



## Case Note

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## HATRED IN CYBERSPACE: ON THE CZECH REPUBLIC ADOLESCENT'S EXPERIENCE

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### Abstract

*Relevance.* The study aimed to examine the experience of Czech adolescents with cyberhate as observers, victims and perpetrators. In addition, the study focused on parents and guardians of adolescents, their exposure to cyberhate, and knowledge of their children's victimization through cyberhate.

*Methodology. Sample:* In total, 3,087 Czech adolescents aged 11-16 (49.8% - girls) and their parents or caregivers (67.0% - women) were interviewed.

*Methods.* An online survey (CAWI method) was used to collect the data. The survey was conducted by the media research agency STEM/MARK.

*Results.* The results show that cyberbullying was the most common occurrence among adolescents (59.3%). The experience increased with age, and its prevalence was highest among 15-16-year-old respondents. Boys and older adolescents reported intentionally seeking out cyberhate more often than girls and younger. The majority of adolescents reported being exposed to cyberhate unintentionally. Reports of cyberhate victimization also increased with age, but no significant gender differences were found. The most common reason for cyberhate victimization was sexual orientation. Only a minority of respondents (7.5%) reported being cyberbullied, and this was the least common experience. Also in this case, the most common reason for cyber-hate was sexual orientation.

The results show that parents and caregivers tend to underestimate their children's victimization experiences. Only a minority of them knew what had happened to their child.

*Keywords:* *cyber-socialization, cyberhate, adolescents' well-being, cyberhate exposure, cyberhate victimization, cyberhate aggression.*

### Relevance

Cyberspace has provided a platform for new social interactions, learning or entertainment opportunities for young people. But it has also given a new way to spread hatred and aggression. In this study, we explored Czech adolescents' experiences with cyberhate and their caregivers' knowledge. Our first goal was to study different types of

experiences adolescents can have with cyberhate. And secondly, to examine caregivers' experience and knowledge of their child's victimization.

We present the results from the report on cyberhate (Bedrosova et al., 2022), which draws data from the first wave of a survey conducted by the IRTIS research group from the Faculty of Social Studies at Masaryk University (Brno, the Czech Republic).

Cyberhate is a form of cyber aggression (i.e., aggression conducted via information and communication technologies) that attacks groups or individuals due to their group characteristics and group identities (Hawdon et al., 2017). Cyberhate is often motivated by negative intergroup stereotypes and prejudice (Mondal et al., 2017) and justifies, promotes, or incites intolerance and discrimination (Council of Europe, 2022; Committee of Ministers, 2022). Involvement of children and adolescents, who are active and avid internet and social media users (Smahel et al., 2020), is particularly worrisome as they are in a sensitive developmental stage when they are forming their attitudes and thus might be more vulnerable to hateful or extremist messages.

The IRTIS study (Bedrosova et al., 2022), which findings we present here, focused on cyberhate targeting three types of group identities: (1) sexual orientation, (2) ethnicity, race, or nationality, and (3) religion. Three types of cyberhate experiences were studied: (1) cyberhate exposure; (2) cyberhate victimization; (3) cyberhate aggression.

### **Methodology**

We interviewed 3,087 Czech adolescents aged 11-16 ( $M = 13.46$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ , among whom 49.8% were girls) and one of their parents, step-parents or legal guardians (i.e., caregivers) aged 18-77 ( $M = 43.35$ ,  $SD = 6.33$ , among whom 67.0% were women). The data was collected in 2021. This report uses data from 2,991 households (i.e., adolescent/caregiver pairs).

The main research method was an online survey (CAWI method). The survey was conducted by the media research agency STEM/MARK. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Masaryk University and it conformed to the ESOMAR and SIMAR ethical guidelines. Informed consents from parents or legal guardians of participating adolescents were obtained.

### **Results**

Among the three types of cyberhate involvement, cyberhate exposure was the most common experience for the interviewed adolescents – 59.3% of them stated they were exposed at least once during the past six months.

The exposure experience increased with age, and its prevalence was the highest among those aged 15-16. We further asked those adolescents, who were exposed to cyberhate at least once, how this happened. The majority (81.6%) of them stated they were exposed unintentionally. However, 18.4% of adolescents were intentionally searching for cyberhate content. Boys and older adolescents (aged 15-16) intentionally sought out



cyberhate more than girls and younger adolescents. Almost all adolescents (90.1%), regardless of whether they were exposed intentionally or unintentionally, reported being at least slightly upset by contact with such content. However, most of them (52.1%) got over this feeling immediately or were upset only for a few minutes. The feelings after exposure depended rather on gender than on age. Girls tended to report feeling upset after encountering cyberhate more than boys.

The examination of cyberhate victimization shows that 12.1% of adolescents became cyberhate victims because of their sexual orientation, 8.0% - their race, ethnicity, or nationality and 6.2% - their religion.

We also asked adolescents about their exposure to online campaigns against cyberhate and aggression on the internet. Adolescents encounter such online campaigns quite commonly: 63.6% reported they had been exposed to such a campaign at least once during the past six months. This percentage was slightly higher for girls (66.6%) than boys (60.5%), and increased with age.

Comparable to adolescents' experiences, their caregivers themselves also reported fairly high exposure to cyberhate – 71.9% were exposed at least once during the past six months (6.8% were exposed once, 38.9% a few times, and 26.2% were exposed monthly or more often). Nearly three-quarters (70.4%) of caregivers were somewhat or very bothered by their cyberhate exposure.

The caregivers of those adolescents, who reported being cyberhate victims, mostly underestimated the occurrence of this experience and had incorrect knowledge about it. Most of them incorrectly stated their child had not been victimized because of sexual orientation (80.5%), because of race, ethnicity, or nationality (76.4%), and because of religion (74.2%), even though the child reported the opposite.

## Conclusions

This research provided a complex picture of adolescents' experiences with cyberhate and their caregivers' awareness of this problem. The findings can contribute to our understanding of the peculiarities of adolescents' cyber-socialization and their experiences with negative and harmful online content. Communication about the internet and media within the family and school environments is essential to children's and adolescents' cyber-socialization.

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