

Students' Victim Behavior on The Internet: Motives and Features

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Abstract

The problem of students' social adaptation to modern pace and style of life, norms and rules that are imposed by the society, as well as the increased relevance of victim behavior prevention in young people on the Internet determine the crucial necessity to study psychological characteristics, factors and mechanisms of victim behavior manifestation in modern youth. The article presents the results of a comprehensive theoretical and empirical analysis of psychological characteristics, factors and mechanisms of students' victim behavior on the Internet in Kazan Federal University (Russia) and Vyatka State Humanities University (Russia). The following concepts are considered: "victimization", "victim", "victim behavior of students". The conclusions are based on the fact that it is in the period of youth that a change in the level of victimhood can lead to students' social disadaptation, which is manifested in a conformal, sacrificial, unconscious, careless behavior, inability to create their own behavioral strategies and take responsibility for their actions. Differential psychology approach was applied to analyze personal characteristics of students manifesting victim behavior. The paper states the need to clarify the factors determining the victim behavior of a person in adolescence and to develop special prevention and correction programs that will contribute to the formation of viability and selectivity of life-critical attitudes, the ability to choose flexible and effective safe behavior strategies in difficult life situations.

Keywords: victimization, victim behavior, the Internet, disadaptation, characteristic features, students.

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Published by Kazan federal university and peer-reviewed under responsibility of IFTE-2019 (V

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International Forum on Teacher Education)

Introduction

Currently, the Internet has become an integral part of modern life, and the number of Internet users is constantly growing. According to the Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation, over the past five years, the number of active subscribers of fixed Internet access in Russia has increased by 9,242,349 people. In particular, from the first to the second quarter of 2017, the number of subscribers increased by 548,031 people from 28,617,975 users to 29,166,006. Today, according to the results of numerous sociological surveys, the main Internet users in Russia are young people aged 18 to 24 (Rudensky, 2013).

The relevance of the study is due to the rapid pace of the spread of victim behavior among young people in the Internet. The growing "internetization" of the Russian society has led to the fact that young people constantly being in the virtual world sacrifice their needs, positive emotions, relationships with important people, unconsciously generating a victimization towards themselves. Quite often, virtual reality becomes a reflection of everyday life situation: victims of bullying and humiliation in real life are attacked in the internet as well. Moreover, Internet users for many reasons may be victims of computer crimes. At the same time, the phenomenon of victimization in the Internet, the features and causes of students' victim behavior in the Web, are not sufficiently researched and developed, which stresses the relevance of the research topic.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of the study is to theoretically substantiate and experimentally verify the causes and characteristics of students' victim behavior on the Internet.

The objectives of the study:

- 1) to reveal the essence and content of the concepts: "victimization", "victim personality", "victim behavior", based on the analysis of psychological and pedagogical literature;
- 2) to study the characteristics students' victim behavior on the Internet;
- 3) to reveal the causes of students' victim behavior on the Internet;
- 4) to identify the content and the necessity of activities for students' safe behavior on the Internet.

Literature review

The problem of potential victims of crimes was studied in Western social pedagogy and psychology in the context of victimology (from "victima" – victim and "logos" – learning) by such foreign and Russian authors as: Vishnevetsky (2010), Malkina-Pykh (2009), Polubinsky (1980), Mendelsohn (1995), Frank (1977), Feldman (2012) and others, who revealed the general scientific categories "victim behavior", "victim personality", analyzed the typical "dangers" at the stage of socialization of the individual. Andronnikova (2004), Zagvyazinsky (2012), Selivanova (2012) and others studied the factors and causes of victim behavior of a person.

Still, there are a number of scientists pointing out its negative effect: Orzack (1998), Griffiths (2000), Davis (2001), Zhychkina (2001), Kandell (1998), Rivman (2002), Young (1998), Young & De Abreu (2010), etc. However, in modern psychology and pedagogy there is not enough experimental research on the problem of student victimization on the Internet, there are only some works that study the psychological characteristics of children and adolescents, namely, Burelov (1991), Kudryavtsev (1998),

Morozova (1992), Perezhogin (2009) and others. At the same time, until now, problems of the genesis of victim behavior, a system of factors determining its occurrence, and features of the victim behavior in young people have not been studied in full.

Victimization in the scientific literature is, on the one hand, the influence on a person of a set of negative external conditions, and on the other - the process of social and psychological changes in a person under the influence of negative external factors that form the "victim's psychology" in it.

Victimization or victim-genesis is the physical, mental, and social features that create a predisposition to making a victim of a person (crime, accident, destructive cult). The concept of "a victim" is pivotal in the definition of victimization and victim personality.

According to Malkina-Pykh (2009), in the context of victimology, "a victim is a person who has suffered physical, moral or property damage from a crime, regardless of whether he/she is found a victim by law or considers himself as such subjectively. It is the victimization of a person that makes him/herself a victim".

According to Odintsova (2007), "a victim is a person endowed with a set of emotional, cognitive, volitional, and behavioral components that have a defensive character and contribute to an unproductive way of solving problems in interaction". It is "defensiveness" that determines the psychological content of the of the "victim" phenomenon.

Her view is shared by the psychotherapist Burno (1999) who states that the concept of defensiveness (Latin *defensio* - defensiveness, to defend) is the opposite of aggression. From Burno's point of view (1999), defensiveness is revealed by such traits as timidity, cowardice, shyness, anxious suspiciousness, proneness to doubt, self-doubt, indecision, pang of guilt. A defensive person is not authoritarian, not aggressive, not inclined to command, but defending oneself, tucking tail in the environment where the aggressive one bares his teeth. Such people are conforming, melancholic, weak, psychasthenic, depressive and anxious individuals.

A victim personality on the Internet is by all means the one addicted to it. Internet addiction is the state of psychological comfort that a person experiences when implementing activities only in the Internet environment, thus the rest of the activity space causes irritation, oppression and total unwillingness to act.

Young & De Abreu (2010) identifies five main categories of Internet addiction:

1. Cybersexual - dependence on interactive chat rooms for "adults" or on cyber pornography.
2. Excessive online involvement - gambling online gambling, dependence on online auctions, and intrusive online trading.
3. Information overload - excessive involvement in visiting websites and searching databases.
4. Computer addiction - an obsessive state while playing computer games or programming, mostly among children and adolescents.
5. Cyber-communicative dependence, that is, dependence on communication in social networks, forums, chats, group games and teleconferences and establishing friendships or "flirting" in the course of communication, which can later lead to the replacement of family members and real friends with the virtual ones.

Cyber-communicative addiction is the dependence of an individual on communication in the most popular communication medium of the Internet — social networks. Many people, once in a social network, are involved in it, and the more time they use it, the more difficult it is for them to live a real life. Obviously, speaking of the victimization behavior on the Web, it is necessary to focus on the victimization and aggressive behavior of the individual. Cyberbullying is an example of victimization and aggressive

behavior on the Internet. The founders of Cyberbullying Research Center Sameer Hinduja and Justin Patchin define this phenomenon as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Manifestations of cyberbullying are threats, spreading rumors and gossip, sending out mocking images, violation of network “property” by means of a virus infection (Vandebosch & Cleemput, 2009), impersonalization by logging into the victim’s account or revealing personal information. E-mails, social networks, instant messengers, blogs, forums, chats, web pages, Skype, SMS-messages serve as platforms for cyberbullying. Participants in cyberbullying are bullies (those who bully), victims, bullies-victims (those who were maltreated and were engaged in maltreatment themselves) and witnesses (Smith, Dempsey, Jackson, & Olenchak 2012). Moreover, according to the authors, the witnesses can also indirectly assist the aggressors by laughing at the target of bullying.

Thus, victim behavior of students is considered in the given study as careless, risky, thoughtless, violating the safety standards on the Internet, both in relation to one’s own personality and the environment of an individual.

Further, let’s study in detail the characteristic features of the victim personality.

Yunatskevich (2007) distinguished the following types of victim behaviour:

- a) by manifestations in various life situations - criminal, political, economic, transport, domestic, military, etc.;
- b) by the dominant psychological mechanisms - motivational, cognitive, emotional-volitional, mixed;
- c) by the number of people involved - individual, group, public (mass);
- d) by the attitude to the professional activity in ensuring security - non-professional (general civil) and professional;
- e) by the psychological level of victimization - weakly expressed, moderately expressed and strongly expressed;
- f) by terms of time - situational and relatively stable (Yunatskevich, 2007).

Psychologists Malkina-Pykh (2009) and Klachkova (2007) studying certain aspects of victim behavior emphasize that people choosing the social role of the victim are (consciously or unconsciously) involved in various criminogenic situations with a subconscious goal of getting possible sympathy and support from others. At the same time, the victim’s position is justified by being set on helplessness, unwillingness to change one’s own state without outside interference, low self-esteem, intimidation, increased suggestibility, readiness to learn victim behavior, and mastering victim stereotypes from society.

According to Zagvyazinsky (2012) victims can be divided into three main groups of people:

1. People characterized by the predominance of negative moral and psychological features, causing victim behavior in a conflict situation. This group can be attributed to persons with various kinds of characteristic deviations (psychopathy, neurosis, proneness to emotional decompensation or affects, increased demonstrativeness, negativism).

2. People, generally positive, fall victims to abuse due to their careless, imprudent behavior. These are people (mostly children and adolescents) who, due to lack of life experience, cannot adequately and timely estimate the possible negative consequences of their own behavior (e.g. agreed to get into the car of a stranger; thought it would not be dangerous to jump from the bridge, etc.). The behavior of this group can vary from unwisely to provocative. Such victim behavior is legitimate though imprudent.

3. People that fell victims to objective circumstances. This group may include persons with various types of congenital ailments (childhood disabilities) who survived situations associated with a high risk to life (victims of disasters, forces of nature).

According to Yakovleva (2009), victim personal characteristics of young people are due, among other things, to the specific characteristics of the Russian mentality as victimized mentality developed over the centuries. According to Mudrik (2008), on the individual level, the victimization of a person depends on temperament and some other characteristic features, on the genetic predisposition to self-destructive or deviant behavior. According to many researchers, family is also a source of formation of a certain victim type through the mechanisms of co-addiction, identification, determining the transmission of parents' styles and behavior patterns by children. The dangers emanating from the family give rise to such problems as the feeling of abandonment or resistance to hyper-care; low self-esteem, self-rejection; the use of antisocial and self-destructive ways of adapting to parents or methods of compensation and self-affirmation.

Thus, we can identify the characteristic features of adolescence, which lead to victim behavior on the Internet: personal immaturity, manifested in the inability to self-consciously choose information that is relevant to one's interests, beliefs and plans; conforming mindset of a person, imitativeness, readiness for perception of manipulative informational influence; state of society that promotes increased suggestibility, mass infection with ideas. Moreover, it is an unresolved crisis of meeting with adults manifested in the development of an identity crisis with the emergence of a conflict between the self-identity of the individual and the proposed social roles and replaced by an intimacy crisis with the formation of psychological isolation; the Internet environment is attractive for resolving such crisis due to the possibility of constructing the desired reality.

Methodology

Research methods

In accordance with the purpose and objectives of the study, the following research methods were used:

1) theoretical: the study and analysis of psychological, pedagogical and methodical literature on the problem of the research; analysis, synthesis and synthesis of empirical data; cause-and-effect analysis of pedagogical experience data;

2) empirical: questioning, testing, survey;

3) methods of qualitative interpretation and data processing.

Diagnostic tools

The characteristics of students' victim behavior on the Internet were defined by means of the following methods:

1. Schubert's "Risk Readiness Diagnostics" technique made it possible to assess the degree of students' risk-readiness, and to what extent this risk is necessary and reasonable. The technique helped to determine the orientation of students towards achieving success and avoiding failures as well as to assess the subject's predisposition to become a victim.

2. Andronnikova's "Test of propensity for victim behavior" (2004) was carried out to determine the level of potential and realized victim behavior as a person's characteristic trait. The technique is designed to diagnose some aspects of young people's behavior associated with the realization of internal potential victim behavior and determine the leading type of victim activity of the individual.

3. Toncheva's "Addiction to cyber-communication" questionnaire (2012) was conducted to diagnose the level of addiction to cyber-communication of young people, that is, the level of dependence on communication in social networks, forums, chats, group games, video conferences.

Research implementation

The study was conducted in three stages:

At the first (theoretical and exploratory) stage, the analysis of the problem was carried out in the psychological, pedagogical and methodological literature on the research topic; the conceptual framework and research base were determined; methods of the research were selected.

The study was conducted on the basis of Kazan Federal University (Kazan) and Vyatka State Humanities University (Kirov). The study involved students aged 17-19. At the first stage of the study, 85 first-year students of Vyatka State Humanities University and 97 first-year students of Kazan Federal University (KFU) were surveyed with the aim of identifying students at risk – the ones prone to victim behavior. It should be emphasized that the results of the victimization level diagnosis in the two samples turned out to be approximately the same.

Out of 85 students of Vyatka State Humanities University, 56 students were identified as the ones prone to victim behavior, which is 65.9% of the total number of students participating in the study and 59 students of KFU accounting for 60.8%, respectively.

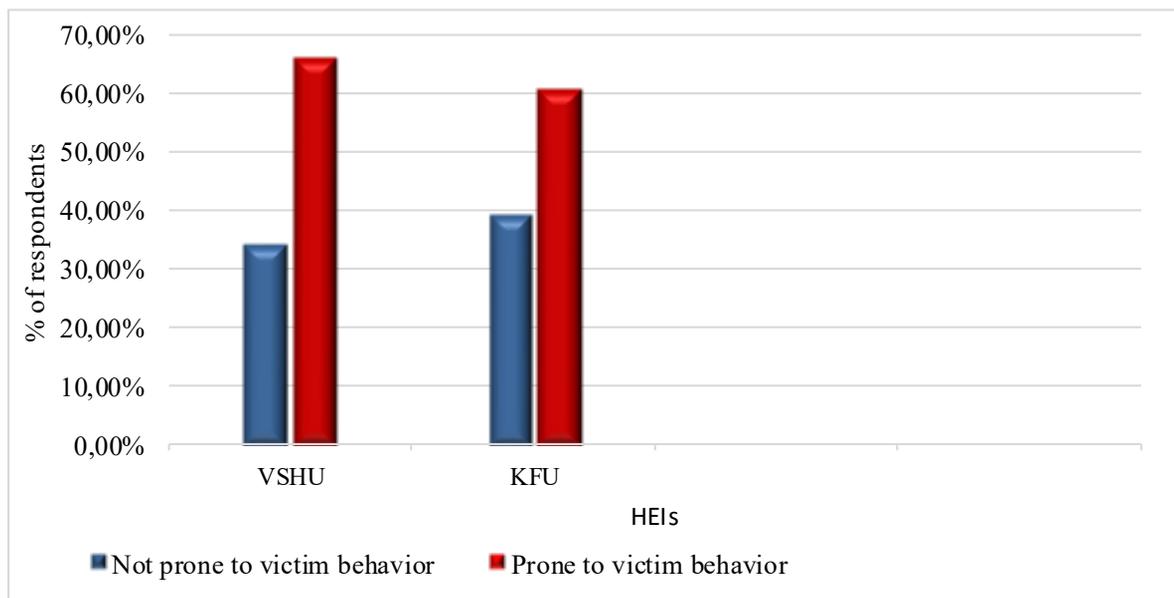


Fig.1. Characteristic features of students' behavior

At the second (experimental) stage, the research hypothesis was tested, the causes and features of students' victim behavior on the Internet were determined.

At the third (resumptive) stage, the systematization and processing of research results were carried out, theoretical and experimental conclusions were made.

Results and discussion

Features of students' victim behavior in the Internet. Proneness to risk.

As a result of a survey of young people at risk, the following results were obtained. According to Schubert's "Risk Readiness Diagnostics" technique, 48.2% of respondents of Vyatka State Humanities University and 42.3% of KFU respondents have values close to standard. 41.2% of respondents of Vyatka State Humanities University and 40.2% of KFU respondents are prone to risk. High level of proneness to risk is accompanied by low motivation to avoid failures (protection). Risk willingness is directly proportional to the number of mistakes made. The desire to take a risk violates the need for security, reduces the level of subjective control, which increases the susceptibility of the subject to become a victim. Moreover, a low level of subjective control can lead to hyper-victimization. Hyper-victimization is characterized by a stuck desire for thoughtless risk-taking, experiencing euphoria from overcoming excessively dangerous obstacles, provoking critical and conflict situations. 10.6% of respondents of Vyatka State Humanities and 17.5% of KFU respondents were too careful. This means that students have a need for increased security, the Internet included. Such people have a low self-esteem and a limited number of social contacts, avoid difficulties and realities of modern life. Self-realization of a student in this case may be constrained, social passivity may appear, leading to dissatisfaction with achievements, a feeling of vexation, or envy. On the one hand, prudence on the Internet will help protect against excessive agitation or excitement and prevent from being victims of computer frauds. However, obsessive caution can lead to the emergence of personal victim phobias that impede the development and self-realization of the individual.

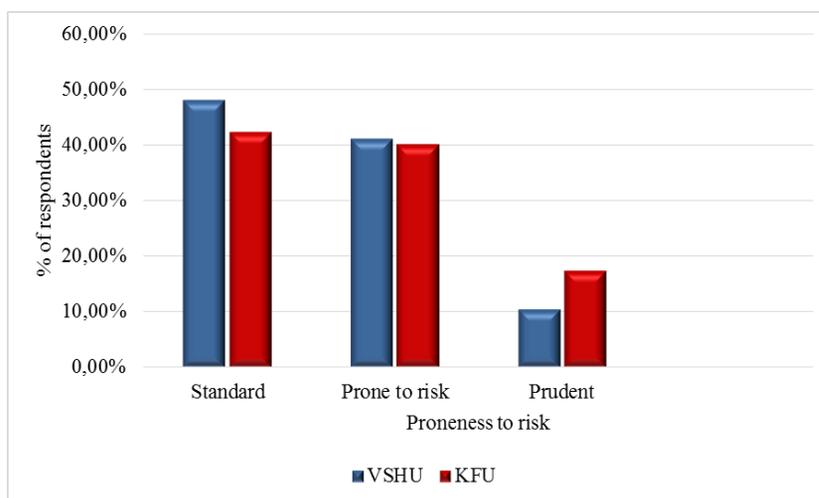


Fig.2. Students' proneness to risk

Features of students' victim behavior in the Internet. Proneness to victim behavior.

According to the results of Andronnikova's "Test of propensity for victim behavior" technique implementation, 35.3% of students of Vyatka State Humanities University and 29.8% of students of KFU are prone to aggressive victim behavior, which manifests itself in frequent aggression in the form of attack or other provocative behavior (insult, slander, bullying). They are characterized by the intentional creation

or provoking a conflict situation. Their behavior can be a realization of the typical antisocial orientation of the individual, within the framework of which aggressiveness manifests itself in relation to certain individuals and in certain situations (selectively). These students are inclined to antisocial behavior, violation of social norms, rules and ethical values just neglecting them. Such people are easily amenable to emotions, mostly negative; they are rather expressive, dominant, impatient, quick-tempered. 62.4% of respondents of Vyatka State Humanities University and 72.1% of respondents of KFU are prone to independence and insulation. They have a great desire to stand out from the peer group, to have their own perspective in every possible situation. They are irreconcilable to the opinions of others, authoritarian, confrontational. It is such a behavior that attracts the aggressor. They are characterized by strong skepticism, internal vulnerability, leading to the increased desire to isolate from others.

The most accessible and open resource of the Internet that offers maximum opportunities for personal expression is chat. Online chat provides a person with the unique chance for self-expression that could not be found in the real world. Spending a lot of time in chat rooms without a clear goal, people sacrifice their desires, change their principles for the sake of this circle of communication. They are forced to discuss topics they are not interested in, or to take the side of the majority in key issues in order to stay the part of the community. 55.3% of students of Vyatka State Humanities University and 59.7% of KFU students are prone to self-damaging and self-destructive behavior. They are characterized by self-sacrificingness accompanied by the active behavior of a person, provoking a victim situation by the request or appeal. Such people are inclined to self-inflicting behavior, which is expressed in risk-taking and reckless behavior, often dangerous for themselves and others. They are not aware of the consequences of their actions or just make little account of them, hoping that everything will work out. Self-damaging behavior of students on the Internet can be manifested in a strong Internet addiction, which causes irritability, a sense of self-destruction and fear.

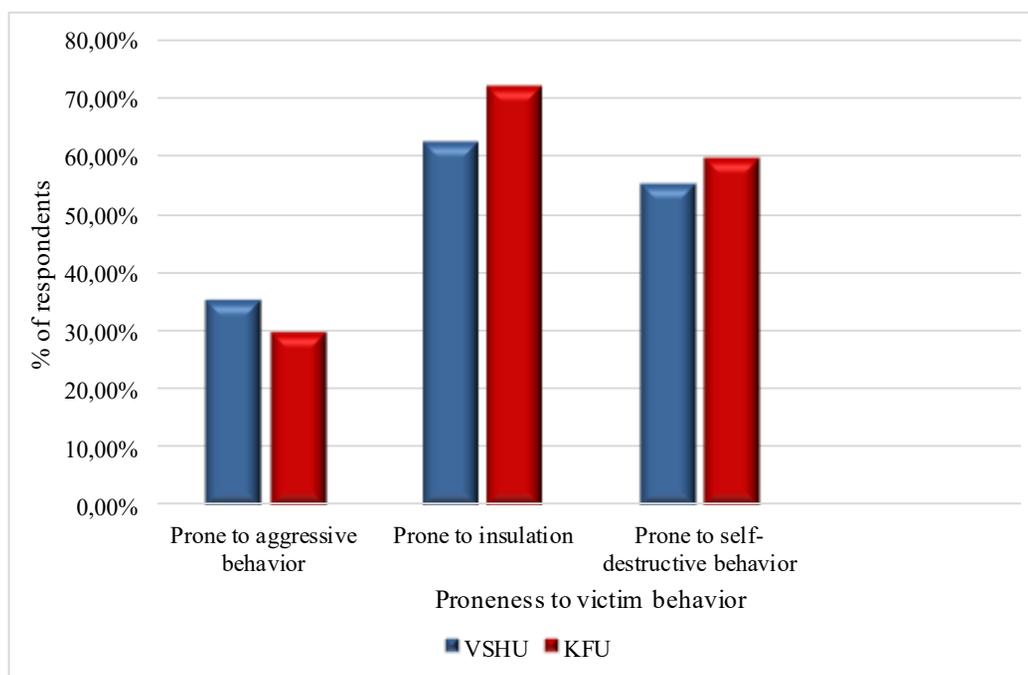


Fig.3. Students' proneness to victim behavior

Features of students' victim behavior on the Internet. Level of addiction to cyber communication.

To study the level of students' addiction to cyber communication we conducted Toncheva's "Addiction to cyber-communication" questionnaire (2012). According to the results of the study, there was not identified a high level of addiction to cyber communication in the studied samples in Vyatka State Humanities University, while in KFU 3.09% of respondents have a high level of cyber addiction. 63.5% of students of Vyatka State Humanities University and 45.3% of KFU students manifested a low level of addiction to cyber communication. 36.5% of students of Vyatka State Humanities University and 51.5% of KFU respondents have an average level of addiction to cyber communication, which means social networks affect a person's life and cause some problems. The diagnostic results showed that 80% of students of Vyatka State Humanities University and 58.7% of KFU respondents are online for more than 2 hours per day and frequently or constantly have an irresistible desire to use a social network. 62.4% of students of Vyatka State Humanities University and 41.2% of KFU students use a social network frequently or seldom to get away from personal problems.

It should be noted that excessive enthusiasm for communication on the Internet can lead to substitution and restriction of traditional forms of communication, to social incompetence of the individual. Due to social incompetence, a person becomes a victim of deviant behavior - deviant victimization occurs and a person masters deviant patterns and behaviors.

Research of the motives of students' victim behavior in the Internet

As a result of a survey of young people at risk, the following results were obtained. According to the results of Odintsova's (2007) questionnaire "Type of role-related victimization", 63.5% of students of Vyatka State Humanities University and 41.2% of KFU students have a high level of role-related victimization. Students received high scores, which indicate a low level of viability, lack of meaningful life-sense orientations and preference for non-constructive behaviors (avoidance or escape behavior, antisocial and aggressive actions). Such people are characterized by frequent mood swings, and particularly decrease in optimism. As a result, they are pessimistic about what is happening, engage in self-reproaching activity and, therefore, often experience emotional discomfort. Self-accusations are combined with accusations of others and self-pity. They are characterized by dissatisfaction with their daily activities (experiencing boredom, longing). They are often stressed out and sensitive, touchy and vulnerable. Victim individual tries to decline responsibility for what is happening, blaming other people for any troubles. Individuals with a high level of role-related victimization are prone to avoid problems; they accept the situation and do not want to change anything, as they believe nothing will improve and any attempts are useless. Moreover, according to the results of the study, it turned out that 30.6% of students of Vyatka State Humanities University and 22.6% of KFU students often assume the "social role of the victim". They feel lonely, unnecessary and suffer deeply about it. Propensity to blame others is combined with self-reproach. They are touchy and consider other people more attractive and successful. Such people are less flexible in their relations with people, find it more difficult to adapt in the society.

The results of the study allow us to conclude that the reasons for the victim behavior of students on the Internet are personal characteristics that contribute to the development of a person as a victim. These characteristics include clearly expressed passivity, avoidance of responsibility, loss of one's own identity, a tendency to depression, avoidance or escape behavior when overcoming difficulties. At the same time, student age is sensitive for the development of self-esteem and self-affirmation of a person; in addition, young men and women have to solve problems of separation, formation of ego-identity, establishing

relationships with peers, mastering new social roles, however, communication problems are particularly acute: shyness, impulsiveness and uncompromising judgment. We can state the fact that the lack of control over the activities of students on the Internet, together with the attractiveness of the “virtual world” of cyberspace, is becoming a real reason for the formation of cyber-addiction and student victimization.

Conclusion

The conducted study allows us to conclude that:

1. The characteristics of students' victim behavior on the Internet are: high level of proneness to risk, the violated need for safe behavior on the Internet; frequent manifestations of aggressive behavior on the Internet, including cyber-bullying; the inclination for self-damaging and self-destructive behavior in the form of Internet addiction; low level of cyber addiction accompanied by a significant impact of social networks on the life of a young person; sacrificing one's needs, positive emotions, relationships with significant people for the sake of self-expression and standing out from the peer group in Internet chats.

2. The motives for the victimization of students on the Internet are both the social factors of victimization: the specific characteristics of the Russian mentality, the conditions and characteristics of family upbringing, and the individual psychological factors - the personal characteristics of the victim personality.

3. To date, there is no properly developed system of measures aimed at preventing the realization of young people's victimization on the Internet. The methodological basis and psychological conditions are not sufficiently developed to carry out preventive measures in this direction in a correct way.

4. The results of the study indicated the need to develop preventive and psycho-correctional measures aimed at promoting students' safe behavior on the Internet, which will allow young people to become less vulnerable to the negative impact of the Internet and to form viable life-purpose mindset, to fully realize their abilities, to act flexibly and effectively in difficult life situations.

Acknowledgements

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University. The reported study was funded by RFBR, project number 19-013-00814A.

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