

## STUDY ON YOUTH'S SAFETY SENSE

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**Abstract.** *The safety of young people in today's society is a topical and socially significant issue, as the younger generation is the future of society. In the everyday work of law enforcement and emergency agencies, significant attention is paid to promote the safety of young people for preventive purposes. Often, the methods used in practice tend to be outdated or ineffective due to the channels chosen. In order to promote the safety awareness of young people, it is necessary to find out the opinion of young people about the safety factors that are relevant to them, as well as various habits that affect them and the information channels for reaching them. In order to find out the understanding of safety within youth, a study was conducted in which 4281 children and young people in Finland, Latvia and Lithuania were surveyed. More than half of the respondents were in the age group of 14 to 18 years. The survey data indicated that young people believe that they are lacking knowledge about First Aid, safety on water and psychological safety. It is worrying that 19 percent of surveyed young people have experienced sexual abuse. The obtained and analysed survey data will provide an opportunity to improve the safety awareness promotion for young people. In the research conclusions proposals have been developed on the types of safety education for young people that can be used by educators and safety specialists.*

**Keywords:** *children, information channels, promotion of safety, reach, safety, youth.*

### Introduction

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2015) explains that violence against children may take the form of physical and sexual, and emotional violence and may occur in a variety of settings, such as at home, school, in the community or on the Internet.

One of the ten core values of the social value classification system developed by social psychologist Schwartz (Schwartz, 2006) is safety, which includes health, social harmony, order and stability, security, etc.

In a study published in 2016 by Hillis, Mercy, Amobi and Kress (Hillis, Mercy, Amobi, & Kress, 2016), compiling data on approximately half of the world's countries, concluded that over the course of 2015, more than 1 billion children and young people aged 2 to 17 had experienced violence.

These figures are surprising, so everyone should take care of the children –

our future. In order to reduce violence against children and young people, as well as to increase their sense of safety, it is necessary to find out what is the current level of safety awareness of young people.

The aim of the research: to clarify and systemize the information obtained in the study on the safety awareness and understanding of young people, identifying their views on current safety factors, as well as various behavioural habits that affect them.

### **Preparations before the Study**

“Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) is the leading network of cities in the Baltic Sea Region with the members from all ten Baltic Sea countries. Founded in 1991 in Gdansk, UBC is a voluntary, proactive network mobilizing the shared potential of its member cities for a safe, smart and sustainable Baltic Sea Region. The UBC cooperates with numerous Baltic and European organisations.” (Union of the Baltic Cities, 2020, p. 47). In January 2021, the UBC consists of 68 member cities (Union of the Baltic Cities, 2021). In accordance with the Statute of the UBC (Union of the Baltic Cities, 2019), a General Conference is organized at least once every two years, which is the highest body in the Union and to which representatives of each member city are invited to participate. Various working and discussion groups are also organized during the General Conference. In October 2017, within the framework of the 14<sup>th</sup> General Conference of the UBC, which took place in the Swedish city Vaxjo, in a discussion conducted by the author (Union of the Baltic Cities, 2017), 20 young people aged 15 to 18 from all over the Baltic Sea region were invited to a small focus group discussion. By dividing the young people into two smaller discussion groups, discussions were carried out about the most significant safety risks of young people, which undermine the sense of safety among them. The first group of young people mentioned quite wide and different security risks. Highlighting separately the threats existing in educational institutions and workplaces, because today young people are not only educating, but also looking for different job opportunities, of course, depending on the age group. There was also a separate mention of safety at home and in their free time, and additionally, the safety while traveling was mentioned. It is likely that travel safety was mentioned because many young people came to the venue from other countries, thus further thinking about traveling in general. The importance of health in safety matters was also emphasized, but the main emphasis was on intoxicating substances and harmful habits. Meanwhile, the discussions by the second group also raised the main topics related to various safety elements, in addition to highlighting various possible safety problems at home, as well as possible solutions to how this sense

of safety could be promoted, for example by educating about first aid and self – defence. It is important to mention that the young people of the second discussion group highlighted the need to know how to act in various emergency situations in their place of residence and considered this to be an important aspect of safety.

Summarizing and comparing the results of the discussions in both groups, which were conducted independently of each other, the main conclusions of young people on safety factors did not differ from one another, thus gaining confidence that on average these safety risks are of major concern to all young people in the Baltic Sea region. The results of the focus groups have been taken into account in developing the basis for conducting a survey for young people in the Baltic Sea region. It is essential that both discussing groups highlighted Internet and its related risks as the main safety concern, rather than the physical safety. The importance of the Internet for safety among young people is understandable, as today a large proportion of young people use the Internet on a daily basis for a variety of purposes, from education to entertainment and communication. Meanwhile physical safety may not be such a relevant topic for young people, although various physical safety issues were also emphasized in the discussions. Of particular note is the peer harassment and bullying, which was emphasized in the discussions of both groups as a topical issue today, especially among young people. If in the past, before the widespread use of the Internet, the bullying of school and classmates took place only in an educational institution, nowadays, with the help of the Internet, this bullying can take place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, publicly and individually, knowing or even not knowing who the exact bully is. Furthermore, with computer technology and the Internet, this bullying has become more widespread and possibly more abusive. It is important that the young people of both discussion groups have also raised issues related to road traffic, not only as pedestrians, but also as drivers. By understanding the fact that there are various factors that affect road safety directly on the behalf of drivers, it is hoped that today's young people will become more conscientious as future drivers. Both groups also highlighted the safety factors related to sexual violence and harassment, which suggests that examination of this factor is also important in promoting youth safety.

In September 2019, the development of a youth safety survey was launched. In the development of the survey young people from the Latvian city of Liepaja, the Finnish city of Espoo and the Lithuanian city of Kaunas were involved. Additionally, there was an involvement of safety professionals (fire and rescue services, police and civil protection practitioners) from the Baltic Sea region cities who are members of the UBC Safe Cities Commission.

## **Methodology**

The study “Youth for safer youth” was developed in the Baltic Sea region. The survey was conducted in the summer of 2020 in three countries of the Baltic Sea region – Latvia, Lithuania and Finland, with a total of 4281 respondents from these three countries between the ages of 10 and 30. The aim of the survey: to determine the feeling of safety among the young people of the Baltic Sea region in both physical and virtual environments.

The subject of the study: children's and young people's awareness of current and to them important safety factors and aspects. The study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the self-assessment of the young people's sense of safety?
2. How do young people perceive safety information?
3. What are the favourite social networks of young people?

Percentage calculations were used for mathematical statistical processing of the study data.

In order to develop a questionnaire on youth safety, the choice of questionnaire questions was based on the results of a discussion platform of working groups of youth representatives and safety practitioners. The following topics were identified: respondent information, general issues, fire safety, road safety, safety in the Internet environment, safety in public places, health care, family safety, followed by the conclusions.

## **Results of a Study on Youth Safety**

4281 respondents from three countries of the Baltic Sea region participated in the survey - 3156 (74%) from Finland, 702 (16%) from Latvia and 423 (10%) from Lithuania. The majority of respondents were female - 62.7%, but 36% were male, while 1.3% of respondents did not identify themselves with any of both genders. 19% of respondents were under 13 years of age, while the majority (68%) of respondents were between 14 and 18 years of age. Young people aged 19 to 24 accounted for 9% of responses, while 2% of respondents were aged 25 to 29. 2% of respondents were older than 30 years.

Asked to assess their overall sense of safety (Fig. 1) on the scale from 1 to 5, where “1” indicates that the young person does not feel safe, but “5” indicates that the young person feels very safe, a total of 86% of all the surveyed young people indicated that they feel safe or very safe. Most young people feel very safe in Finland (44%), while in Latvia 32% of young people feel very safe, but in Lithuania only 21% of surveyed young people feel very safe. 3% of all young people surveyed feel unsafe.

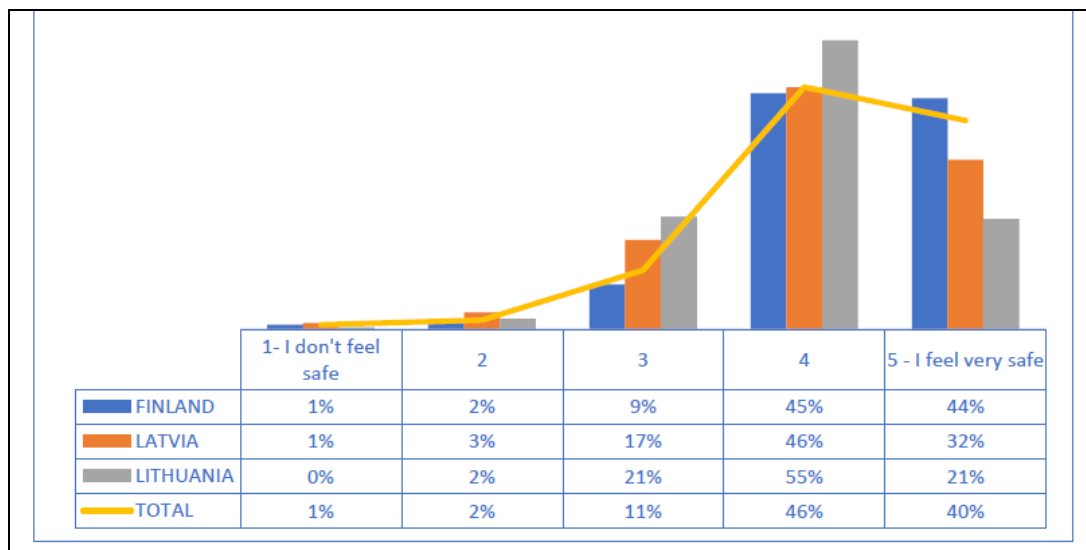


Figure 1 Self-assessment of Young People's Sense of Safety

Assessing their level of awareness of the various safety factors, it can be concluded that young people consider that they have good or average awareness of safety, with the exception of first aid, psychological safety, travel safety and safety on the water. Analysing young people's responses by country, it can be concluded that young people in Finland consider that they have poor knowledge of safety on the water (13.8%), first aid (11.5%) and psychological safety (7.9%). Meanwhile, young people in Latvia have indicated that they have poor knowledge of first aid (34.7%), psychological safety (20%) and travel safety (11.2%). Lithuanian young people believe that they have poor knowledge of psychological safety (21.9%), first aid (20%) and fire safety (10.8%).

13% of all young people surveyed have been in fire. Most of the young people that have experienced a fire were in Lithuania (27%), in Latvia 16%, but in Finland 10% of young people have been in a fire. 53% of the all the respondents have completed fire safety training. If in Lithuania 62% of the surveyed young people have had fire safety training, then in Finland they are 55%, but in Latvia only 39%. When asked if young people know what to do in the event of a fire in their home, 94% of them would know what to do. Analysing these answers by countries, 96% of young people in Finland would know what to do in the event of a fire at home, 92% in Latvia and 85% in Lithuania would know what to do. It can be concluded that although in general only 53% of the surveyed young people have received fire safety training, almost all of them would know what to do in case of fire.

98% of all surveyed young people have been introduced to traffic rules, but only 89% of young people always use a seat belt in a car. The most conscientious are young people in Finland, of whom 91% always wear a seat belt and 8%

sometimes. In Latvia, 85% always wear a seat belt, but 14% use it sometimes, while in Lithuania, 79% always use a seat belt, but 21% use it sometimes. When riding a bicycle, 47% of all surveyed young people follow road traffic and safety regulations (53% in Finland, 27% in Latvia, 32% in Lithuania). 32% of the surveyed young people always use reflectors when walking in the dark (33% in Finland, 25% in Latvia, 31% in Lithuania). It must be concluded that although almost all young people surveyed have learned traffic and safety rules, it is still problematic for them to follow these rules, thus endangering their health and life. It is therefore necessary to remind young people on a regular basis about these rules when they are relevant, as well as the consequences of non-compliance with these rules, with an emphasis on threats on their own health and life rather than punitive sanctions.

When asked about online safety, 94% of all the respondents said that they were familiar with principles of Internet safety, i.e., restricting the processing of personal data, being careful when downloading files, creating secure passwords, shopping in trusted and secure online stores, being careful when "meeting" people online, using antivirus and firewall programmes, etc. However, when asked about the frequency of changing passwords, 62% of all respondents replied, that they change their passwords only when required by the website, while 18% of all respondents do not change the access passwords to websites that require authorization at all. Thus, it is understandable why 21% of all respondents have indicated that their social network or other website account has been hacked. Assessing their sense of safety when using the Internet, 86% of respondents indicated, that they feel safe. Young people in Finland (92%) feel most secure, while young people in Latvia (71%) and Lithuania (72%) feel less secure. A total of 42% of all respondents have been contacted on the Internet by an unknown person who has tried to allure or persuade them to do something. Even more worrying were the answers to the question of whether young people had met people in real life after they had met them online. More than half (55%) of all respondents have met people in real life after they got to know them online. This fact is very worrying because the Internet is used by unscrupulous people who sometimes pretend to be other people. 20% of all respondents indicated that they had been a victim of emotional humiliation online, while 14% of respondents indicated that they had insulted, ridiculed and posted humiliating comments about another person online. Internet bullying is a relatively big problem, because in the past, before the Internet became popular, bullying was mostly only done when people were in the same room, but via the Internet, it can take place continuously and in many different channels and ways. When asked if respondents would act when they saw suspicious behaviour or intimidation and bullying on social networks, about 60% said they would try to do something to prevent it.

In the questionnaire section on safety in public places, a total of 43% of

respondents said they feel safe at mass events in public places, while 48% said they often feel safe, but 10% said they do not feel safe. In supermarkets and public transport, young people feel safer, with only 6% saying they do not feel safe in these places. When asked whether respondents try to avoid possible conflict situations, only 5% of all respondents stated that they do not try to avoid, but 55% always try to avoid potential conflict situations. Meanwhile, 33% of all respondents have found themselves in conflict situations with strangers. When walking in the dark, 28% of all respondents stated that they tend to walk often in dark and unlit places. 54% of all respondents have learned self-defence. If in Finland and Lithuania more than half of the respondents have learned self-defence, then in Latvia they are only 33% of the respondents. Only 14% of the surveyed young people always carry some form of self-defence tools, for example a pepper spray. When asked whether respondents would be able to defend themselves if necessary, 28% of all respondents said that they would definitely, while 53% would be more likely to do so. Only 19% of all respondents said they could not defend themselves. It should be noted that in Finland only 13% think that they would not be able to defend themselves, while in Latvia 33%, but in Lithuania 35% of respondents. It should be highlighted that most of the respondents were minors, but if they had to deal with an adult abuser, then young people would still have little chance to defend themselves.

When answering questions on health safety, 72% of all respondents have received first aid training. It is important to point out that there is a significant difference between the countries represented by the respondents, if in Lithuania 85% of the respondents have received first aid training, but in Finland 74%, then in Latvia 53% of the respondents have received first aid training. It is necessary to provide first aid knowledge at an early age, because, as indicated by 20% of respondents, they have had to perform first aid – 9% have performed it alone, while 11% have performed it together with someone. However, when asked whether the respondents know how to perform Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CRP) correctly, a total of 64% (Lithuania - 70%, Finland - 65%, Latvia - 55%) stated in the affirmative. 95% (97% in Finland, 95% in Lithuania, 87% in Latvia) of all respondents knew how to deal with light cuts, stabs or abrasions. Young people have a very poor knowledge of what to do in situations where they have to help someone who has an asthma attack (35% of respondents would know how to help), diabetes (37% of respondents would know how to help) or an epileptic seizure (29% of respondents would know how to help). Meanwhile, in general, 59% of respondents would know how to help in a situation where a person is intoxicated with alcohol or other narcotic or psychotropic substances. However, even in this case there are significant differences between the countries represented by the respondents - in Finland 67%, in Lithuania 50%, but in Latvia only 29% of the respondents would know how to help. Assessing the answers of

the respondents on health safety issues in general, it must be concluded that in Finland and Lithuania young people are more knowledgeable about how to act in case of various injuries than young people in Latvia.

Assessing psychological safety, in total 70% of young people have encountered negative thoughts and felt depressed (25% - often, 45% - from time to time). Most often, faced with negative thoughts were young people in Latvia - 37% and in Lithuania - 31%, but in Finland - 21% of respondents. In their opinion, 45% of all respondents have experienced a panic attack. 19% (Latvia 21%, Finland 19%, and Lithuania 16%) of all respondents think that mental health complications should be hidden from others and dealt with alone. However, 83% of all respondents would know where to turn for psychological help, but there is a relatively significant difference between the countries represented by the respondents - in Finland 87%, in Lithuania 79%, but in Latvia 68% of young people know where to turn for psychological help.

Thinking about the safety at home and in the family, a total of 87% feel safe, 11% generally feel safe, but 2% do not feel safe. When asked whether the respondents face domestic violence, the provided answers indicated that in total 78% have not experienced it, but 7% no longer do so. Unfortunately, 5% of respondents experience physical or emotional abuse in the family, while 10% experience it sometimes. However, when asked whether respondents have a good relationship with family members, 3% of all respondents said they do not have a good relationship with their family members. The contrast between the countries represented by the respondents can be found by evaluating the answers given between good relations and mostly good relations. In Finland, 82% of respondents have good relations with family members, while in Lithuania they are 62%, but in Latvia only 47%. When asked whether respondents trust their family members, in general 74% always trust, 20% mostly trust, but 5% do not trust them. There are quite significant differences between the countries represented by the respondents, if in Finland 4% of the respondents do not trust their family members and in Lithuania 6%, then in Latvia 11% of young people indicated that they do not trust them. Overall, 77% of respondents know what to do if the respondent or relatives are exposed to domestic violence.

It is worrying that 19% (20% in Finland and Lithuania, 12% in Latvia) of young people surveyed have experienced sexual abuse or harassment in the form of sexual comments, inappropriate touching, etc. Meanwhile, a total of 34% (in Latvia 40%, Finland - 34% and Lithuania - 27%) of respondents have experienced mental abuse.

When asked how safety information is most easily perceived by young people, 50.7% of young people in Finland said that they think, that information was best perceived through practical training by safety professionals, while 48.4% would prefer presentations by safety professionals. 34.9% of respondents



indicated that they like video lessons, but 34.8% can learn from social networks content. 32.9% said they enjoy learning by playing games. However, 73% of the surveyed young people in Latvia indicated that they would like to learn the most with the help of the Internet and social networks, but 53.8% would prefer practical trainings led by professionals. 50.9% admitted that they could learn from the presentations of safety specialists, but 41.4% of young people indicated that they would remember well the information from public events on safety issues. Meanwhile, 72.9% of the surveyed young people from Lithuania would prefer practical trainings by safety specialists, but 56.4% - presentations of professionals. 48.6% of responses on how to make it easier to understand safety information stated that this could be done by public events on safety issues and the content of the Internet, including social networks.

At the moment, young people receive information and education about safety at school (53% in Finland, 55% in Latvia, 57% in Lithuania) and from family and friends (53% in Finland, 51% in Latvia, 53% in Lithuania). Information on safety is also obtained from social networks (27% in Finland, 18% in Latvia, 30% in Lithuania) and news (32% in Finland, 25% in Latvia, 18% in Lithuania).

In 2017, the study “On Media Literacy of 9 to 16-Year-Old Children and Adolescents in Latvia” initiated by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia (Latvijas Universitātes Sociālo zinātņu fakultāte, 2017) conducted by the UNESCO Department of Media Literacy of the University of Latvia, it was concluded that in Latvia the most popular daily activities of children and adolescents from 9 to 16 years of age on the Internet are watching videos (70% of respondents do it every day, 98% admit that they tend to do it at all), communication with short messages (68% of respondents do it every day) and use of social networks (66% of respondents do it every day). A smartphone is the most commonly used device that performs these activities. When describing modern students, E. Welburn and B.J. Eib (Wellburn & Eib, 2010) indicated that young people do not like school, but they like learning, they use social networks during lessons, they often do not read textbooks or reading material, they think that school have no connection with life and do not understand how different test questions can help them solve societal problems or help them in their future work.

As today's young people can be found on social networks and they use them regularly, it was clarified what social networks young people use in Finland, Lithuania and Latvia. The results of the survey indicate that of the social networks, most young people use (Fig. 2) YouTube (94%), WhatsApp (87%), Instagram (87%) and Snapchat (82%). There are significant differences between countries in their use of the two social networks. Facebook is used only by 34% of young people surveyed in Finland, while in Latvia 55% and in Lithuania 93% use that social network. However, WhatsApp is used by 96% of young people in

Finland, 95% in Latvia and only 18% in Lithuania. Therefore, in order to reach young people through social networks, it is necessary to know the most popular social networks among young people in the respective country, because, according to the survey results, they tend to differ even in close and very similar countries like Latvia and Lithuania.

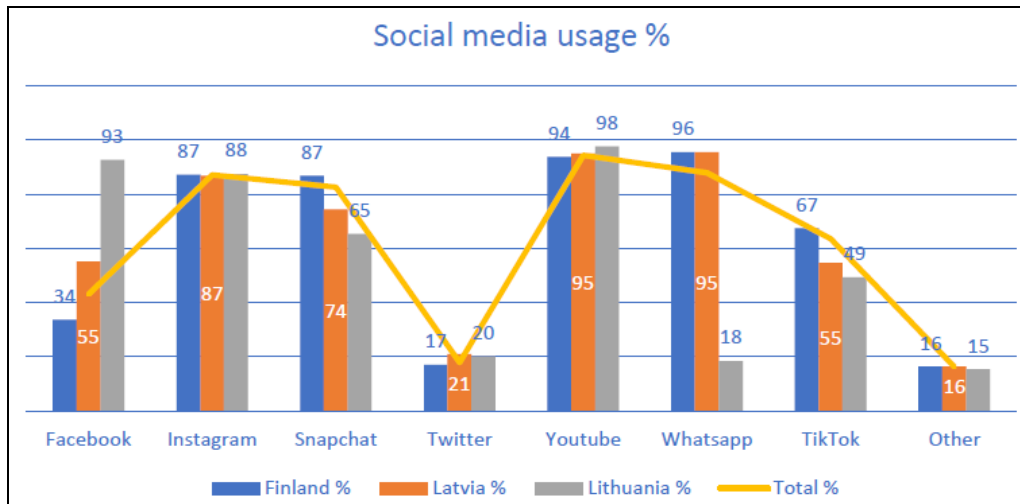


Figure 2 Social Networking Habits for Young People

In total, 19% of young people surveyed follow at least one of the social network accounts of emergency services (police, fire and rescue services, emergency medical services, etc.). In Finland, to at least one of the emergency service accounts in social networks is followed by 16% of respondents, in Latvia - 23%, but in Lithuania 29%.

## Conclusions

Based on the data of the study, it can be concluded that today's young people mostly feel safe. However, when analysing the survey data on individual safety components for young people in Finland, Latvia and Lithuania, it can be argued that there is a need for additional knowledge on a variety of safety factors.

The young people surveyed admitted that they have insufficient knowledge about psychological safety, first aid, fire safety and safety on the water. From the survey data, it can be concluded that in each of the safety factors included in the study, it is necessary to improve and enhance the knowledge of young people so that they feel and are safer. As young people spend a lot of time on the Internet, it is important to pay attention to this factor, because online safety affects psychological, financial and physical security.

Assessing the ways to raise young people's awareness and education on safety issues, it can be concluded that significant impact would provide purposefully designed practical training or presentations led by safety professionals, as well as through the use of the Internet and social networks.

Systematizing and summarizing the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained as a result of the study, it can be concluded that qualitative improvement of young people's knowledge about safety is possible by developing a common methodology for preparing educational materials and implementing them in practice for educating young people, using the various technological possibilities of the Internet.

The results of the study can be used in the work of both teachers and safety specialists, developing educational and informative strategies appropriate for the target audience of young people.

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