

SOCIAL SURVEY ON PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM HARMFUL INFORMATION: UZBEKISTAN'S CASE

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ABSTRACT

It is known that, XXI century has become an age of information technologies and, of course, this is a positive phenomenon. However, it should be noted that in this period of progress, there are some cases where information could bear negative influences to the weakest layers of our society. Often we do not pay much attention to its potential harm, and let it remain exposed to everyone. Such negative information can be found freely in the internet, media, songs, movies, video games and even in children's toys and in the clothes they wear. In the process of globalization, protecting the youth from violent information sources is becoming one of the most crucial duties of the state and society. It is not a secret that such kind of information can negatively influence child's mentality, health, and their future. This paper discusses the actuality of the topic and the related works done in this area. Then we present our results of public opinion poll conducted to evaluate the need for protecting youth from harmful information. We also propose our recommendations in reforming the current legal system towards this objective and draw our conclusions on the expected outcome.

Keywords: Child's rights, child protected, harmful information, opinion poll

INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, the advance of information and communication technologies has become the key aspect of our daily life. Asian countries such as South Korea and Japan are one of the outstanding countries where such technologies are highly integrated into the education of every schoolchild. Also, in Uzbekistan, 30.2 % of the population, it is approximately 9.815 million, are considered as the active users of the Internet. This indicator has increased by 11.2 % compared to 2014. Also, online polls have shown that 90% of youth are using the Internet as main source of information today [2].

However, with this growth, we have to admit that the impact of negative information on youth has grown as well. Such information is one of the main reasons that shape a distorted view about reality in child's mindset. It is not a secret that some sources of media (the Internet, television, radio, press and etc.) promote cruelty, violence, pornography, abusive lexicon, etc. which contradict with humanitarian aspects of child's education and traditional upbringing. According to Ergasheva's research, in Uzbekistan, an ordinary child watches about 180 thousand violent episodes on television itself till he/she reaches adulthood. It is important to note, 45% of these episodes are related to brutal scenes such as torture and murder [1]. According to the survey carried out by Belson, the youth who watched violent content commits crimes 50% more often than the ones who have been exposed to such content far less. Park and Liance observed that the young criminals held in custody in the US and Belgium exhibited more violent behaviour as they had unrestricted access to violent content, while the ones who had restricted access to such content, became more benevolent towards others.

It is clear that the Internet provides unrestricted access to any kind of information, and the emergence of advanced encryption technologies such as VPNs, anonymous P2P content sharing systems, Tor network facilitates the propagation of illicit content promoting violence, hatred and abuse. For example, we were able to identify more than 9000 blogs in open web only explaining the “easy ways” of committing suicide, more than 4000 blogs that propagate hatred and encourage using brutal force in resolving day-to-day conflicts. This, of course, affects child’s interests and shapes his/her ill-interpreted understanding of the world. For example, Urozov found that 38% of schoolchildren are keen to read literature promoting violence, racism and ethnic intolerance in the Internet [2]. Our research has also found that almost 49% of contemporary computer action games aimed at younger audience promote cruelty and violence. Moreover, it is very well known that any teenager can watch pornographic content online without restriction whatsoever.

RELATED WORKS

Gorbacheva [3] studied the main aspects of providing legal support for minors to guarantee their right for protection from malicious information. As a result, she characterised the type of information which can negatively influence social, psychological and mental development of minors and proposed a set of laws which determined the administrative responsibility for failure in safeguarding children from harmful information. She also suggested that the government and other authorised bodies should be able to monitor and control the flow of such information in the best interest of children.

Budanov [4] described the legal aspects of information security of minors. Research of Budanov mainly deals with information security standards in juvenile criminal law and draws parallels in current legislation system which guarantees minor’s protection against malice.

Some of the issues related to the protection of minors from the harmful information were studied by Lopatin [5], Pristanskaya [6], Bachilo [7], Kobzeva [8]. For example, Lopatin explored the concept of development of legislation in the field of information security, Pristanskaya explored prosecutor's supervision over the implementation of legislation in the field of information security for minors, Bachilo outlined the regulations to be imposed on processes involving the flow of information, Kobzeva conducted a comparative analysis of harmful information in general broadcasting and film distribution from legislative standpoint.

SURVEY RESULTS

The survey has been carried out about the rights and interests of the child in March and April 2013 in different provinces and cities of Uzbekistan. The number of respondents was 516 people, 46.2% of them were boys and 53.8% of them were girls. Most of the respondents were teenagers from 15 to 20. Table 1 shows the detailed distribution of our survey sample over different age groups.

Table 1. Distribution of survey sample over age groups

<i>Age</i>	<i>Sample Size</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
15 year	13	2.5%
16 year	144	27.8%
17 year	150	29.2%
18 year	140	27.0%
19 year	58	11.2%
20 year	11	2.3%

When we asked the minors “For what do you use the Internet?”, 40.9% of them answered that they use it for education, 31.3% for news, 13.9% for watching entertainment, 10.6% for playing games, 9.3% for social networks and 1.3% of them use the Internet for religious information. Most importantly, among respondents there were children who anonymously confessed that they use the Internet to watch pornographic content (1.5%), to watch terror expressed videos, photos and information (0.5%), to watch videos with violent, cruel scenes (0.3%) and so forth. Although it is not the significant part of the sample polled, the fact that children are exposed to such harmful content and they themselves reveal about that is uneasy situation. Moreover we have to admit that the majority of children who use the Internet might be using the Internet for obtaining harmful information, but refused to write about that. We assume that there is a strong bias towards not revealing this fact in fear of humiliation. On the flipside of the coin, there are 15.7% respondents who do not want to use the Internet at all, 8.6% do not have an opportunity to use it and 0.3% indicated that they rarely use the Internet. One third of respondents (36.6%) answered that they find it difficult to answer.

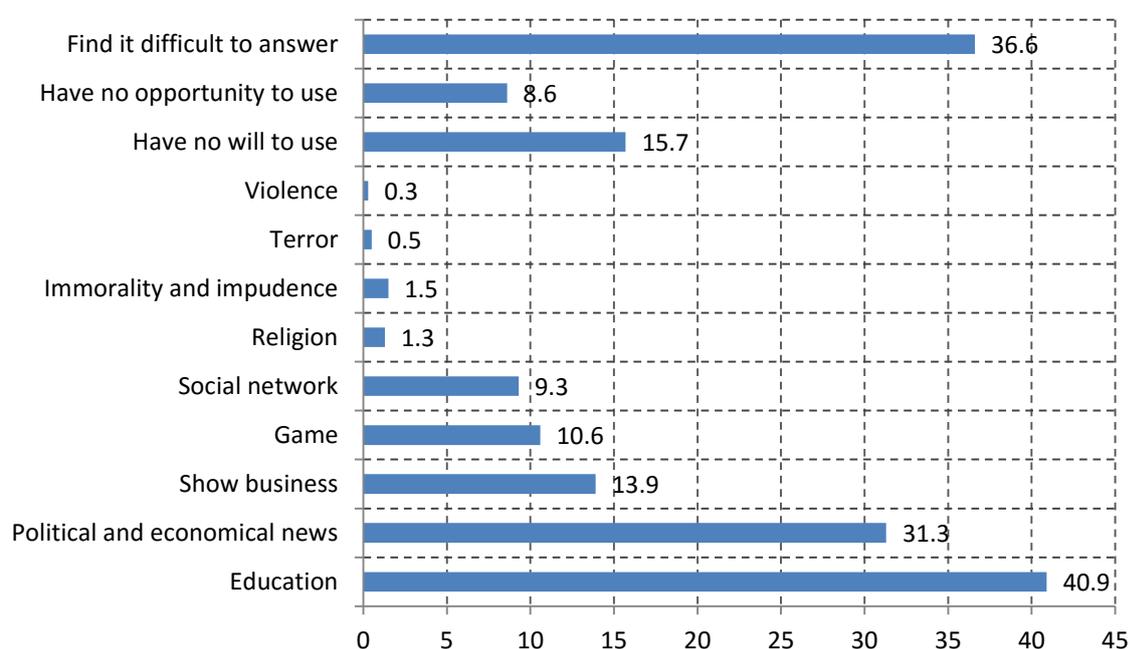


Figure 1. Distribution of responses to the question “For what do you use the Internet?”

When we asked children in which online clubs and web sites they had profiles, 41.7% of children responded that they do not have any registered profiles in the Internet. Also, 12.4% said that they have registered in educational web sites, 6.6% stated web sites on social-political news, 5.3% entertainment web sites, 1% religious web sites, 0.3% web sites about sport. Also most children agreed that they use social networks such as “Odnoklassniki” and “Facebook”. Some answers (0.8%) of respondents in collected questionnaires had shown that children also have memberships in web sites with harmful information which express violence, hatred and pornographic content. Besides we have found that 3% of children are interested in web sites promoting suicidal thoughts, self-harm and life of depression such as emo clubs, or other types of nihilist youth subcultures. It was curious that 39.9% of respondents were hesitant in revealing their membership in such clubs.

When the children were asked “Is there harmful information to children in the mass media of Uzbekistan?”, 1.1% of them answered “yes, a lot”, 28.3% considered that “not much but there is”, 10.1% stated that “there is none” and 3.5% of respondents said that “we have never

come across with this sort of information”. Nearly half of them (46.7%) found it difficult to answer.

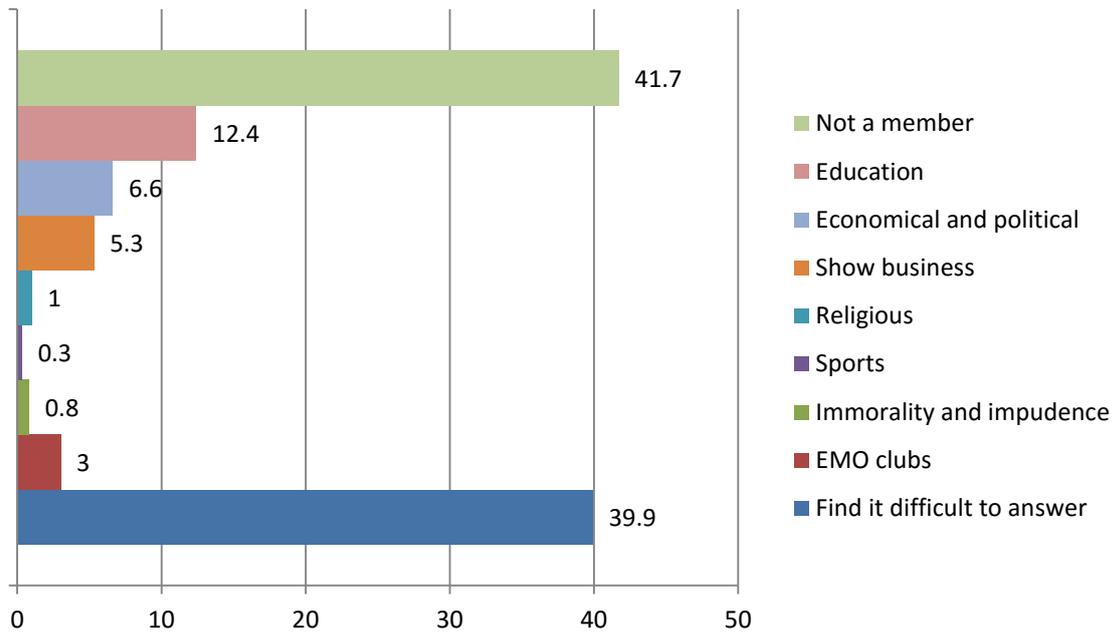


Figure 2. Distribution of the responses to the question “Which clubs and sites do you have memberships with in the Internet?”

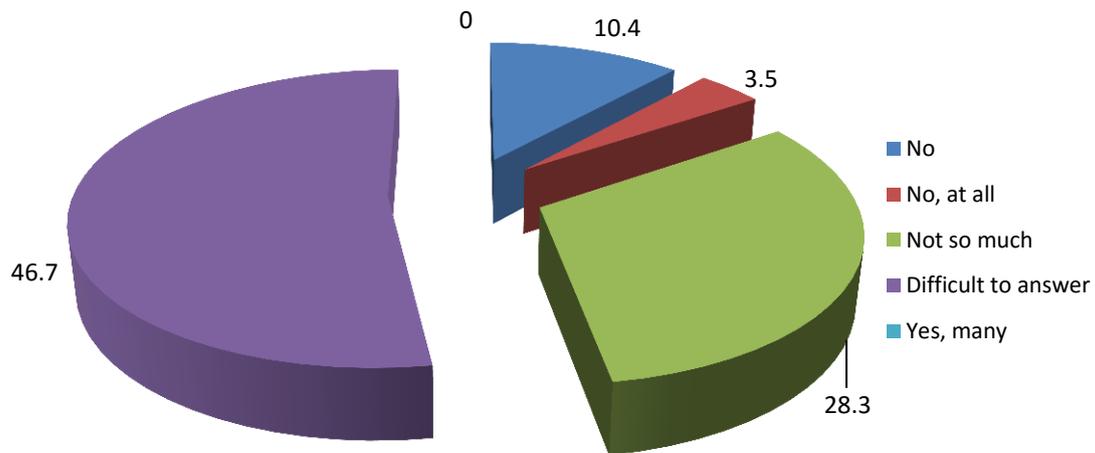


Figure 3. Share of the responses to the question “Is there harmful information to children in the mass media of Uzbekistan?”

We also asked the question “What do you think about the ways of protecting children from harmful information?” to most of respondents and obtained interesting ways of tackling this issue. Almost one tenth of the children (9.3%) consider “reading classic literature”, “going to sports” as an effective way of minimizing the influence of malicious information in youth mind. 7.3% of respondents said that children should be always under the control of their parents or an adult guardian, 6.6% advised not to have open gaps in child’s daily schedule, 5.6% stated that it is worthwhile learning new professional skills or languages. Some of the respondents pointed out that teaching good manners and ethics is the only way of immunizing children against harmful information. We have also received a number of responses regarding

the prohibitive measures on certain aspects of child's lifestyle. For example, 3.5% stated that children should not be allowed to use mobile phones so often, 1.8% answered that restricting the harmful information by software filters is necessary, 1.5% noted that banning the resources which disseminate harmful information is the responsibility of the government. Also it has been mentioned that explaining children the negative influences of harmful information in a demonstrative way and immunize them against such ideologies must be included into the agenda of every educational institution. We have received suggestions in introducing legislative amendments to regulations controlling harmful information. Some has proposed creating youth organizations that fight against the popularization of harmful ideologies among youth. Some of the respondents gave such answers as giving children more freedom to children, using good characters from ancient stories and tales as a model, engaging children in participating more in public events, publishing more educational material, providing more informative content through accessible and comprehensive means in national language, providing free community supported counseling and advice, leading happy and peaceful family life, etc. To sum up, the answers and the advices were diverse, so they served a fruitful soil to build our recommendations on protecting children from harmful information. In the next section, we will talk about more.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we must point out that our future cannot be better without mental or physical health of younger generation. We must admit that children are the most vulnerable of us not only physically, but psychologically too. And once there is chance that we might face the negative consequences of harmful information on our children, we should be prepared to confront it both legally and practically. That is why it is of an important concern to understand the contemporary interests and needs of youth, and provide trustworthy sources of information to them in order to make them immunized against such phenomenon. And in order to achieve this goal state and society must work hand in hand together. In our future work, we plan to conduct a survey on the adult population of Uzbekistan to learn more about how they are protecting their young from harmful activities on the web.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After detail study it may be consider important to establish theoretical and practical sources of protecting children from harmful information.

From practical aspect

In protecting the children, one needs to focus on two aspects of the problem.

First of all, to achieve harmlessness of main sources of information, and create informative environment for children, following aspect should be taken into account:

- i. In informational sphere, unified directed national policy of protecting the youth from harmful source should be developed and activated;
- ii. For providing the information security, activity of state forces should be coordinated from authorized body;
- iii. To create legal mechanisms of protecting the children from destructive information and put in into work;
- iv. Special attention should be paid on construction of the system of social partnership;
- v. Unified list of harmful sites, blogs, e-mail addresses and web-pages in Uzbekistan should be made and placed into age-based classification system;

- vi. According to content of the information, we should accept the expert opinions of psychologists, pedagogues and other specialists for determining the age-based classification system, and to show the signs before announcing the information (for example 0+, 6+, 12+, 16+, 18+);
- vii. Commercial shops, like internet cafes, mobile services and CD & DVD sellers should be vetted for the execution of the state regulations on harmful information and in case of a breach corresponding administrative measures or even the suspension of their operations should be imposed;
- viii. Control the quality of imported goods, monitor them for indecent pictures, signs, texts in clothes or toys and limit their free sale;
- ix. Train specialists capable of detecting and preventing the dissemination of harmful information;
- x. Conduct regular scientific-practical seminars and provide new recommendations in this field.

Secondly, to immunize youth against harmful information:

Nowadays when the information is spreading too fast, bringing up our children in a complete isolation and choosing for them what to see or what to read on their behalf would definitely not suit to the contemporary needs of the world and even to the human freedoms guaranteed by international conventions. As it has been set to the agenda of our national development program, we should confront the ideology with an ideology, the idea with an idea and the ignorance with the enlightenment. In our view, following activities would help in strengthening the children's understanding about multiplicity of ideologies, and their ultimate objectives and goals, and would enable them to distinguish the harmful information from unknown sources:

- i. Organizing community-based centers for informing youth and their parents/guardians about harmful information, their consequences and the methods of protection from them.
- ii. Broadcasting materials concerning the negative influences of harmful information and providing expert-led talk-shows and other programs directed at confronting this phenomenon;
- iii. Introducing specialization courses which train specialists such as psychologists who could explain the negative influences of harmful information and provide psychological aid and catering for those who have already turned the victims of such negative influences; information security specialists who could detect and filter such content from being exposed to children in multiple channels.

From theoretical aspect:

- i. Publish more scientific literature explaining the adverse effects of violent, explicit and graphic content on the mental development of children;
- ii. Develop the legislative foundations for preventing the exposure of harmful information on children;
- iii. Toughen the responsibilities for breaching the corresponding regulations on harmful information;

- iv. Study similar practices in preventing the flow of harmful information in other countries, compare them with the current legislative system in Uzbekistan, deduce important lessons;
- v. Determine the government's role, rights and responsibilities in controlling the content transmitted via global network.

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