language typical for the youth. Due to these observations they become cunning, they hide away their own personal information and data, as well as their age and intentions. This kind of behavior is supposed to look like a coincidence, but the whole situation has been directed and premeditated, very often leads to blackmail. Such situations are very depressing for young people, and these situations became aggressive, their aim is to create possibility of meeting in the real world. Cyberspace allows groomers to meet their victim any time, place and moment of their lives.

O'Connell enumerates a number of phases in the process of children seduction on the Internet. Not all the phases must be present in the process of seduction, some on them may be omitted. It depends on the pedophile's personality and the tactics they have assumed [4].

The initial phase of the contact between the child and the pedophile can be characterized as a friendship-forming stage. It is based on learning about the potential victim, delicate and precise observation of the child's behavior. At this stage the child meets an adult person. During further conversations the child stops perceiving the adult as a stranger, a mature person who is very different from the child.

The following phase is a relationship-forming stage between them. Their dialogues are more frequent and longer, concern the details from the child's life such as school or home. The adult asks about the child's emotions, their experiences, interest, dreams. The longer the relation has lasted, the less resistant the child is to provide this information. The groomer puts himself in the position of a friend the child can confide in and get advice in every situation.

Another stage is the risk assessment stage, where the seducers attempt to assess the risks associated with this acquaintance. They ask where the computer is located, whether somebody else is interested how the child uses the computer and whether there are any other users of the computer. This way the pedophile verifies who else in the

household (parents, elder siblings) is able to control the child's activity when using the computer.

From this stage the seducer proceeds to the relation phase, where he shows the child the rule of reciprocity and tries to make their relations more exclusive (exclusivity stage). The relation becomes then more intimate, the adult goes as far as making sexual offers. The child perceives the situation as a part of the mutual relation, exclusive for both of them.

The exclusivity stage introduces the relation phase between the seducer and the child leading to sexual abuse in the real world (sexual stage). The pedophile direct the conversation to make the child imagine a meeting in reality. The pedophile encourages the child to meet in reality to prove that all that has happened in the world of virtual conversation will find its final realization in the real world. The child perceives this kind of declaration as exceptional closeness offered by the virtual friend and the child also wishes to reciprocate this feeling by attending a meeting. At the same time the child is encouraged by its guide, complemented for the courage, openness and maturity. From this point it is not far for the child to be abused.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is most often understood as virtual aggression and violence towards children and the youth posed by their peers. They use electronic forms of communication in a persistent and repeated manner (text messaging, e-mail, discussion forums, net communicators, chats, blogs, twitters), threatening the freedom of an individual and humiliating the victim, as the victim is weaker in a physical, mental or social sense [13]. The aggressive behaviour in virtual world originates from violence and aggression in the real world (bullying) and becomes its continuation. These behaviour of an individual or a group of people is harmful and abnormal (exceeds the norms of social behavior), meant to harm somebody (most often a school fellow) physically or mentally, to ignore and isolate the victim, to cause pain, distress, moral suffering or to ruin somebody's reputation. This behaviour is regular and prolonged in time. It aims to harm the victim, who is innocent and has not provoked this kind of behavior[14,15]. The bullying person, who is most often anonymous, oppressive and aggressive, and disguises to remain unidentified, wants to triumph over the victim and manifest the hidden aims (discredit the other person or a group of people, take revenge, manifest domination, power, social status, satisfaction or build the image in the group). And in turn the bullied victim, according to the investigation of Gemis S.A., feels distress (60%),

grief (42%), fear (18%), shame (13%). According to the interviewed victims, the most dangerous type of violence is the verbal-mental one, which harms the social image of a person [17].

Cyberbullying is present in different forms in different forms of communication. Text messages are the most popular form, where insults, swear words, mockery and threats are sent. The message author uses nicks (in order to hide his personality or to make the reconstruction of personality impossible) and also a special language (Internet acronyms) which is a typical language understood only by the peers in the same group (e.g. A/S/L – *age, sex, location*; LMIRL – *let's meet in real life*; PA – *parent alert*, P911 – *my parent are coming*; PIR – *parent in room*). Another form of cyberbullying is using telephones: anonymous or open calls, direct or indirect (via some other person). An email or communicator message or chat room message with abusive content, threats, insults, pictures is another form of cyberbullying. Announcements aiming to shame or oppress another person are often published on a community portals or blogs alongside with a description of a victim and his personal data. The aggressor feels he goes unpunished and has unfair advantage over his victim.

Three forms of cyberbullying can be enumerated here: flaming (sending abusive messages over the Internet), harassment (harassment most often present among adults), denigration (minifying), impersonation (miming, disguising or mocking somebody), trickery (cheat), exclusion/ostracism (social boycott, a person is excluded from his/her society) [18].

A growing number of young people experiences cyberbullying as a popular form of violence. According to the research performed by Gemius S.A. in Poland in January 2007, as many as 52% of internet users aged 12-17 admitted that they have experienced virtual violence via telephone or the Internet: 47% experienced vulgar insult, 21% had to face humiliation, mockery, 16% were threatened and blackmailed [1]. The organization Pew Internet & American Life Project informed that 32% of teenagers in the USA aged 12-17 complains about various form of online harassment [19].

Sexting

Looking for entertainment, initial fascination in sex and interest in opposite sex, lack of experience, curiosity and shyness. These are the main reasons why young people are interested in sexting, that is dangerous games with MMS's (word combination of sex and texting). This phenomenon is based on sending somebody's own naked images to other friends, but this, in consequence,

becomes a mass distribution of such pictures (the pictures start to live their own life), which in turn causes the original author of the picture to suffer from nervous break down, forces him to oppose blackmail and many of them end up committing suicide. The intimate pictures start to be presented on the Internet in the form of a joke or as a way of revenge, usually when young people split up or the telephone is taken over by somebody else. The pictures are then available on community portals, exchanged as pornography (the pictures were often taken by the partner against the other person's will) and then pedophiles get hold of them. Sometimes, though being less common, the pictures are downloaded straight from our telephones using Wi-Fi or Bluetooth technology, without the telephone's owner being aware of this fact.

Britain's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Center (CEOP) interviewed 2000 school children aged 11-18. The results came as a shock, as many as 40% of them have participated in sexting. About 70% know personally the message senders. Besides, 18% admit, that they distribute pictures of people they know from the Internet only. These numbers are alarming, if the fact that almost all of them possess mobile phones, is taken into consideration [20].

The questionnaire carried out by Beatbullying organization in Great Britain in 2009 shows that 38% of teenagers aged 11 to 18 have come across emails or text messages with pornographic content [21]. Sexting is present not only among adults or the youth. It is becoming more popular among teenagers below the age of 15, though in questionnaires, they express the opinion that sending nude images of people under age, is reprehensible.

Violence in virtual world, sexual violence included, is even more severe than its real equivalent, where the victim and oppressor face each other and the violent act has its beginning and end. The number of witnesses is also limited. The victims in virtual world may feel that the violence will last endlessly, will be followed by blackmail, shame, lack of understanding in the society, consequences from the parents or educators.

Conclusions

The main source of virtual violence is children's and young people's online activity (chats, web pages, e-mails, IRC, discussion groups, blogs, profiles, SMS, MMS). The Internet and the mobile phone have become ubiquitous among young people and are the source of information, knowledge and entertainment. The positive aspects of media culture are not free of negative aspects brought about by the mass media. Using these means of communication is often connected with children's risky behaviour, such as disclosing personal data (e-mail address,

telephone number, place of residence, their photographs), making on line and off line appointments with strangers, viewing pornographic content. The first and most wanted help should be provided by parents. It is sad to conclude that parents' media competence is inadequate, and they are less experienced in using the Internet than the children. It is necessary to educate parents about the newest communication technologies, the Internet in order to give them more experience and most importantly to make them participate in their children's activity on line in order to supervise children's presence in the virtual world. According to Eurobarometer 83% of parents are present when children are on line (30% always present, 31% - often present, 22% - rarely present), in Poland it is 94% (respectively 31%, 43%, 20%), in Germany 84% (respectively 36%, 30%, 18%). In European Union 61% of parents use monitoring strategies and filters, in Germany 72%, in Poland 49%. The lowest results are in Romania (21%), Bulgaria (27%), and Lithuania (29%). One of the main reasons of the situation is the confidence the parents have in their children (64%), which turn out to be a comfortable excuse, which has not been given proper consideration. Parents should be supported by the bodies created to combat virtual violence. Only 38% of parents in European Union actively work for safer internet (informing the police, hotlines, non-profit organizations and associations) when they notice illegal or threat posing contents on the Internet. In Germany it is 47% and in Poland 39% of the parents.

The Internet can be made a safer place of cultural enrichment through the increase of parent's media competence, and in turn better legal regulations and also the activity of school educators, the police, mass media, internet site creators, organizations, associations and the Church. This way we can protect our children from virtual violence, and the violators will no longer stay anonymous and escape responsibility.

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