

# FACTORS DETERMINING VULNERABILITY ON ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS AMONG TEENAGE GIRLS ATTENDING A CHILD DAY CARE CENTRE

Lilia Žukauskienė

Rasa Skališienė

Klaipėda University, Lithuania

**Abstract.** *The article presents the results of the qualitative research which provide a deeper understanding of the factors determining vulnerability on online social networks among teenage girls attending a Child Day Care Centre. The research has involved the specialists from Child Day Care Centres of different towns and districts of Lithuania. A version of a systematic grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) has been applied to conduct the research; it has helped to construct the phenomenon – Insight into threats on online social networks: “One step and everything can end up badly”. By applying the paradigmatic model of “cause and effect” of the systematic grounded theory, reasons for the development of this phenomenon, contextual and intervening factors, strategies of actions/interactions applied by the specialists as well as the manifested consequences have been distinguished.*

**Keywords:** *Child Day Care Centre, online social networks, teenage girls, vulnerability.*

## Introduction

Today, the Internet is an important part of everyday life of young people; it provides numerous opportunities for learning, leisure, and communication. Online social networks are described as a fast-developing part of the Internet (Haataja, 2010); they unite people of common interests who themselves create the content of a particular website and interact with each other virtually (Wellman & Marin, 2009). By participating on online social networks (further referred to as OSN), young people often face a variety of risks that pose a threat to their safety. The problem of vulnerability on OSN is particularly acute in adolescence, since it is precisely at this age period when the peak of risky participation on online social networks is reached (Gamez-Guadix et al., 2016; Schilder et al., 2016; Targamadzè, 2016; Vanderhoven et al., 2014; Vandoninck et al., 2014; Steijn, 2014; Turow & Nir, 2000).

Scientific studies (Notten & Nikken, 2014; Paluckaitė & Žardeckaitė-Matulaitienė, 2016; Pociūtė & Krancaitė, 2012; Wolak et al., 2008; Noll et al., 2013; Rosen, 2007) have identified the significance of the social context for risky involvement of adolescents in OSN: adolescents who are growing in

dysfunctional and/or single-parent families often lack social skills; therefore, their participation on OSN is prone to higher risk exposures. Socio-cultural, economic, and educational crisis prevails in social risk families, and child development disorders are determined both by the objective situation in the society and by the subjective experiences of family members and their attitude to the crisis situation (Kovachevikj et al., 2009).

It is noteworthy that, according to the data of the *Lithuanian Department of Statistics* (2016), there are about ten thousand social risk families in Lithuania and about nineteen thousand children are being raised there. In Lithuania, assistance to children from families at social risk is provided by *Child Day Care Centres* (further referred to as *CDCC*) which not only ensure social services but also organise children education (Catalogue of Social Services of the Republic of Lithuania, 2006).

According to the results of the study called *Life Online - Through Children's Eyes* (2017), girls spend more time communicating on social networks than boys. Therefore, teenage girls' communication on OSN might often lead to their greater vulnerability in the following aspects: harassment, bullying, persecution, exploitation, sexual harassment, or seduction (Dowdell & Bradley, 2010). Girls are more likely to publicise sexual photos on social networks (Rafferty, 2009); they are more inclined to share information about their daily activities with others (Williams & Merten, 2009); and they are more often exposed to the threats of sexual nature (Wolak et al., 2008).

There are studies on the relationship between adolescents' gender and their self-presentation in social media (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015; Campbell & Twenge, 2015) differences in online activities from the point of view of gender (Johnson, 2011); dangers for girls and boys in the virtual space and their safety (Livingstone et al., 2014); risky behaviour of girls and boys on the Internet (Notten & Nikken, 2014; Hasebrink et al., 2009) involvement of teenage girls and boys in OSN and its relation to romantic and/or sexual experience of relationships (Sorbring et al., 2014). These studies discuss the peculiarities of teenage behaviour on OSN of both sexes, but they lack deeper and more comprehensive insights into girls' involvement in OSN.

**The purpose of the research** is to deepen the understanding of the factors determining vulnerability on OSN among teenage girls attending a *CDCC*.

**Tasks:**

1. To identify the reasons determining vulnerability on OSN among teenage girls attending a *CDCC*.
2. To highlight the contextual and intervening factors related to teenage girls' vulnerability on OSN.

3. To distinguish the strategies of actions/interactions of specialists of a CDCC aimed at reducing teenage girls' vulnerability on OSN and their consequences.

### **Methodology of the Research**

The *qualitative research method* has been chosen for the empirical research. A qualitative research helps to answer the question of how a particular phenomenon occurs and it allows raising the question of why this phenomenon is expressed in one way or another (Silverman, 2011). It is an inductive approach to research: from a practical analysis of the phenomenon towards theory construction (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). The research has been accomplished by applying the grounded theory methodology (further referred to as GTM), *a version of a systematic grounded theory* developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Based on the authentic experiences of participants of the research and by using tools of high-level of conceptualisation, explanations of the phenomenon under investigation are performed which later can be transferred to other environments of social reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Amsteus, 2014; et al).

The application of the grounded theory has helped to reveal the development of the phenomenon (its reasons, context, factors, strategies of actions, consequences); it provided with an opportunity to look through the eyes of participants of the research, through their subjective experiences and language.

Therefore, this study aims at revealing the opinions of specialists of Child Day Care Centres on the problem of vulnerability of teenage girls on online social networks and the factors that determine it.

*Participants of the research.* 20 specialists from Child Day Care Centres of different towns and districts of Lithuania have participated in the interview. The sample has consisted only of those objects that are sufficiently informative in respect of the research, i.e. the need for research as well as the relation of the investigated subjects to the problem under investigation have all been taken into account.

The research was carried out in the period of 2015-2016 in *Children Day Care Centres* in various cities of Lithuania. Data on the experiences of specialists in this aspect of research have been collected by means of a *semi-structured interview*.

The analysis of the research data has been carried out in respect of the methodology of the grounded theory, by gradually implementing all three stages of data coding: *open, axial* and *selective*. The phenomenon – The insight into threats on OSN: “*One step and everything can end up badly*” has been developed in the process of axial coding, by means of the coding paradigm of a *systematic version of the grounded theory*, which allows us to view the emerging category-

phenomenon from different perspectives (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The phenomenon has been given a name that was embedded in the words of participants of the research *in vivo*.

### **The Research Findings**

The phenomenon – The insight into threats on OSN: “*One step and everything can end up badly*” highlights the dangers of girls’ involvement in virtual space. In the course of the development of the phenomenon one can perceive the experiences of specialists of a CDCC due to insecure involvement of teenage girls in OSN. Specialists’ concern about the well-being of girls in the virtual space also becomes prominent. This phenomenon helps to understand the reasons and purposes of girls’ risky involvement in OSN, reveals specialists’ actions that strengthen adolescents’ skills and promote the risk-free involvement in OSN.

**Reasons.** The research data reveal that workers of a CDCC are concerned about girls’ involvement in OSN. The main reasons for their concern are the following: risky girls’ actions, the threat posed by other users of OSN, striving to get the attention “at all costs”. It becomes evident that the feeling of threat experienced by specialists is due to unsafe behaviour on OSN among the girls themselves, often due to their willingness to receive attention “at all costs”, which further leads to the expression of problematic girls’ behaviour on OSN.

**Risky girls’ actions.** According to participants of the research, girls often face risk due to their own unsafe actions on OSN. They emphasize the problematicity of girls’ information published on OSN, notice that it is namely girls at social risk that provide a lot of personal information in the public domain: “*Girls behave risky by publishing their personal information on OSN, by exposing their contact details, their location, hobbies, photos*” (9th informant). The sense of threat is reinforced by the list of girls’ friends on OSN as well as by their interaction and meetings with strangers: “*There are hundreds of friends in a friend list of a twelve-year-old or thirteen-year-old girl, there are older people, foreigners with whom her relationship is unclear; various thoughts appear; she is messaging on OSN with older guys, whom she later meets, is going for a ride in cars*” (7th informant). Specialists are afraid that teenage girls are involved in various online communities where they can get access to harmful, dangerous information: “*Teenage girls are involved in various online communities that are now plenty of on Facebook; they are involved in communities that propagate various harmful habits, promote bodily self-harm in various forms, even extreme cases of suicide can be observed there*” (12th informant). Particular emphasis is put on the sensitive problem of cyberbullying. Specialists note that teenage girls at risk often try to resolve their disagreements and emerging problems by insulting

and threatening in the public space: *“If they quarrel with others, on the Internet, under their photos there appear threats, curses, and offensive comments”* (15th informant). The research data reveal that by their actions girls often violate not only their own security limits, but also the limits of other people, for example, their friends or other Internet users. As specialists point out, *“On OSN younger girls tend to publish photos in which there are other people who are not aware that they are being published”* (7th informant). Girls share information of inappropriate content that may harm not only them but also other younger Internet users: *“Girls watch and sometimes for other children distribute recordings of pornographic nature”* (8th informant); or: *“Several girls who harm themselves, cut their hands and feet, take pictures of this and share photos on Facebook”* (15th informant).

Specialists note that girls’ actions are more courageous on online environment than in real life; their photos on OSN are very open, sometimes even vulgar, their communication is too brave: *“Girls behave on OSN boldly, share their contacts, and meet strangers”* (9th informant). Girls are often inclined on OSN to create such their image which would allow to think they are older than they really are: *“By publishing photos on OSN they try to look older, sexier; they lie about their age, choose hairstyles, cosmetics, clothes that would make them look older”* (5th informant). According to specialists, it is precisely age-concealment that may influence the fact that girls may get older men’s attention and intimate, indecent suggestions. It is also noticed that on OSN girls often use taboo language, street slang, etc.: *“Photos, posts are commented in taboo language, a lot of swear words, jargons, etc. are used; this allows us to form a certain opinion of the culture of behaviour of a girl”* (3rd informant).

**The threat posed by other users of OSN.** While working with girls, in their stories specialists also perceive the threat posed by other users of OSN as well as the threat posed by the published information of violent content: *“Teenagers tell that they are often disturbed by information on the Internet published by others, for example, pictures of tortured animals; they complain that after seeing such pictures it is hard to fall asleep at night”* (12th informant). Specialists note that girls receive offers, intimate queries that pose a threat to them: *“Because they had received offers on the Internet, they had been invited to work as models, they blurted out that they had been invited to prostitute, to take part in photography; I think it is a big threat”* (14th informant). Often, girls get suggestions to get involved or to share the links of doubtful OSN communities: *“Once a girl told me of how she had been invited to join the group of “suicides” on Facebook, and as I understood from her story, in this group there were people with addictions, people who were suffering from anorexia, bulimia, people who were talking about the ways and possibilities of suicides, well, people who had reached a certain*

*bottom in their life... The girl did not join the group, but she and her friends had been invited and asked to share the link of the group”* (16th informant).

***Striving to get the attention “at all costs”.*** Another aspect that stimulates specialists’ worries is girls’ desire to be popular and visible on online environment. For girls at risk *“attention is important as the weather, because if they had not received it in another environment, they can make up here [on OSN]”* (6th informant). It is very important for girls to get as much attention from the Internet users as possible, therefore, often they are not inclined to behave safely on OSN: *“It is important for them that everybody would see their information; they themselves are looking for friends among strangers, so what to talk about safety settings, they want this publicity as much as possible”* (15th informant). In this way girls test their social status seeking to be valued and recognized by the users of a social network: *“If your picture has received many “likes”, it seems that you are better or more popular than others”* (14th informant). Specialists have noticed some posts in the Facebook chronicles of a girl, where for a “like” of her photo she promises to write a personal message (8th informant). Specialists express their concern that girls often publish photos of their naked bodies, personal intimate information in a desire to get the answer. Striving to get the attention “at all costs” girls often neglect the sense of security.

The reasons determining girls’ vulnerability on OSN highlighted by the specialists of a CDCC confirm the insights by other researchers. The authors analysing the problem of adolescents’ involvement in social media (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015) also perceive the interrelationship between adolescents’ gender and their self-presentation; they discuss the encountered risks and the issue of adolescents’ safety (Livingstone et al., 2014). Scientific research has revealed that girls are more likely to share information about their daily activities (Williams & Merten, 2009); they are more often faced with the threats of sexual nature (Wolak et al., 2008), harassment and bullying (Dowdell & Bradley, 2010). Adolescents’ actions on OSN are often directed towards the formation of an attractive self-image (Campbell & Twenge, 2015) and associated with the experiences of romantic and/or sexual relationships (Sorbring et al., 2014). Risky involvement of young people in social networks can be displayed in three ways: a young person may be the initiator of a risky activity on OSN, in another situation he may be the continuator of a risky activity initiated by other users and he may be exposed to risky activities of other users, to encounter their consequences (Hasebrink et al., 2009).

**Context.** The analysis of the research data helps to understand that the anxiety of specialists of a CDCC about the involvement of teenage girls in OSN often occurs under certain conditions, the main of which are the following: *biographies of girls’ lives, OSN as the world of illusions, risky behaviour is fashionable and vulnerability of younger girls.* Specialists’ thoughts help to

explain the threats posed to girls on OSN, the context of girls' living conditions, their perception of OSN and their vulnerability in the virtual space.

**Biographies of teenage girls' lives.** Research data reveal that biographies of teenage girls' lives often create a certain environment for their actions on OSN. Girls' biographies are revealed through the characteristics of their families: a family at social risk is usually characterised by the problems of alcohol consumption, illicit activity, lack of a warm relationship, which is compensated by things, parents' lack of responsibility for their children, care for the younger children is given to older children, etc. (2nd, 4th, 5th, 8th informants). According to specialists, girls, who grew up without love and sense of security often naively hope to find them in the virtual space: "*Girls like homeless kittens become attached to everyone, without considering that one can "caress behind the ear", and the other can throw them out somewhere*" (10th informant). Such experiences in life in particular create the environment in which girls are looking for love without realizing that they can be wounded and/or harmed even more. The fact that these girls "*grew up without love like snails without shells*" (10th informant) makes them particularly vulnerable to actions by other people. They do not have a shield that can protect them and help them understand how to appropriately behave in the virtual space. Specialists note that "*it is ironic, but girls, who grew up in families that lacked warmth, foster one main dream – to find a husband and have a family*" (2nd informant). This striving can also be one of the motives encouraging risky adolescents' involvement in OSN because a desire to find a partner for life can stimulate thoughtless behaviour.

**OSN as the world of illusions.** Another contextual factor of this phenomenon, according to specialists, is girls' misconceptions about OSN. The analysis of the research data allows us to realize that girls' assessment and understanding of the virtual social space often go beyond the reality. According to one participant of the research, OSN to girls is "*a world of illusions which they themselves create, where they live and which they often do not distinguish from the reality*" (9th informant). Often girls who have received attention and recognition on OSN are even more likely to get involved in this environment. The world of OSN is more pleasant to them: "*It is fun for them to live in their created world where they are loved, where boys write them, where their photos are commented, where they get a lot of attention; but the return from the virtual space to reality is sometimes painful*" (1st informant).

**Risky behaviour is fashionable.** Risky teenagers' behaviour on OSN is promoted by the examples of such behaviour demonstrated in their environment. Research data have revealed that teenage girls often observe the models of inappropriate involvement in OSN among their peers, in their families and in society.

The context of the phenomenon is revealed through the environment which is created by girls and where it is fashionable to behave risky, and such actions on OSN are even encouraged: *“She boasts what risky actions she had performed, it is even “a fad” to behave like this, she proudly tells other peers how she interacts with older men on OSN, how they got acquainted, how they had been writing each other, how they met; there are girls who are afraid to interact like this so others urge them: “Don’t be silly, nothing will happen here” (15th informant). Workers of a CDCC point out that the forms of risky behaviour are also propagated for children by their family members: “If her mom is also interacting with different kind of people, if she has her eyes glued to the computer, does not come out of Facebook, then her daughter will think that it is normal, that it should be this way” (9th informant). Tendencies of risky behaviour are perceived by specialists as prevalent not only in daily routines of the youth, but it is also noticed that the norms of such behaviour are declared and implied in the virtual space by the society itself: “On Facebook you can see how everyone is sharing funny videos, the content and jokes of which are vulgar, full of violence, sex scenes, and it is normal for everyone; everyone is simply “liking”, “sharing”...” (8th informant). Participants of the research believe that such forms of behaviour that harm and impair the consciousness of individuals are supported in the society. Therefore, actions that pose a threat while being involved in OSN become a certain norm or even a trend if somebody wants to get more attention, become popular and visible. Fashion dictated to teenage girls is especially significant since it is demonstrated by certain groups that are important to them: peers, family and society.*

***Vulnerability of younger girls.*** The feeling of the threat for the participants of the research is reinforced by the fact that younger girls are more vulnerable on OSN. This is due to several reasons. First of all, younger girls’ behaviour on OSN is different: *“I think we should work with younger teenage girls more because they tend to publish more open photos than older teenage girls” (11th informant). Another reason which reveals the vulnerability of younger girls is their incapability to recognize the threat: “Now they often do not associate OSN with dangers, thus, we say that bad things can happen, and they, especially the younger ones, do not even have such thoughts “on their little minds” (12th informant).*

The contextual factors identified by the specialists of a CDCC confirm the findings of other studies that adolescents raised in families at social risk are more likely to have a higher probability of exposure to risk on OSN (Notten & Nikken, 2014; Paluckaitė & Žardeckaitė-Matulaitienė, 2016). The authors of earlier studies (Pociūtė & Krancaitė, 2012; Wolak et al., 2008; Noll et al., 2013) also emphasize that poor culture of relationship in girls’ families, the lack of understanding and comfort, painful experiences and dissatisfaction with the quality of their lives are essential factors determining adolescents’ careless involvement in OSN and leading to the cases of girls’ victimization on OSN.



**Intervening factors.** In the course of the research it has become evident that specialist's anxiety about the involvement of teenage girls in OSN is determined by the following essential factors: lack of skills, underestimating the threats, lack of privacy on OSN is the problem of the society, parental withdrawal.

**Lack of skills.** Specialists are convinced that the lack of girls' skills in choosing what information is suitable for publishing in the virtual space, the inability to protect their privacy and their data create the preconditions for the real threat on OSN. According to them, *"teenage girls have unlimited opportunities for communication on OSN but they do not have enough skills thus they pose a danger to themselves by their own actions"* (6th, 8th, 13th informants).

Specialists note that girls' skills are often limited to the creation of a questionnaire; they are not capable of realizing of other their necessary actions on OSN. It is believed that this may be due to language barrier, since some girls do not have any skills of the English language (or do not know the language well enough), they are not capable of protecting their data or performing other important actions (4th, 10th informants). Due to the lack of skills teenage girls often lose their passwords to the OSN account, they do not know how to deal with problems they face on OSN. Specialists also point out that girls lack for information where they should seek for help if they are faced with a problem. According to participants of the research, *"administrators of social networks should pay more attention to personal data protection and assume at least partial responsibility in order to protect younger users of OSN"* (9th informant).

**Underestimating the threats.** Specialists claim that girls fail to assess the threats in a virtual environment. This is one of the root reasons affecting teenage girls' vulnerability on OSN.

According to specialists, girls' understanding of the potential threats on OSN is very superficial, often they do not see any. A specialist gives an example when one teenage girl, who had got acquainted with a boy on the Internet, was about to meet him, although she did not know him completely. She was advised not to meet with a stranger, the risk of such meeting was explained to her: *"We told the girl that it is a big risk, but when girls are lost in love, they are in a fog and they do not see anything"* (15th informant). Similar examples are provided by other participants of the research who had talked with girls about the impending dangers of choosing strangers as their friends on OSN. In such cases, girls are encouraged to act risky by only one motive – "getting as many friends as possible", and they do not even think about security: *"It does not matter what friends; they simply do not think that it is not the quantity, but the quality that matters"* (3rd, 8th, 9th informants). Another observation by the specialists is that girls are aware of the threats, but *"they lack the understanding that it is not a joke, that it is very serious"* (14th informant).

**Lack of privacy on OSN is the problem of the society.** Participants of the research believe that actions which pose a threat on OSN are not only the problem of teenage girls – lack of privacy on OSN is the problem of the whole today's society: *“The lines and all the boundaries between what is personal and private, what we should keep for ourselves, for the closest people, have been deleted long time ago; all boundaries disappear when children's photos since birth are published on OSN, when our everyday events are published, when we try to resolve our disagreements there...”* (4th, 1st, 16th informants). Consequently, contemplations and discussions about girls' actions on OSN are often inseparable from the standards declared in the society and the patterns of behaviour in the virtual space. The issue of publicity on the online environment has already become a global problem, and it is becoming a certain standard (7th informant).

**Parental withdrawal.** In the course of revealing intervening factors of this phenomenon, one more factor which is inciting specialists' stress and worry about girls' vulnerability on OSN has been observed – it is the withdrawal of their parents (guardians) from their lives and from their activities on OSN.

As it is evident from the statements of specialists, the withdrawal of parents from the lives of adolescents is twofold: either parents are completely not involved in adolescents' lives, or they are indifferent to girls' activities on OSN. According to participants of the research, *“there are parents who are completely not involved, they do not know how to use a computer or how to turn it on, they only play card games and that's it; there are very many of such parents...”* (11th, 8th informants). Participants of the research have also revealed painful experiences of girls' lives in families at risk: *“Parents are drowned in alcohol, in their friends' companies, this child is not necessary, he or she is like “a fifth leg to a dog”* (10th informant); parental involvement in girls' lives is very minimal. The research has revealed that parents are not interested in or they are simply indifferent to girls' activities on OSN, some of them even believe that involvement in OSN ensures their safety because teenage girls *“are not tramping in streets”*: *“Parents are not interested in the activities of adolescents on OSN, they feel safer when the child is at home on Facebook and not somewhere else”* (7th, 9th informants). Parental indifference affects the vulnerability of adolescents on OSN, not all parents understand what social networks are and how they work: *“Parents are not interested in girls' activities online, some of them even do not know how to use the computer, not to mention social networks”* (10th, 15th informants). Participants of the research point out that parents themselves show their children the examples of inappropriate involvement in OSN: *“One mother is constantly coming to the library because she is single and she is looking for acquaintances online, she is so involved that she forgets her daughter; but she does not understand it, she needs these acquaintances, new dads, other things are not important to her... the girl sees everything, so what can be expected in the*

*future?*” (2nd informant). The provided examples of parental withdrawal from the lives of adolescents are often full of specialists’ helplessness, anxiety, stress and worries, they constantly raise the question whether they are capable of doing something if “*everything is the opposite in the family*”.

According to specialists of a CDCC, girls’ skills and abilities to assess the threats on OSN are still very weak. This insight is confirmed by other studies (Steijn, 2014; Schilder et al., 2016) which stress that adolescence is a period when young people are particularly vulnerable because the ability to critically assess the environment and to resist the mischiefs is not yet fully developed. Studies by Turow and Nir (2000) suggest that young Internet users, due to limited their ability to make decisions, are more likely than adults to be deceived, persecuted or exploited by others on the Internet.

**Strategies of actions/interactions.** The analysis of the research data helps to understand that the following strategies of actions are used by specialists in order to protect teenage girls on OSN: computer use regulations in a CDCC, prohibitions to use OSN and encouraging parental involvement in the lives of adolescents.

**Computer use regulations in a CDCC.** One of the strategies applied by the specialists to identify and solve the manifestations of problematic involvement of adolescents in OSN is the establishment of regulations of the Internet/computer use at a CDCC. This order establishes the time, sequence of the Internet use, possible online activities, etc. According to specialists, in a CDCC adolescents’ involvement in OSN must be restricted because it is becoming a problem: “*Since there is Wi-Fi in a CDCC, girls practically do not “get off” their phones, they are basically sitting on Facebook, so we try to introduce a rule that we do not use phones in the centre*” (11th informant). It is suggested for those teenage girls who violate the rules to change their activities or they are absolutely prohibited to use the computer: “*If I see that she is doing something wrong on OSN, I tell her either to change the activity or I will no longer allow her to sit at the computer*” (14th informant). Specialists understand that the activity of adolescents on OSN is their entertainment and a part of their free time; on the other hand, activities at a CDCC is primarily focused on such areas of teenage activities as doing homework, catering, etc., only then their leisure time is organized, then they are allowed to use the Internet. Participants of the research acknowledge that computer use regulations aim to address the problem of girls’ vulnerability on OSN.

**Prohibitions to use OSN.** Another strategy of action applied by the specialists is various prohibitions: bans to use the Internet or OSN completely or prohibitions to perform certain actions on OSN. Specialists reveal that sometimes when they are tackling the problems of teenage girls’ vulnerability on OSN, they are overwhelmed by the feeling of helplessness and if not seeing another way to protect teenage girls, they prohibit to use the Internet: “*Girls ask why they cannot*

use Facebook, we reply that we cannot protect them” (2nd informant). Prohibitions are often applied because the attempt to solve the problem of adolescents’ vulnerability on OSN by means of conversations and warnings is equal to “*tilting at windmills*” (8th informant). Specialists of a CDCC are often worried about risky girls’ involvement in OSN: “*We are worried about the consequences of girls’ risky activities, yet everything is fortunate, but one can never know when something bad may happen*” (8th, 9th, 16th informants). Another case which encourages specialists to apply bans is a painful experience of one tragic event: “*Communication and meetings of one child who had been attending a CDCC with strangers from OSN ended up in his death*” (10th informant). Specialists note that the online space is difficult to control and manage, but in order to protect teenage girls from dangerous activities on social networks, they take the following steps: girls are banned from publishing vulgar photos on OSN, looking for information that is not appropriate for their age, being involved in networks that are dangerous, and sometimes they are absolutely prohibited to use the computer in order to reduce the chances of misuse and to avoid tragic consequences.

***Encouraging parental involvement in the life of a CDCC.*** As one of the strategies used to reduce the potential threats of OSN, parental involvement in the life of a CDCC is promoted. Maintaining closer relationships with the family strengthens and stimulates parents’ perception of the involvement of adolescents in OSN.

Specialists motivate why, in their opinion, it is necessary to encourage parents to participate in the activities of adolescents on OSN: “*If there is no parental control – there are no levers to control the threats online*” (8th, 11th informants). Participants of the research observe that the work with families at social risk is rather specific, such parents (guardians) are reluctant to talk, to cooperate, thus firstly one has to win their favour (which is easier to achieve if parents participate in the activities of a CDCC), to talk with them about everyday matters, to discuss the bothering issues.

According to participants of the research, in order to reduce girls’ vulnerability on OSN, it is necessary to explain to teenage girls the rules of safe behaviour on OSN, to teach them to follow the appropriate order. When communicating with girls’ parents it is important for specialists to discuss with them the issues of safe Internet use, to inform about positive communication, the creation of the rules for using the Internet and their support in the family. Studies by other authors (Rosen, 2007) have found out that children with whom parents had not discussed the issues of online safety exhibited a more dangerous online behaviour than those children with whom parents had talked about safe Internet use.

**Consequences.** The strategies applied by the specialists of a CDCC in order to reduce teenage girls' vulnerability on OSN have some consequences. The analysis of the research data helps to understand the main consequences of the development of this phenomenon: teenage girls' resistance, "forbidden fruit is sweeter", negative experiences on OSN, parental involvement.

**Teenage girls' resistance.** Specialists are worried that the strategies of prohibitions or regulations applied in a CDCC do not always bring positive results; in some cases, feedback is completely the opposite. According to participants of the research, teenage girls, due to some peculiarities of their development, tend to rebel and resist to the advices and decisions of adults, therefore, in the case of the established order they "*try the limits*" (12th, 15th informants). One particular case demonstrates that a girl was not allowed to bring the tablet to a CDCC because her behaviour on OSN was not always appropriate. However, after some time, she continued to ignore the rules of the centre and used her tablet (6th informant). Specialists acknowledge that prohibitions for the activities on OSN are sometimes short-term and not always effective: "*The problem is resolved only for some time; after I said it – it worked, the girl did not view inappropriate information on OSN; but later I noticed that she was continuing to share inappropriate information because if she thinks that I do not see, she is again viewing the information that does not meet her age*" (1st informant).

Although specialists understand that the results of activities with teenage girls are often minimal and short-term, they do not give up and consider how to help the girls to adequately recognize and overcome the threats on OSN.

**"Forbidden fruit is sweeter".** Another consequence of the strategies of actions/interactions which is closely related to the first one is the fact that the more teenage girls have something forbidden, the more they want it. In adolescence, the desire for independence is so strong that any prohibition makes them even more likely to behave the opposite: "*Adolescence is a disease that passes, but in this phase it is necessary to find a medicine to help teenage girls*" (10th, 2nd informants). According to the workers of a CDCC, although prohibitions in emergency situations are beneficial, they sometimes have to be used carefully, especially if working with teenage girls: "*You know, you can quickly achieve the opposite result, they have a "blind" desire to resist adults' demands, to wish for something that is not allowed, thus these prohibitions sometimes "bring more fire"*" (14th informant).

**Negative experiences on OSN.** Specialists note that when involved in OSN girls often have negative experiences due to their own or other users' actions. The loss of their OSN accounts due to unprotected passwords is named by the specialists as one of the most commonly learned girls' negative experiences: "*There are very often repeated cases when other children steal girls' passwords,*

which leads to writing in their profiles inappropriate, malign things that the girl is of a free behaviour, doing all kinds of things for a certain price, etc.” (15th informant). Negative girls’ experiences are related to cyberbullying, which, according to specialists, is another serious reason why girls suffer painfully: “Cyberbullying occurs constantly, how much psychological violence girls have to endure” (13th informant).

Specialists note that girls’ negative experiences are also related to the harassment by the adult men, when teenage girls receive intimate suggestions, or after they publish their contacts they receive phone calls with indecent offers (15th, 9th, 13th informants). The girls themselves often do not perceive anything negative in such experience; it is more noticed by the specialists.

**Parental involvement.** Data of the research reveal that strategies of specialists’ actions oriented towards parental involvement often fail to achieve positive results, therefore specialists are worried and experience the feeling of hopelessness. Parents are reluctant to cooperate, they avoid the specialists of a CDCC. Participants of the research compare the work with families at social risk to “nightmare”, saying that there is nothing to motivate them when all the invitations and attempts to get involved in the life of a CDCC are not responded, and if encouraged more persistently, even drastic decisions are made: “More courageous efforts to motivate parents for cooperation end up in parents’ prohibitions to their children to attend the centre” (16th informant).

It can be stated that specialists of a CDCC perceive the real threat to girls on OSN but they acknowledge that the strategies of their actions / interactions to manage this phenomenon do not yet yield long-term positive results. However, they do not give up and think about how to help the girls to recognize and overcome threats on OSN.

According to participants of the research, in adolescence the desire for independence is so strong that any prohibition makes the adolescents even more likely to behave the opposite, girls are not able to recognize the risks and to perceive the consequences of their behaviour. Studies by other authors have identified that teenagers have difficulties in controlling their impulses, they have the need to suppress the potential negative effects, which in turn may increase the risk, especially if they publish their photos, declare about their needs and reveal their identities (Vanderhoven et al., 2014; Targamadžė, 2016). The results of this research have revealed that girls often do not see any negativity in negative experiences on OSN. What specialists perceive as a threat, girls associate it with the positive and/or opportunity. In the context of adolescents’ online experiences, a contradiction is also found by other authors (Vandoninck et al., 2014): sharing sexy photos and intriguing comments may be those things that fascinate adolescents, but they may also be a precondition for gaining negative experience, for example, for receiving particularly offensive comments, etc.

## Conclusions

Specialists of a *CDCC* identify the following *reasons* determining girls' vulnerability on OSN: risky girls' actions on OSN, which are manifested in over-courageous and open interactions, publishing personal information, dissemination of information of harmful content; the threat posed by other users of OSN when the information of violent content is published, when intimate offers are proposed, when the links of doubtful OSN communities are shared; striving to get the attention "at all costs"; and the desire to be popular and visible.

The *contextual factors* related to girls' vulnerability on OSN are: the biographies of their lives in families at social risk, where the lack of a warm relationship is attempted to be compensated in the virtual space; illusory understanding and evaluation of the virtual space; a desire to behave fashionably; higher vulnerability of younger girls.

Girls' vulnerability in the virtual space is influenced by the following *intervening factors*: the lack of skills in choosing which information is appropriate for publishing in the virtual space; failure to protect privacy; frequent underestimating the emerging threats on OSN; in the society prevailing problem of privacy on OSN; parental withdrawal from girls' lives and activities on OSN.

In order to reduce teenage girls' vulnerability on OSN specialists apply the *strategies of actions/interactions*: at a *CDCC* establish the regulations of the Internet/computer use; in certain cases impose prohibitions to use OSN; encourage parents (guardians) to get involved in the life of a *CDCC*, i.e. to participate in various activities, to talk, together discuss the bothering issues.

The strategies applied by the specialists of a *CDCC* in order to reduce the vulnerability of girls on OSN have the following *consequences*: girls' resistance to the decisions and prohibitions of adults; their desire to behave contrarily to what is advised; negative girls' experiences due to their own or other users' actions; insufficient involvement of parents (guardians) in the activity of a *CDCC* and in girls' activities on OSN.

Although specialists' actions do not yet yield positive results, they are looking for ways and means to reduce girls' vulnerability on OSN and to help the teenage girls to recognize and overcome the threats on OSN.

Only after the factors determining teenage girls' vulnerability on OSN are identified it is possible to determine the direction for the development of their safe and responsible behaviour on OSN in order to achieve the active role and equal participation in this process by girls themselves.

## References

- Amsteus, M. N. (2014). The Validity of Divergent Grounded Theory Method. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 13, 71–87.
- Atkins, L., & Wallace, S. (2012). *Qualitative Research in Education*. London: Sage Publications.
- Catalogue of Social Services of the Republic of Lithuania (2006). *Valstybės žinios*, Nr. 17, 589. Downloaded from <http://www.socmin.lt/index/php-2103340925>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. California: Sage Publications.
- Doornwaard, S. M., Bogt, M., Reitz, E., & van den Eijnden, R. (2015). Sex-Related Online Behaviors, Perceived Peer Norms and Adolescents' Experience with Sexual Behavior: Testing an Integrative Model. *PLoS ONE*, 10 (6), 47 – 59.
- Dowdell, E. B., & Bradley, P. K. (2010). Risky internet behaviours: a case study of online and offline stalking. *The Journal of school nursing*, 26 (6), 432 – 443.
- Campbell, W. K., & Twenge, J. M. (2015). *The narcissism epidemic: Living in the age of entitlement*. New York: Free Press.
- Gamez-Guadix, M., Borrajo, E., & Almendros, C. (2016). Risky online behaviours among adolescents: Longitudinal relations among problematic Internet use, cyberbullying perpetration, and meeting strangers online. *Journal of Behavioural Addictions*, 5 (1), 100 – 107.
- Haataja, M. (2010). *Social media applications in marketing communications of the marketing oriented companies*. Aalto University School of Economics, Marketing Master's Thesis.
- Hasebrink, U., Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., & Olafsson, K. (2009). *Comparing Children's Online Opportunities and Risks across Europe: Cross-national Comparisons for EU Kids Online*. London: LSE.
- Herring, S. C., & Kapidzic, S. (2015). Teens, Gender and Self-presentation in Social Media. (Forthcoming, 2015). In: J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of social and behavioral sciences, 2nd edition*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Johnson, G. M. (2011). Internet Activities and Developmental Predictors: Gender Differences Among Digital Natives. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 10 (2), 64–76.
- Kovachevikj, R., Bijedikj, M., Kuralikj-Kjishikj, L., & Muftikj, E. (2009). Family risk factors as indicators of behavioral problems with youth. *Journal of special education and rehabilitation*, 10, (1-2), 63-71. Downloaded from [http://jser.fzf.ukim.edu.mk/pdf/20091/63-71\\_PSIHOLOSHKO-PEDAGOSHIKI%20PREGLEDI\\_%20Ranko%20Kovachevikj.pdf](http://jser.fzf.ukim.edu.mk/pdf/20091/63-71_PSIHOLOSHKO-PEDAGOSHIKI%20PREGLEDI_%20Ranko%20Kovachevikj.pdf)
- Life online through children's eyes*. (2017). Findings from the Children's Advisory Panel. Downloaded from <https://www.teliacompany.com/globalassets/telia-company/documents/about-telia-company/life-online---through-childrens-eyes-cap-report-2017.pdf>
- Lithuanian Department of Statistics*. (2016). Downloaded from <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize?hash=a425a426-4eef-42ef-a375-04dc6e735e02#/>
- Livingstone, S., & Helsper, E. (2008). Parental mediation and children's internet use. *Journal of broadcasting & electronic media*, 52 (2), 581– 599.
- Livingstone, S., Kalmus, V., & Talves, K. (2014). Girls' and boys' experiences of online risk and safety. In: Carter, C., Steiner, L., McLaughlin, L. (Eds.). *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender* (pp. 190-200). London: Routledge.



- Noll, J. G., Chad, E., & Barnes, J. E. (2013). Association of Maltreatment With High-Risk Internet Behaviors and Offline Encounters. *Pediatrics, 10*, 510–517.
- Notten, N., & Nikken, P. (2014). Boys and girls taking risks online: A gendered perspective on social context and adolescents' risky online behavior. *New Media & Society, 5*, 1 – 23.
- Paluckaitė, U., & Žardeckaitė-Matulaitienė, K. (2016). Students' Engagement in Risky Online Behaviour: The Comparison of Youth and Secondary Schools'. *The European Proceedings of Social and Behavioral Sciences, 11*, 266 – 273.
- Pociūtė, B., & Krancaitė, E. (2012). Paauglių aktyvumas vs pasyvumas interneto socialiniame tinkle „facebook“ ir sąsajos su jaučiamu vienišumu bei asmenybės bruožais. *Psichologija, 8*, 46–79.
- Rafferty, F. (2009). Boys should be boys – is it that simple? *Education Journal, 116*, 32–41.
- Rosen, L. D. (2007). *Me, MySpace, and I: Parenting the net generation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schilder, J. D., Marjolein, B., Brusselaers, J., & Bogaerts, S. (2016). The Effectiveness of an Intervention to Promote Awareness and Reduce Online Risk Behavior in Early Adolescence. *J Youth Adolescence, 45*, 286–300.
- Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting Qualitative Data. A Guide to the Principles of Qualitative Research*. 4th ed. London: Sage Publications.
- Sorbring, E., Skoog, T., & Bohlin, M. (2014). Adolescent girls' and boys' well-being in relation to online and offline sexual and romantic activity. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 8* (1), 1–16.
- Steijn, W. M. P. (2014). A Developmental Perspective Regarding the Behaviour of Adolescents, Young Adults, and Adults on Social Network Sites. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 8* (2), 9–18.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basic of Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. London: Sage Publications.
- Turow, J., & Nir, L. (2000). The Internet and the family: The view of U.S. parents. In: C.von Feilitzen & U. Carlsson (Eds.), *Children in the new media landscape* (pp. 3313–3348). Göteborg, Sweden: UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen.
- Targamadžė, V. (2016). The New Generation at the Crossboard of Cultures: Socialization Aspect. *Multicultural Studies, 1*, 65–76.
- Vanderhoven, E., Schellens, T., & Valacke, M. (2014). Educating teens about the risks on social network sites. *Media Educational Research Journal, 43* (22), 123–131.
- Vandoninck, S., d'Haenens, L., & Smahel, D. (2014). *Preventative Measures: how youngsters avoid online risks*. Downloaded from <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20III/Reports/Preventivemeasures.pdf>
- Wellman, B., & Marin, A. (2009). *Social Network Analysis: An Introduction*. Downloaded from <http://www2.units.it/dotstoriafil/MARIN%20WELLMAN%202009.pdf>
- Williams, A. L., & Merten, M. J. (2009). Adolescents' online social networking following the death of a peer. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 24* (1), 67–90.
- Wolak, J., Finkelhor, D., Mitchell, K., & Ybarra, M. (2008). Online “Predators” and their Victims: Myths, Realities and Implications for Prevention and Treatment. *American Psychologist, 63*, 111–128.