

Medical and legal aspects of psychological influence on children on the internet

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ABSTRACT

The Internet and modern digital technologies offer numerous advantages, including ease of use, efficient information exchange, broad accessibility, and the ability to overcome geographical barriers. However, alongside these benefits, the digital environment also poses serious threats—particularly to minors. These include harmful content, cyberbullying, sexual exploitation, and involvement in illegal activities. Many such threats are carried out through manipulative techniques that influence the thinking and behaviour of underage users, often leading to depression, anxiety, internet addiction, or eating disorders. A particularly alarming consequence is the emergence of destructive behavioural patterns, such as self-harm and suicidal tendencies. Adolescents are especially vulnerable due to emotional instability, lack of life experience, underdeveloped critical thinking, and a tendency toward risk-taking. As a result, they often become targets of psychological manipulation in digital spaces. This article aims to examine the mechanisms of psychological influence on minors on the Internet and to outline the potential medical and legal consequences. The findings reveal that manipulation is often used for purposes that harm the best interests of the child and may endanger their health or even their life. Effective prevention requires an interdisciplinary approach involving technical, educational, psychological, and legal measures, with active participation from parents, educators, healthcare professionals, and law enforcement.

Keywords: Children, Depression, Internet, Psychological influence

Introduction

Today, it is difficult to name any sphere of human life that does not rely on modern information and communication technologies or the Internet. To fully grasp the impact of digital technologies on society, one must consider statistics on global internet usage.

According to Conte N., at the beginning of the 21st century, the number of internet users exceeded 361 million, representing just 6% of the global population in 2000. By 2025, this number had surged to 5.6 billion, or 68% of the world's population. Technological innovations, particularly smartphones, have played a major role in this expansion, with 96% of users accessing the Internet via mobile devices in 2025 [1]. In terms of demographic distribution, Ani Petrosyan reports that as of 2024, internet usage was highest among individuals aged 15-24. In Europe, this age group had the highest penetration rate, reaching 98%, while the global average for the same demographic stood at 79% [2].

As a result, the number of Internet users is fast expanding, with a large portion of this expansion driven by children and adolescents who are increasingly beginning to engage with digital devices—frequently before developing language abilities. Early

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and intensive exposure to the digital environment has a substantial impact on children's social ties and behavioral habits. New terms in public and scholarly discourse include "virtual friendship," "stranger friend," "virtual love," "Facebook depression," "Google amnesia," and so on, showing a shift in notions of social ties, closeness, and support.

The role of digital space has become especially prominent during times of crisis, particularly in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, when most forms of communication, education, and socialisation have moved online [3, 4]. The importance of the Internet as a medium for interaction has increased even more during the war, particularly in Ukraine, when digital platforms have become almost the only means of keeping in touch, receiving information, and psychological support.

Despite the numerous benefits of information and communication technologies, a child's presence on the Internet entails significant risks to their mental, emotional, and even physical well-being. One of the most serious threats, in our view, is the category of so-called «contact threats»—those that arise from online communication and interaction with other users.

Through virtual interactions, children may fall victim to various forms of psychological abuse and manipulation, including social engineering, cyberbullying, cyberstalking, sexting, grooming, revenge porn, online intimidation, and even involvement in illegal activities such as drug trafficking or participation in harmful online communities. Particularly alarming is the incitement of self-harm or suicide.

What unites these threats is a common mechanism of influence: the manipulative shaping of behavioural and emotional responses. This underscores the need for a systematic, interdisciplinary approach to studying the phenomenon—integrating psychological, medical, social, and legal perspectives.

Materials and Methods

To achieve the objectives of the study, a combination of general theoretical, specialised scientific, and interdisciplinary methods was employed, ensuring a comprehensive approach to the examination of criminological, psychological, and medical aspects of online manipulation in the digital environment.

The logical-semantic method was used to clarify the meaning of the concept of manipulation in the context of influencing human consciousness, particularly that of children [5]. The formal-logical method helped identify the social determinants of this phenomenon and its transformation under the influence of digitalisation processes.

Sociological and statistical methods were applied to analyse empirical data obtained from open sources, while the psychological method was used to characterise age-specific features of adolescents.

Clinical and psychological analyses were conducted based on scientific research on manifestations of anxiety disorders, depression, internet addiction, eating disorders, and sleep disturbances among underage internet users to assess the psycho-

emotional state of minors exposed to destructive influences in the digital space [6, 7].

Finally, systematization and generalization approaches were utilized to make findings and generate suggestions targeted at preventing manipulative effects on children's mental health and minimizing its implications across the medical, legal, social, and educational dimensions [8-10].

Results and Discussion

As a result of the study, it was found that the capabilities of modern digital technologies have created ideal conditions for psychological influence on children, particularly through personalised content and direct online communication. The illusion of safety on the Internet contributes to reckless behaviour and reduced critical thinking in children, increasing their vulnerability to manipulation.

Psychological influence in virtual environments represents a systemic, multi-level risk to children's mental health [11-14]. Its manifestations range from mild emotional pressure to severe psychological trauma, which can lead to sleep disturbances, eating disorders, emotional instability, and even suicidal behaviour.

From a legal perspective, online manipulation is often linked to unlawful acts such as cyberbullying, sexual harassment, grooming, fraud, and involvement in illegal activities.

As a result, medical and legal prevention of these online threats—which calls for an integrated approach—should involve educating kids about the risks of the digital world, providing parents and teachers with psycho-emotional support, enlisting the help of mental health professionals when needed, and working to increase digital literacy among kids as well as parents and educators.

Most importantly, effective prevention must be based on interagency cooperation, particularly among educational institutions, healthcare providers, and law enforcement agencies [15, 16].

Given that manipulation is studied across multiple academic disciplines—including psychology, sociology, philosophy, journalism, and criminology—each of these fields has developed its own internal discourse regarding the concept of manipulation, which requires clarification.

According to the French Etymological Dictionary, the term originates from the Latin word *manipulus*, meaning «a handful» or «to control by hand» [17]. In modern usage, the term is most commonly employed in a figurative sense. For example, the Great Explanatory Dictionary of the Modern Ukrainian Language defines it metaphorically as deceit or fraudulent activity [18]. The Dictionary of Psychological Terms (2015) defines manipulation as a type of psychological influence in which skillful techniques are used to control another person's behaviour and desires. The effectiveness of manipulation depends largely on the manipulator's ability to exploit a person's psychological vulnerabilities—including character traits, habits, desires, and

even virtues—that operate automatically, without conscious analysis of the situation or self-awareness [19].

For the purposes of this study, the term “*manipulation*” will be used in a figurative sense—to refer to psychological influence on a child aimed at covertly controlling their consciousness or behaviour, particularly within the digital environment.

It should be noted that the issue of psychological influence on human consciousness and behaviour has attracted the attention of scholars for decades. One of the earliest scientific attempts to systematise knowledge about the psychology of mass influence during the information boom of the 20th century is the work of Franke H.W. «*Der manipulierte Mensch: Grundlagen der Werbung und der Meinungsbildung*» [20]. In this book, the author considers manipulation not only as a method of psychological influence, but also as a deliberate tool for shaping public consciousness—particularly through advertising, the press, political propaganda, and related media.

By analysing methods used to influence human thoughts, emotions, and behaviour, Franke H.W. emphasised that the careful selection of words, music, and visuals can trigger subconscious reactions that greatly facilitate manipulation. In other words, manipulative influence is aimed at *activating* emotions and the subconscious during the decision-making process, thereby reducing one’s capacity for critical thinking or rational analysis.

In the context of widespread digitalization, a leading Internet platform seeking to promote its channel requires a specific method of emotionally engaging content to attract and retain its online audience.

The danger of manipulation on the Internet is highlighted in the work by D. Susser, B. Roessler, and H. Nissenbaum, «*Online Manipulation: Hidden Influences in a Digital World*» [21], where the authors stress the importance of using the term «online manipulation» to describe a distinct category of manipulative practices enabled by various information technologies. They argue that manipulation involves covert influence—an implicit undermining of an individual’s capacity to make autonomous decisions. Furthermore, information technologies significantly simplify the execution of manipulative tactics, thereby increasing their potential harm. The authors also demonstrate that by impairing decision-making autonomy, manipulation infringes upon free will, a core principle of liberal democracy.

A study of the psychological and medico-legal aspects of digital influence on children, as well as the types and mechanisms of online psychological manipulation, benefits greatly from an interdisciplinary approach. Modern children spend 7–10 hours a day online—and some are “always connected”—making it very difficult, if not impossible, to monitor the content they consume and the people they interact with. At the same time, children are particularly vulnerable to psychological influence, including manipulation, because of their emotional instability, lack of life experience, and lack of critical thinking skills.

Thus, based on the source of psychological influence, manipulations in the digital environment can be carried out either through the content consumed by the child or through contact (communication), i.e., during virtual interaction. Both

types are quite common and possess specific characteristics that will be discussed below.

Psychological influence (manipulations) implemented through relevant content may pursue the following goals

1. The formation of false beliefs in the child regarding:
 - the value system as a whole, perceived as life-guiding principles (e.g., aggressive behavior as a way to gain peer respect; the belief that the world belongs only to the wealthy, etc.);
 - the permissibility and legality of certain behaviors (e.g., self-harm, violence, hooliganism, vandalism, etc.);
 - the nature of interpersonal relationships (within the family, with peers, towards older individuals, etc.), intimate relationships, and so on.

It should be noted that pedophiles often resort to demonstrating child pornography to convince the child that sexual relations between an adult and a child are normal.

From a medico-psychiatric perspective, such manipulations and suggestive influences may contribute to the development or exacerbation of paraphilic disorders, particularly exhibitionistic disorder (6D30), voyeuristic disorder (6D31), pedophilic disorder (6D32), coercive sexual sadism disorder (6D33) [8].

2. Imposing certain distorted standards:
 - Regarding social status and indicators of success. For example, a child may develop the belief that constantly posting photos and videos online is a marker of popularity and thus personal success; or that sharing provocative or explicit images reflects attractiveness and desirability.
 - Concerning physical appearance. For instance, the promotion of thinness as a beauty ideal often leads girls to refuse food, engage in uncontrolled use of advertised weight-loss products, or adopt other harmful behaviors.

Medically speaking, such content may serve as a catalyst for the onset or aggravation of eating disorders or disordered eating behaviors, specifically anorexia nervosa (6B80), avoidant-restrictive food intake disorder (6B83), and disorders pertaining to somatic distress and body perception, such as body distress disorder (6C20) and body integrity dysphoria (6C21) [22].

3. The formation of a dependency on virtual audience approval often begins with encouraging children to collect as many:
 - likes,
 - followers,
 - positive comments, etc.

This constant pursuit of validation from the online community frequently leads children into a psychologically vulnerable state

or even clinical depression [23-26]. This may result from a perceived lack of attention in the digital space or dissatisfaction with their own lives when comparing themselves to others who appear more successful, popular, or happier based on the number of likes and positive feedback they receive.

In an effort to increase their popularity, children often begin posting content that attracts the most attention. This is typically so-called «shock content»—material that elicits strong emotional reactions from viewers, such as disgust, sexual arousal, fear, or panic. Examples include photos and videos of «train surfing», «roofing» (climbing tall structures), or depictions of self-harm, all of which may involve life-threatening and high-risk behaviors engaged in by teenagers.

The danger of becoming dependent on the opinion of a virtual community lies in its potential to lead to tragic consequences. A notable example is the case of a 16-year-old girl from Malaysia (2019), who died by suicide after conducting a poll on her Instagram account asking whether she should live. According to police reports, at one point, 69% of respondents voted for «death» [27].

From a medical perspective, such exposure to online activity poses a risk of developing Internet addiction. Even if the child is not involved in gaming, they may lack the willpower to disconnect from their online audience. Furthermore, constant dependence on positive feedback from the virtual community can trigger mental health disorders or intrusive, pathological thoughts—in particular, personality disorder (6D10), symptoms or signs involving content of thought (MB26), with suicidal ideation (MB26.A) being among the most serious and life-threatening outcomes [22].

4. Incitement to certain types of behavior (dangerous, unlawful, etc.) through:
 - Promotion of self-harm or suicide. The Internet provides easy access to content that promotes suicide or self-injury, including information on how to commit such acts. Forums and chatrooms discussing suicidal topics are readily available, as well as so-called «death groups,» where suicidal thoughts and intentions are encouraged and reinforced;
 - promotion of dangerous behavior in the form of invitations to participate in hazardous challenges, games, pranks, or experiments;
 - Promotion of unlawful behavior: violence, cruelty, hooliganism, substance abuse (narcotics or alcohol), etc. For example, it is relatively easy to find online content offering information about acquiring drugs and their derivatives, methods of production, and descriptions of their expected effects. Such content is often framed positively, portraying it as a sign of maturity or «freedom» from parental restrictions, and as a means of gaining social status among peers.

Thus, aside from the aforementioned risk of instilling suicidal thoughts, this type of content can provoke disruptive behavior or

dissocial disorders, particularly, Oppositional Defiant Disorder (6C90), Conduct-Dissocial Disorder (6C91) [22].

5. Increasing sales of goods or services by:
 - disseminating explicit or covert advertising that shapes specific desires and needs in children, prompting them to purchase products (often unnecessary) or subscribe to paid services, and so on.

Content presented by well-known and popular bloggers (influencers) holds particular appeal for adolescents.

Manipulative communication in the digital environment may also be used for the purpose of

1. *Fraud* committed through the use of social engineering. In recent years, this term has been used to describe techniques for manipulating an individual (including a child) in order to extract confidential information or induce specific actions. Often, under the guise of seemingly trustworthy online communication, a child may disclose sensitive information to an attacker—such as parental income, home address, daily routines, the presence or absence of a home alarm system, bank card numbers, passwords, etc.

Social engineering methods are employed in numerous types of fraud, including phishing, vishing, smishing, pretexting, and baiting.

2. *Cyberbullying*, which can be carried out in various forms and through different tactics, including:
 - a. Public humiliation: posting offensive comments, caricatures, memes, or altered images intended to mock or shame the child publicly;
 - b. Private message bullying: sending insulting, degrading, or threatening messages via private chats (often from anonymous accounts);
 - c. dissemination of false or true information that the child did not intend or consent to share;
 - d. Social exclusion – removing or excluding the child from group chats, online games, blocking them in online communities, etc.;
 - e. Doxxing – public disclosure or distribution of a child's personal information (such as home address, phone number, personal photos, videos, etc.) either publicly or within specific social groups;
 - f. Harassment – monitoring a child's online activity, sending threats, offensive, or disturbing messages, and other forms of persistent intimidation;
 - g. Blackmail – using compromising material (including photos or videos) to extort money or manipulate the child's behavior;
 - h. Provocation or inducement to aggressive or otherwise inappropriate behavior, with the intent to subsequently ridicule or blackmail the child.

3. *Harassment of a child for sexual purposes (online grooming)* refers to the process of building a trusting relationship with a child in order to commit sexual or lewd acts. In such cases, a range of psychological tactics and manipulative techniques are employed to gain the child's trust, establish control, and ultimately achieve full compliance with the abuser's demands. Common grooming strategies include:

- Feigned interest. Groomers pretend to be genuinely interested in the child's hobbies and interests in order to form an emotional bond;
- Compliments and affectionate support. Offenders often provide abundant praise and emotional reassurance to foster a sense of trust and emotional attachment;
- Demonstration of care. Groomers show concern for the child's emotional well-being by frequently asking about school, family life, and personal problems;
- Gradual undermining of trust in the child's social circle, with the intent to isolate the child from family and friends. They may convince the child that no one understands or supports them, and urge secrecy in communication;
- Emotional blackmail and gradual introduction of sexual content. Tactics may include statements like: «If you don't send me an intimate photo, it means you don't love me», or «I'll leave you», or «Some friend you are – I give you everything and you can't even send me a picture».
- Psychological pressure, threats, and blackmail. Groomers may threaten to expose the child's secrets or share explicit photos/videos. They often use guilt or shame to manipulate and dominate the child's behavior.

It should be noted that the more personal information about a child is publicly accessible – particularly on social media – the easier it becomes for groomers to lure the child into a «trap» and successfully manipulate them.

From a psychological and mental health perspective, the child may come under such intense pressure, fear, and emotional exhaustion that they often fall into a depressive state and begin experiencing suicidal thoughts.

4. *Involvement of a Child in «death groups», subcultures, antisocial movements, and illegal behavior.*

- a. *Online psychological influence to involve a child in so-called «death groups»* – social media communities where adolescents participate in a type of game that can lead to suicide. The prevalence of these suicide quests among adolescents peaked in late 2016 and early 2017. The activities of death groups are characterized by a high level of secrecy. Detecting such communities is difficult due to a mandatory rule: participants are forbidden from telling anyone, especially their parents, about their involvement. If a child wants to quit or refuses to continue with a task, the group administrator uses blackmail or threats to coerce them.

Although most children are aware of the existence of such groups and the danger they pose, as confirmed by a survey conducted among schoolchildren in Kyiv (Ukraine), in which 79.2% of respondents stated that they were aware of this. It is important to note that 4.8% of the surveyed students admitted they would agree to participate in such games if invited (even out of curiosity), while 11.2% remained undecided. This means that 16% of children are potentially at risk, i.e., approximately every sixth child [28].

- b. *Psychological influence in the Internet environment to encourage a child to join certain subcultures, such as «roofers», «zachepers», «tracers» (parkourists), «furrys», «emos», «goths» etc.*

Subcultures are social groups that offer their members a unique kind of enculturation and socialization by following their own set of norms, customs, and values [29]. Becoming a part of a subculture is appealing to a child, particularly an adolescent, because it provides a platform for self-expression and a feeling of community with like-minded people who will recognize, understand, and value the child's individuality in relation to society at large. Furthermore, children's lack of life experience and critical thinking abilities makes them a prime target for manipulators who take advantage of their weaknesses.

In recent years, with the rapid growth of platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, some subculture participants have begun to actively promote their groups on these social media channels.

It should be noted that some subcultures popular among adolescents pose a serious threat to a child's physical and psychological health. For example, in communities of «roofers» or «zachepers», gaining or maintaining authority requires continuously escalating risky behavior to create new content that serves as the participant's «business card»—a criterion of success, respect, and popularity within the community.

We would like to focus on the category of seemingly harmless subcultures, one of which is Furry. This subculture unites enthusiasts of anthropomorphic animals featured in popular culture. One of the distinctive traits of the subculture is the desire to create a «fursona»—a kind of animal alter ego, which can be expressed through creativity or acted out in real life, much like an avatar. Fursonas are also used for role-playing games on the internet, in video games, and during in-person meetings [30]. According to data from the Furscience [31] research project, which studies the furry subculture, the vast majority of community members (over 75%) are under 25 years old. Most members are male (84%), 13% are female, and 2.5% are transgender. It should be noted that members of the furry subculture identify as exclusively homosexual approximately five times more often than the general population.

Paying attention to the medical aspect of this issue, besides the risk of provoking some of the above-mentioned mental and behavioral disorders, such psychological influence may implant thoughts related to gender incongruence in the child, which can trigger self-rejection or the desire to change sex during adolescence. Such a situation would require medical attention,

particularly for psychodiagnostics to determine a diagnosis of Gender Incongruence of Adolescence or Adulthood (HA60) or Gender Incongruence of Childhood (HA61) [22].

As already mentioned, the activities of representatives of the furry subculture (as well as other similar communities) are widespread across many internet platforms and forums, which often lack proper moderation. Under such circumstances, it is impossible to guarantee that a child will not become a target of psychological abuse, cyberbullying, or even sexual exploitation. Additionally, the creation of a so-called «fursona» can, over time, blur the line between the real world and the fictional persona, leading to deep immersion in the role and a loss of contact with reality. It is also important to recognize that children who join particular subcultures may become targets of bullying both online and in real life.

Therefore, to ensure a child's resilience to online threats, it is necessary to continuously improve their level of digital literacy, especially regarding safe online behavior – this is the main idea presented in the study by Rodríguez-de-Dios I. and Igartua J.J. (2016) «Digital Literacy Skills to Address the Risks of Interactive Communication» [32]. It is imperative to reassure children that it is never acceptable to remain silent about any problem that arises, whether in or outside the digital environment. Conversely, adults need to pay close attention to a child's psychological state, behavior, mood, and so on, and, if necessary, promptly consult specialists for early diagnosis of mental disorders.

- c. *Psychological manipulative influence aimed at involving a child in antisocial subcultures or movements, as well as in illegal activities.*

Thanks to the possibilities of the digital environment, the spread of subcultural or antisocial ideologies can occur rapidly and reach a vast audience. A notable example is the Redan movement, which emerged in early 2023 in Russia. This informal youth group, mostly consisting of boys aged 14–17 who are anime fans, quickly gained notoriety [33]. In February 2023, within a few days, large-scale clashes between «Redan members» and representatives of other youth cultures broke out in multiple Russian cities. The movement soon spread to Ukraine and Belarus. In Ukraine, mass riots in several cities were prevented only thanks to the coordinated efforts of law enforcement agencies [34, 35].

A key factor in the formation and expansion of this movement was the dissemination of information via the Internet, including the creation of dedicated chats and Telegram channels. These platforms were used to attract new members, maintain communication, and coordinate public actions. In a similar way, the global information network enables the promotion and involvement of minors in illegal activities such as hooliganism, violence, pornography, and drug trafficking. Particularly alarming is the involvement of children not only in drug use but also in drug distribution, which poses a serious threat to the future development of society as a whole. According to the results of a survey conducted among schoolchildren in Kyiv (Ukraine), nearly one in seven students (14.7%) reported having

been offered alcohol or drugs [28]. This highlights the real vulnerability of children and adolescents to drug-related crime. At the same time, the belief that some drugs are «harmless» is spreading across the digital space, creating dangerous misconceptions among young people—especially teenagers—regarding the risks of drug use.

As mentioned earlier, children spend a significant amount of time in the digital environment, which also has a negative impact on their health. In their 2021 study «Association of Physical Activity, Screen Time and Sleep with Depressive Symptoms in Adolescents» [36], Sun and Zhan analyzed responses from 1,331 high school students and found that excessive screen time is linked to an increase in depressive symptoms among adolescents. Depression, in turn, is recognized as a leading factor in adolescent suicides and serves as a major indicator of mental health disorders and broader social issues in adulthood.

Similar results were reported by Vietnamese scientists Cai Thi Thuy Nguyen, Hao-Jan Yang, Gabrielle T. Lee, Lien Thi Kim Nguyen, and Shu-Yu Kuo, who, after surveying 678 secondary school students, established a clear link between excessive Internet use and the emergence of depression, anxiety, and poor sleep quality among students in Northern Vietnam [37]. Research by Chinese scholars Mi Zhou, Weiming Zhu, Xiaotong Sun, and Li Huang also highlights that Internet addiction negatively impacts children's physical and mental health by reducing both their sleep duration and time for physical activity [38].

In the study by Mubashir Gull and Bulle Ruth Sravani (2024) [39], the authors emphasize that a wide range of mental health issues—including anxiety, aggressive behavior, social anxiety disorder, suicidal ideation, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and autism spectrum disorders—are associated with Internet addiction.

Thus, there is a clear correlation between excessive exposure to the digital environment and these psychological conditions in children. It should be noted that this issue is relevant across nearly all countries worldwide [40-43].

Conclusion

The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly expanded the possibilities for psychological influence on individuals, particularly children. The main tools of psychological influence in the virtual environment are content and communication. The illusion of safety and control in online interactions makes children more open and vulnerable to harmful influences.

The digital environment provides favorable conditions for abusers: anonymity, broad access to children via social media, and the availability of open personal information allow manipulators to easily adapt their approach and apply psychological pressure. Such influence may include the formation of distorted values, the imposition of socially unacceptable behavior standards, and the encouragement of risky actions.

Direct online communication with offenders is especially dangerous, as it may involve criminal activities such as fraud, cyberbullying, grooming, sexual exploitation, or recruitment into criminal networks. To achieve their unlawful goals, manipulators may employ psychological influence techniques and carefully selected content designed to strongly affect the child's psyche, prompting them to act in a specific way. Such manipulative tactics can act as triggers, potentially leading to the development of various mental or behavioral disorders in children.

Effective prevention of online psychological influence requires a comprehensive and multi-level approach. The main preventive measures include:

Technical support for children's digital safety

- Implementation of parental control software to restrict access to harmful content, monitor digital activity, and prevent specific cyber threats;
- Configuration of social media privacy settings in accordance with personal data protection principles.

Organizational, legal, and psychoeducational support for fostering digital literacy

- Systematic education of children about the risks present in cyberspace, indicators of psychological manipulation, and available coping strategies;
- Development of critical thinking and information analysis skills to reduce psychological vulnerability;
- Psychoeducational support for parents, aimed at identifying early signs of psychological distress in children – such as sleep disturbances, anxiety, or depressive symptoms – that may signal manipulative influence or exposure to online violence.

This comprehensive strategy can enhance children's resilience in the digital environment and reduce the risks associated with psychological manipulation online.

Institutional cooperation in preventing cyber threats against children

- Educational institutions are encouraged to establish collaboration with IT security experts, juvenile crime prevention specialists, and mental health professionals to implement comprehensive preventive strategies in this domain;
- Organization of legal education sessions aimed at familiarizing students with relevant criminal law provisions concerning liability for offenses committed in the digital space or for participation in unlawful activities.

Psycho-emotional support from the family and parental monitoring

- Regular, trust-based communication between parents and children to enable early identification of signs of psychological pressure or manipulation;
- Engaging children in joint activities, including the development of digital competencies, fosters resilience to online threats, including manipulative influences.

It is important to emphasize that, upon observing symptoms of psycho-emotional distress potentially linked to online psychological influence, parents and caregivers should promptly seek professional assistance from a psychologist, psychotherapist, or psychiatrist. Timely psychological or psychiatric intervention significantly reduces the risk of severe consequences, including suicidal ideation.

Thus, manipulative technologies in the digital environment constitute a component of modern informational threats. Legal, psychological, and medical literacy among adults is a fundamental prerequisite for the effective protection of children's rights and the preservation of their mental well-being amid the ongoing digitalization of society.

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