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Cyberbullying and Opportunities for its Prevention

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the phenomenon of bullying in the electronic environment - cyberbullying. It is divided in two parts - a theoretical part in which we define basic concepts such as bullying and cyberbullying, as they are important in our context. The contribution includes several definitions of cyberbullying from authors who first thought of this topic. Cyberbullying also includes various forms, which, together with their means, are elaborated at work. It is important to explain basic bullying that we compare with cyberbullying. Our goal is to design options and solutions for its prevention and elimination. The research part is in the form of a quantitative questionnaire which analyzes the issue of cyberbullying through the eyes of secondary school pupils, especially their real experience and knowledge of the assumed subject to achieve the idea of the current state. We discovered whether students were bullying someone over the internet, cyberbullying, and how they matched cyberbullying. The aim of our research questions was also to find out if students are familiar with some of the web sites that deal with cyberbullying prevention and whether their school provides enough information to address this issue.

KEY WORDS

The Internet. Bullying. Cyberbullying. Cyberspace. Prevention.

1. Introduction

In the last two decades we have witnessed revolutionary changes that particularly affect new communication technologies. These technologies are characterized by digitalization, multimedia, but mainly communication through the Internet and its applications, such as social networks. New digital media communication brings many opportunities, on the one hand, but also some risks on the other. One of these risks is cyberbullying.¹ The term cyberbullying, created by the combination of bullying and cyberspace, is fairly new, so we will first elucidate the term of bullying.

The word bullying is of French origin - *chicane*. It has several meanings: abuse, persecution, malicious harassment and so on.² Bullying does not have a universally valid definition, but it can be classified as an aggressive behavioural disorder. The interest about this topic has moved considerably over the last thirty years, resulting in the existence of more research. A pioneer in this area is the Norwegian professor Dan Olweus, who in his Cambridge role, developed the theory of bullying and the basic tools by which it can be explored and measured.³ The Czech expert Michal Kolář says about bullying that it occurs when one or more pupils usually intentionally and repeatedly torture and enslave their classmate or classmates and use aggression and manipulation to do so.⁴ Bullying is defined by various authors as behaviour, when someone hurts someone who cannot or is not able to defend themselves, it often happens repeatedly; it is rarely a one-time issue.⁵

Cyberbullying

Today's generation is associated with new media and the internet in day-to-day contact.⁶ However, the big difference in the reaction of response is seen when using the Internet compared to television. On the Internet we can also search for information that interests us, sometimes we can change them and we can also create them. According to Gálík, the Internet, like other media, has an impact on the cognitive abilities of man (perception, thinking, imagination, and knowledge), collective mentality, as well as on the organization of society on the basis of its technological aspect and communication.⁷ The Internet is not physically tangible; it has no basis such as paper in the case of handwriting. Only a few people can imagine sending letters or postcards. They have been replaced by emails, where we in a few clicks can write and send something which would take several days by post. Through smartphones we can also very quickly send a short message - SMS, or various pictures in the form of MMS. However, in verbal communication we see the difference, the person is not so relaxed, he or she stammers, looking for the right words or trying to find a neutral topic.⁸

J. M. Price and J. Dalgleish understand cyberbullying as „*collective marking used to define bullying forms using electronic means such as the Internet and mobile phones to aggressively and deliberately hurt someone.*“⁹ Cyberbullying is most commonly defined by Tománek as: Torture,

¹ HLADÍKOVÁ, V., HUBINÁKOVÁ, H.: Cyberbullying as a risky phenomenon of internet. Communication and possibilities of its elimination. In *SGEM 2017, Volume 1 : Human Geography, Media and Communications, Information and Library Science, Demography and Women's Studies*. Sofia : STEF92 Technology, 2017, p. 158.

² JAŠŠOVÁ, E.: *Ako nebyť šikanovaný*. Bratislava : SELUZ MO SR, 1998, p. 16 - 17.

³ VAŠUTOVÁ, M. et al.: *Proměny šikany ve světě médií*. Ostrava : Filozofická fakulta Ostravské univerzity v Ostravě, 2010, p. 51-52.

⁴ KOLÁŘ, M.: *Nová cesta k léčbě šikany*. Praha : Portál, 2011, p. 32

⁵ VAŠUTOVÁ, M. et al.: *Proměny šikany ve světě médií*. Ostrava : Filozofická fakulta Ostravské univerzity v Ostravě, 2010, p. 53.

⁶ TOMÁNEK, P.: Kyberšikana ako aktuálny problém v súčasnej rodinnej výchove. In *Lifelong learning – Celoživotní vzdělávání*, 2012, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 30. [online]. [2017-02-15]. Available at: <<http://vzdelavani.unas.cz/111201.pdf>>.

⁷ GÁLÍK, S. et al.: *Možnosti a nebezpečnostv komunikácie na internete*. Trnava : Fakulta masmediálnej komunikácie UCM v Trnave, 2014, p. 17.

⁸ TOMÁNEK, P.: Cyberbullying: Experiences, impacts and coping strategies as described by Australian young people. In *Youth Studies Australia*. 2010, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 51.

⁹ PRICE, J. M., DALGLEISH, J.: Kyberšikana ako aktuálny problém v súčasnej rodinnej výchove. In *Lifelong learning – Celoživotní vzdělávání*, 2012, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 30 - 31. [online]. [2017-02-15]. Available at: <<http://vzdelavani.unas.cz/111201.pdf>>.

humiliation, threat or various attacks through the Internet, digital and interactive technologies, but in recent times we have also attributed attacks on mobile phones.¹⁰

Myers says that „*cyberbullying provides the sense of anonymity, immediate access to the victim and an unrestricted audience of supporters to the aggressor.*“¹¹ The intention of the actor's behaviour is to hurt the victim through sexist, racist or other insults. An important role is also played by the age when teens are constantly harassing the victim by persecution, using text messages or emails. Several authors believe that cyberbullying already appears among minors, especially young people. Adults are also involved in Internet attacks, mostly those who are of a similar age and work at the same workplace via anonymous internet alerts or telephone calls. Another method is the targeted abuse of young people using social networks, chatting on websites or emails.

K. Hollá describes cyberbullying as „*aggressive behaviour that involves harassment, threats, persecution, humiliation and other negative behaviour of the child or adolescent against the victim or victims through repeated attacks through computer, mobiles and other electronic devices whose content causes emotional harm.*“¹²

In the aforementioned age groups, peers try to spend as much time as possible with their friends. Through the Internet they can stay in touch anytime, anywhere they are, despite having to leave their home, which greatly helps allow attacks in cyberspace.¹³

2. Survey Methodology

As the most appropriate survey method in the research section we have chosen a quantitative questionnaire of our own construction in electronic form, because we can reach a larger number of respondents in a short time. Anonymity is important, so respondents are not afraid to express their opinion and also have enough time to answer all the questions. The subject of the study is students of secondary vocational school aged from 15 to 19. Selected questions are based on what we want to find out to be able to obtain the most accurate results. They are divided into four units, where we can see cyberbullying from the point of view of victim, aggressor, absences in prevention and whether traditional bullying is linked to cyberbullying. The data obtained from the questionnaire is clearly graphically evaluated.

Subject of the survey

Through the survey we wanted to find the current state of cyberbullying at the Secondary School of Business and Services in Dolný Kubín. In order to achieve this goal, firstly it was necessary to learn about which of these virtual world activities are most frequently done by students, due to possible occurrences of this kind of bullying. In the survey we came up with questions on what level of knowledge students have about cyberbullying, whether they have been victims of it or even have been aggressors themselves. Their responses helped us to compare their attitude toward this phenomenon from various demographic perspectives such as age, gender or field of study itself.

Survey questions

1. Have you ever cyberbullied someone through the Internet?
2. Why did you bully through the Internet?

¹⁰ TOMÁNEK, P.: Kyberšikana ako aktuálny problém v súčasnej rodinnej výchove. In *Lifelong learning – Celoživotní vzdělávání*, 2012, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 31. [online]. [2017-02-15]. Available at: <<http://vzdelavani.unas.cz/111201.pdf>>.

¹¹ MYERS, J. J. et al.: *Responding to cyber bullying. An action tool for school leaders*. CA : Corwgin, 2011, p. 7.

¹² HOLLÁ, K.: *Kyber-šikana*. Bratislava : IRIS, 2013, p. 14-15.

¹³ BOTÍK, M.: Násilie, agresivita a kyberšikana ako jedno z nebezpečenstiev internetovej komunikácie. In GÁLIK, S. et al.: *Možnosti a nebezpečenstvá komunikácie na internete*. Trnava : Fakulta masmediálnej komunikácie UCM v Trnave, 2014, p. 71-74.

3. Has anyone cyberbullied you through the Internet?
4. How did you deal with cyberbullying?
5. What do you think is the best way to defend against cyberbullying?
6. Do you think your school provides enough information about cyberbullying?
7. Do you know any websites of Slovak civic associations and projects which you can turn to in case you become a victim of cyberbullying?

The survey was conducted on a sample of students from the Secondary School of Business and Services in Dolný Kubín. After mutual communication with the deputy director of the school he sent an electronic questionnaire to competent teachers. By this form of cooperation we have determined reciprocal conditions, one of which was to report the results and recommendations turnover. These results will help the school to indicate what different ways and methods they can use to eliminate cyberbullying.

The total number of addressed respondents was 152, aged 15 to 19 from different fields of study and grades. When evaluating the questionnaires we have also come to the conclusion that some of the questionnaires were not satisfactory and therefore it was not a subject of the survey but fictional facts. The total number of matching questionnaires was 150.

3. Results and discussion

Based on the quantitative questionnaire we calculated the survey results of the cyberbullying issue. We analysed this problem from the point of view of the students, we noted it down in the schemes and charts. On the basis of the findings we evaluated the results and attached our own opinions and views on the findings.

The most frequent activity that respondents use every day on the Internet are social networks, with 121 respondents (80,7%) being inclined to. Another activity that is also very popular is chatting, which is attended by 120 students (80%). A very surprising finding was that 6 respondents (4%) do not visit social networks and do not chat.

Nowadays the Internet is dominated by a great phenomenon (youtubering). This is one of the reasons why today's young people spend most of their free time on the Internet. Up to 93 students (62%) spend their free time browsing the Internet and watching videos. Only one student less, 92 (61.3%), watch websites. Our goal was to find out whether there is anyone who does not watch videos and websites. The result was very low, only 4 respondents (2,7%) indicated this option.

The activity with the smallest frequency in replies (not at all) concerns interest in playing online games, 57 students (38%) are interested in this. A large percentage of 20,7% which means 31 students, play games less than twice a month. However we have to point out that the results on online games are surprising to us, because we have assumed that this activity will be ranked in the first three in terms of frequency. Only 23 students (15,3%) play games almost every day. Games allow the creation of different social groups, the player has a certain status in the existing group, can pay for different benefits, and on the basis of these choices can move around in the virtual environment. From these levels of players, personal adaption takes place in the environment, which can also be reflected in the real environment, for example, how can players help, empathize with others or deal with potential aggression.

Sending SMS or MMS messages through Internet gateways ensures anonymity, thus indirectly supporting cyberbullying. A lot of websites require only login or a phone number that can also be made up. This type of sending of SMS or MMS messages is used by 56 respondents (37.3%).

Cyberbullying from the point of view of the aggressor

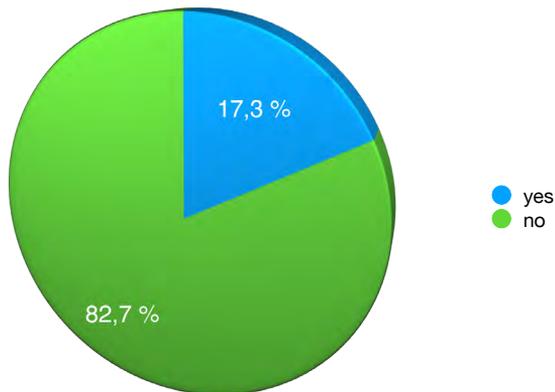


CHART 1:

Have you ever cyberbullied someone through the Internet?

Source: own processing

Based on this chart we discovered that only 26 students (17,3%) from a sample of 150 had cyberbullied. The remaining 124 students (82,7%) never repeatedly attacked other people via the Internet.

The following sub-questions which are in the questionnaire and follow on the survey question concerned only those who were cyberbullying and had the option to mark more answers. In the first sub-question we were finding out which people they were putting pressure on. The most frequent victims were people who they did not know, this answer was chosen by 14 respondents (53,8%). The answer friends followed, it was identified by 10 respondents (38,5%) and the answer classmates was chosen by 8 respondents (30,8%). In last place there were cyberbullied teachers together with higher-grade students who were bullied by 2 aggressors (7,7%).

In the next sub-question we investigated the means by which the aggressors were cyberbullying. The survey shows that 14 students (60,9%) were most often cyberbullying through social networks. The second most common answer was Internet chat, which was rated by 9 students (39,1%). A little less, 7 students (30,4%) use SMS gates which are free as a means of cyberbullying. The survey revealed the same number of responses that 6 students (26,1%) acted aggressively on phone calls, email communications, but also wanted to take revenge in the form of photo publishing. Only 2 students (8,7%) took the opportunity of revenge through humiliating videos, suggesting that the most used means of foreign affairs is unfamiliar to this school.

The comparison of results of online activities and results related to means of cyberbullying has shown us the consensus that the first two most frequent activities are also the most common means of cyberbullying.

An important finding for us was the name used by the aggressors in the process of cyberbullying. According to the studied literature, we deduced that it would be mostly anonymous, but it was second, only one quarter of aggressors thus 7 students (26,9%) used it. Half of them thus 13 aggressors (50%) used their own name. 2 aggressors (7,7%) used the name of a person they knew.

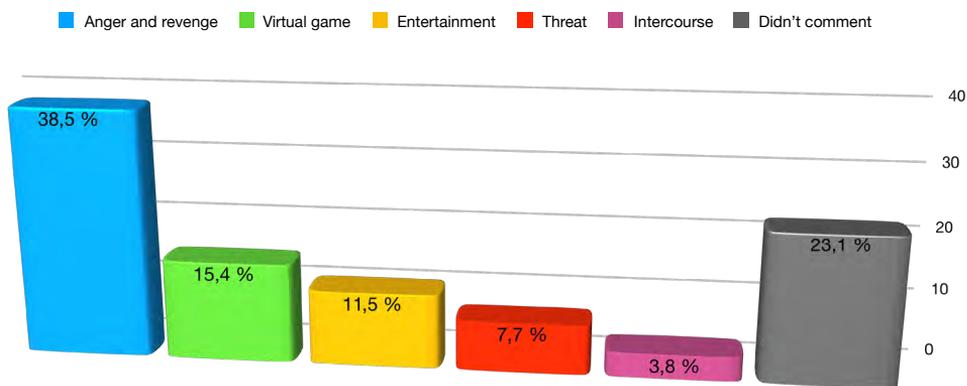


CHART 2:

Why did you bully through the Internet?

Source: own processing

10 students (38,5%) reported anger towards victims they knew and revenge for what they have done in the past as the main reason. As we have already learned from the activity scheme, only 38 students often play virtual games, but there were 4 students (15,4%) from that small number who cyberbullied in that way. There were also other answers about reasons, for example 3 (11,5%) students were cyberbullying for fun, 2 (7,7%) students because of threats and 1 student (3,8%) in order of sexual intercourse. The second most numerous group in this survey question was formed by those who were ashamed of or refused to express themselves, it was 6 students (23,1%).

Cyberbullying from the point of view of the victim

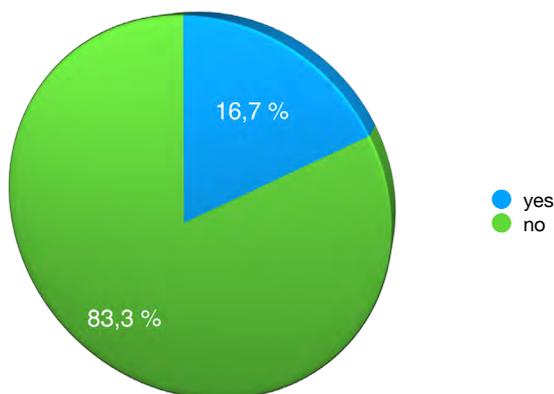


CHART 3:

Has anyone cyberbullied you through the Internet?

Source: own processing

Exactly 25 students (16,7%) from the secondary school of business and services were victims of cyberbullying, the other 125 students (83,3%), most of them, fortunately had not been victims of aggressors.

All of the following questions were targeted at victims, in which respondents had the option to choose more answers. The first sub-question, which dealt with aggressors of cyberbullying, told us that the most frequent initiators were friends, which was identified by 16 respondents

(47,1%). Then followed unidentified aggressors who were considered to be dangerous by 15 respondents (44,1%) and the third is classmates, denoted by 11 respondents (32,4%).

To our amazement the survey showed that 6 respondents (17,6%) encountered Internet aggression from teachers. In our opinion, it should be them who avoid cyberbullying and rather they should be an example for their students and teach them how to be immune to the cyberbullying.

The second sub-question concerned the means of cyberbullying. Social networks can help us to contact people who are far away from us or to establish new contacts. However, it has also been confirmed that the more time spent on the Internet increased the risk of cyberbullying. Mostly, 18 students (62,1%) became victims of cyberbullying through social networks. The second most common means are sms/mms messages, through which 13 victims (44,8%) have been attacked. Revenge of the aggressors in the manner of publishing inappropriate photographs was felt by 10 victims (34,5%). As it was from the point of view of aggressors, there we also confirmed that a small number of only 3 students (10,3%) became victims by the form of a humiliating video.

In most cases, victims had no difficulty in estimating the name of the aggressor because 9 aggressors (36%) acted in their own name, but there were also cases where 7 aggressors (28%) acted with a fictional name. Appropriately, 4 students (16%) identified their aggressor as anonymous, but also as a person who stole the identity of someone known.

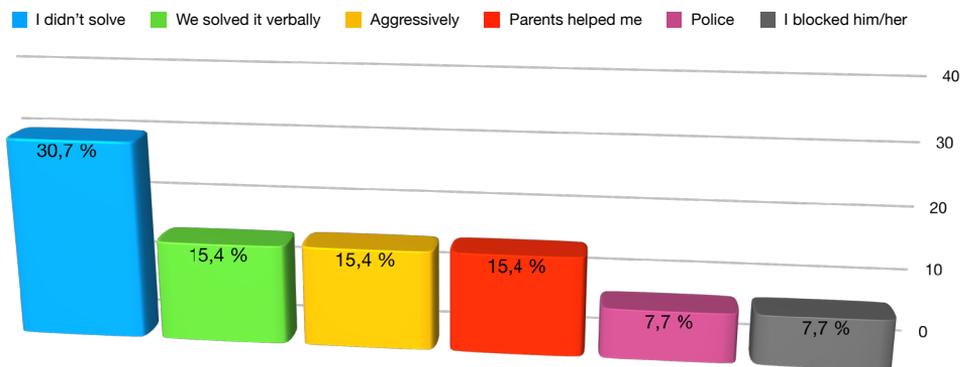


CHART 4:
How did you deal with cyberbullying?
Source: own processing

The last important point that we dealt with from the point of the view of the victim of cyberbullying was its resolution. All 25 victims, who had the option of an open response, spoke. It was not solved at all by 10 victims (30,7%), they were waiting until it was over. This resolution was the most frequent answer. Some, 4 students (15,4%) spoke to the aggressor as well as 4 students who were given help by their parents or who started to behave equally aggressively against the aggressor. The least used step against cyberbullying was blocking the aggressor and resolving it via the police - it was resolved by 1 student (7,7%) in this way. Since cyberbullying is not directly embedded in our legal system, it is possible that many students do not know whether this is a crime or whether it can be resolved via the police and are thus acting on his or her own responsibility.

Prevention of cyberbullying

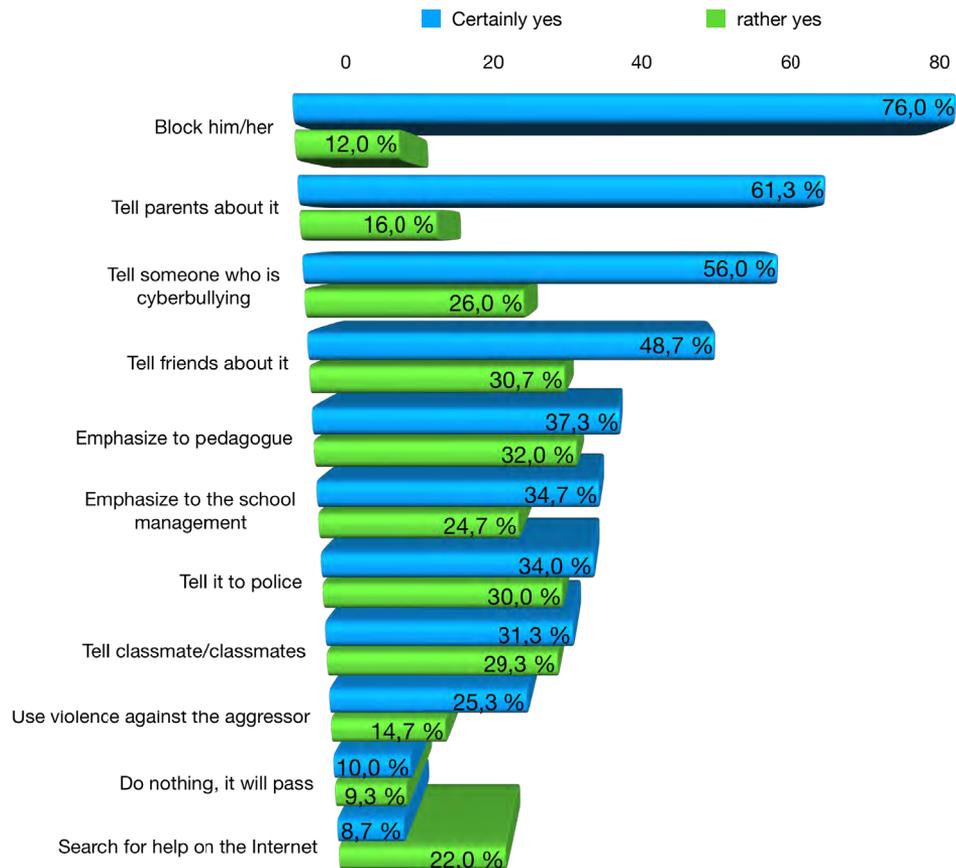


CHART 5:

What do you think is the best way to defend against cyberbullying?

Source: own processing

We showed the most frequent and the least frequent answer in the chart. The largest number, that is 114 students (76%), think that the best defence is to block the aggressor. However, there were also 7 students (4,7%) who are not convinced that this method can help them. A large percentage (61,3%), 92 students would firstly address it with parents. However, there are 17 students (11,3%) who would not, or certainly did not use this form of defence. More than half, 84 students (56%) would try to talk with the aggressor. 73 students (48,7%) have a relatively high level of trust in their friends who they would talk to. Teachers have a positive impact on the students, because 104 students would ask them for help (rather yes + yes). School management would be emphasized by 15 students less. As we have already learned from the personal results of the victims, there are also students who are sceptical about the police, only 51 students (34%) have indicated this option as the first.

From the total sample of 150 students we discovered that 85 students (56%) would certainly not act like this and that the next 36 students (24%) are also inclined to this opinion. Students also do not have a great deal of trust in Internet help, 69 students (46%) do not see any sense in this way of defence. Developing violence against the aggressor has been considered as a bad approach by 61 students (40,7%). 38 students (25,3%) indicated the choice of violence against the aggressor as correct.

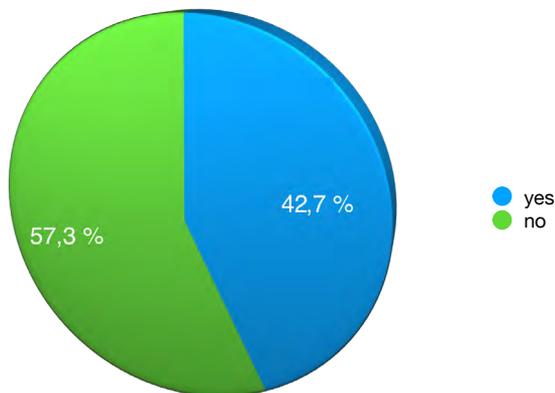


CHART 6:

Do you think your school provides enough information about cyberbullying?

Source: own processing

All of the 150 respondents answered this question. Most of them, 86 respondents (57,3%) mention a lack of information about cyberbullying from their school. As a result, there can miss lectures and discussions with experts about this form of bullying. Through email communication with the deputy director of the school, at which we conducted the survey, we learned that more attention and a bigger emphasis is placed on traditional bullying. However, slightly less students, 64 students (42,7%) think that cyberbullying is being given enough attention.

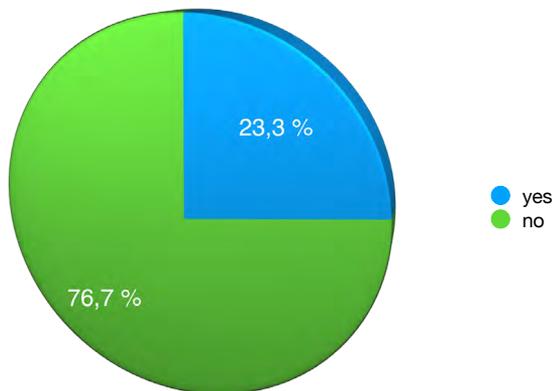


CHART 7:

Do you know websites of Slovak civic associations and projects which you can turn to in case you are a victim of cyberbullying?

Source: own processing

We found out that more than three quarters of respondents, thus 115 (76,7%) do not know any websites of Slovak associations. Only 35 respondents (23,3%) know of them, which is almost one quarter. One of the main reasons for this lack of understanding is that respondents do not trust this form of defence, so they do not even search for it - they prefer personal contact. Another reason can be the low promotion of civic associations at schools in the form of lectures or at the locations where the most potential victims are staying.

4. Benefit assessment and recommendations

Survey results indicate that most students have not yet had a personal experience with cyberbullying. Half of the students participated in this form of bullying only as a witness. Most students acted as heroes and helped the victim, but there was also a minority which was afraid to get involved.

This form of bullying is more difficult to resolve during its process, so it is important to start eliminating it from the very beginning. Most students spend their free time on social networks, through which cyberbullying occurred the most. Therefore, it is important for school networks to be set up so that students do not have access to social networks and block them.

The results showed trust of teachers and management of the school, which we regard as correct. From this we can deduce that even a school psychologist can be the right next step. Students would have the opportunity to confide either by their name or anonymously via paper links.

Most students think that schools provide a lack of information related to cyberbullying. To improve this situation, lectures in social communication lessons with experts on this topic or eventually lectures with people from combined helplines who can retell real cases they have encountered should take place. People who have already gone through such a process and have handled it, either on the side of the victim or the aggressor, also come into consideration.

Student's replies also indicate that a large number of them do not know any websites of Slovak associations that can help them. Therefore one of our recommendations would be cooperation between secondary schools and these civic associations, thorough promotion in the form of posters and leaflets displayed at school.

5. Conclusion

Cyberbullying represents a serious problem in today's society, which should be solved mainly preventively and not when it has already been created. Effective prevention of cyberbullying, could, in addition to the abovementioned suggestions, also introduce courses or direct teaching of media education at schools. This is partly happening, but Slovakia, when compared to other European countries, is still lagging in media education. D. Petranová identifies a number of factors of this lag, such as a weak societal awareness of media education, poor interest of teachers in teaching media education or their weak knowledge, etc.¹⁴ These factors block the adequate development of media competences and especially critical thinking. D. Petranová even says that media education should be understood as a "guidance"¹⁵ that could help recognize, prevent and eliminate undesirable behaviour on the Internet, and thus combat cyberbullying more effectively.

¹⁴ PETRANOVÁ, D.: *Mediálna výchova a kritické myslenie*. Trnava : Fakulta masmediálnej komunikácie UCM v Trnave, 2013, p. 59.

¹⁵ PETRANOVÁ, D.: *Rozvíja mediálna výchova v školách kritické kompetencie žiakov? Does Media Education at Schools Develop Students Critical Competences?* In *Communication Today*, 2011, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 74.

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