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АССЕРТИВНОСТЬ КАК РЕСУРС ПРОФИЛАКТИКИ КИБЕРВИКТИМИЗАЦИИ ПОДРОСТКОВ: ПРОТИВОРЕЧИЯ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ
ASSERTIVENESS AS A RESOURCE FOR PREVENTING CYBERVICTIMIZATION AMONG ADOLESCENTS: CONTRADICTIONS AND PROSPECTS

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается связь ассертивности и кибервиктимизации у подростков. Приводятся данные отечественных и зарубежных исследований, фиксирующие неоднородность этой связи: в одних работах ассертивность отрицательно коррелирует с виктимизацией, в других пассивно-ассертивные реакции выступают предиктором кибервиктимизации. Обосновывается необходимость различать ассертивность офлайн и онлайн при разработке профилактических программ.

Abstract. This article examines the relationship between assertiveness and cybervictimization among adolescents. Drawing on both domestic and international research, it highlights the inconsistent nature of this link: while some studies indicate a negative correlation between assertiveness and victimization, others suggest that passive-assertive responses can serve as a predictor of cybervictimization. The article argues that it is essential to distinguish between offline and online assertiveness when developing prevention programs.

Ключевые слова: Ассертивность, кибервиктимизация, кибербуллинг, подростки, пассивно-ассертивное поведение, профилактика.

Keywords: Assertiveness, cyber-victimization, cyberbullying, adolescents, passive-assertive behavior, prevention.

A teenager online and a teenager at school are not identical subjects of communication. Anonymity, the absence of immediate feedback, and the ability to reread and rewrite a message at any moment alter the structure of a social act. For instance, a statement that is neutral in terms of intonation within a digital exchange might be perceived as an act of verbal aggression—or, conversely, as a sign of poorly defined personal boundaries. Consequently, transposing behavioral patterns from online communication to offline contexts is often inappropriate.

Assertiveness is traditionally defined by M. McKay as «the ability to stand up for one's own interests without infringing upon the interests of others, and to express thoughts and feelings in a socially acceptable manner» [3, p. 45]. In Russian psychology, this concept has been explored by V. G. Romek and A. A. Khokhlov, while in Western psychology, it has been addressed by R. Alberti and M. Emmons. One might therefore assume that a high level of assertiveness reduces the likelihood of victimization in both online and offline communication. However, recent data suggest that this assumption cannot be accepted without certain reservations.

To begin with, a link between assertiveness and victimization does indeed exist, but it is more complex than a simple linear relationship. A study by M. Dierks, involving 648 early adolescents (with a mean age of 12.96 years), demonstrated that using assertive strategies in response to provocation by peers is associated with lower levels of victimization – but only among adolescents

perceived by their peers as having low levels of aggression. For aggressive adolescents, assertiveness did not serve as an effective psychological defense. Thus, even at this level of analysis, it is clear that assertiveness is not a universal protective tool; rather, its effect is mediated by how an adolescent is perceived by those around them.

Lukasz Nickel surveyed 183 adolescents aged 15–18 using self-report questionnaires, through which respondents assessed their own levels of aggression, assertiveness, passive assertiveness, and cyberbullying. This study yielded an unexpected result: both aggressive and «passively assertive» behaviors emerged as the strongest predictors of cyber-victimization. The author defines passive assertiveness as «behavior that outwardly appears to assert boundaries, but is, in essence, reactive and defensive in nature» [9].

In the context of digital communication, this might manifest as a sharp, abrupt response or blocking a provocateur without any explanation. While such behavior may formally meet the criteria for assertiveness, in practice, it triggers an escalation of the conflict and turns the adolescent into a target for further attacks. A study conducted in Palembang, Indonesia, involving 151 high school students during the period of mandatory online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic, identified a statistically significant association between assertive communication and a reduced risk of cyberbullying ($p=0.026$). The authors note that their study design does not allow for the determination of the direction of this relationship; they suggest that it is possible that the experience of being bullied – rather than a lack of assertiveness – diminishes an individual's capacity to behave assertively [8, p. 232].

In Russian research on cyber-victimology, the focus has largely been on describing prevalence and age-related characteristics. According to statistics from the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, cited by A.O. Sinyavina, the number of victims of cybercrime in the first nine months of 2025 increased by 120% compared to the same period the previous year. Her age-based model suggests that adolescents aged 15–17 are most vulnerable to cyberbullying, whereas younger age groups are more frequently targeted by fraud and grooming [4, p. 202]. This implies that prevention efforts for older adolescents should focus specifically on the communicative aspects of online interaction, rather than solely on digital hygiene (such as password management or protection against spam and phishing).

A.I. Vidergold, in an analysis of the victimization of minors targeted by cyber-aggression, identifies a lack of ethical communication skills as a factor that increases the vulnerability of this social group [2, p. 195]. In this context, assertiveness intersects with ethics: the ability to say no without demeaning others, or to set boundaries without resorting to aggression, is more than just a technique—it is a skill that is practiced differently online than in face-to-face conversation.

Because assertiveness in an online environment can sometimes escalate into passive-aggressive behavior, standard assertiveness training programs – if transferred to a digital format without modification – may prove counterproductive. Adolescents are taught to stand up for themselves, but they are not taught to recognize situations where asserting one’s boundaries in a digital exchange might only fuel further conflict. In offline interactions, an aggressor can observe the other person’s reaction and hear their tone of voice, which may prompt them to stop; online, these cues are absent. Online, however, text persists longer, screenshots are preserved, and the potential audience is far broader.

This leads to a practical implication: prevention programs for adolescents aged 14–16 should move beyond a generic «how to be assertive» module and instead offer differentiated scenarios. One set of approaches applies to situations where an assertive response is appropriate and helps reduce risk. Another set applies to situations where the only effective and correct strategy is to disengage, preserve evidence, and seek help from an adult or a chat moderator. This is not a passive-avoidant behavioral strategy; rather, it is strategic assertiveness – focused on ensuring one’s own safety rather than achieving a moral victory in an online exchange.

Thus, we can draw several key conclusions:

1. The relationship between assertiveness and cyber-victimization is neither linear nor unidirectional. International research indicates that passive-assertive reactions can serve as a predictor for victimization in online environments.

2. The impact of assertiveness is moderated by an individual's level of aggression and the broader social context. For adolescents with high levels of aggression, assertive behavioral strategies do not reduce the risk of victimization.

3. In the field of Russian cyber-victimology, adolescents aged 15–17 are identified as the group most vulnerable to cyberbullying, making the development of differentiated communication-based programs a top priority.

4. A promising avenue for future work involves distinguishing between offline and online assertiveness – treating them as distinct constructs – and developing separate methods to assess each.

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