



AWARENESS OF STUDENTS AT TUYEN QUANG HIGH SCHOOL OF CHILD ABUSE IN CYBERSPACE

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Abstract

The strong development of the internet, information and communication technology, and telecommunications in recent years in Vietnam has promoted the development of all areas of social life, and improvement of international integration but also caused various negative impacts on society, one of which is child abuse in cyberspace with many different behaviors and tricks, causing much physical, mental, social and economic harm, requiring solutions to response to and ensure a secure and safe cyberspace for human life.



NHẬN THỨC CỦA HỌC SINH TRƯỜNG PHỔ THÔNG TUYÊN QUANG VỀ XÂM HẠI TRẺ EM TRÊN KHÔNG GIAN MẠNG

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Từ khóa

xâm hại trẻ em, không gian mạng,
xâm hại trẻ em trên không gian
mạng, Trường Phổ thông
Tuyên Quang

Tóm tắt

Sự phát triển mạnh mẽ của internet, công nghệ thông tin và truyền thông, viễn thông trong những năm vừa qua ở Việt Nam đã tạo đà cho những bước phát triển trên tất cả các lĩnh vực của đời sống xã hội, nâng cao năng lực hoà nhập quốc tế nhưng cũng có nhiều tác động tiêu cực tới xã hội, một trong những vấn đề đó là xâm hại trẻ em trên không gian mạng bao gồm rất nhiều các hành vi và thủ đoạn khác nhau, gây ra nhiều tổn thương về mặt thể chất, tinh thần, xã hội và kinh tế đòi hỏi phải có những cách thức ứng phó đảm bảo không gian mạng an ninh, an toàn cho cuộc sống của con người.

1. Introduction

According to statistics for 2021 from the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, Vietnam has approximately 27 million children under 18 years old. A report by Management and Sustainable Development Institute (MSD) indicates that 96.9% of children use the Internet, meaning that 9 of 10 children use the Internet to browse every day. On the other hand, statistics from Center for Creative Initiatives in Health and Population also show that 36.5% of children experience violence-related information and images; more than 13% of children have unwanted experience with sexually explicit material. In 2022 alone, National Child Protection Hotline (111) recorded nearly 370,000 incoming calls of which nearly 28,000 calls were documented, and more than 1,500 support interventions. In particular, there were a total of 419 calls reporting child abuse in cyberspace... Thus, in addition to the positive effects of

information and communication technology on human life, its downside is many complicated social affairs, the most noticeable of which is child abuse in cyberspace. Learning about and understanding students' awareness of this issue has an important significance for educating students to prevent cyber abuse for their safety and social development.

2. Research history

Child abuse in cyberspace is a "hot" concern on the globe and has been researched in recent years through various approaches such as: A research by Beran and Li (2005) on "cyber harassment" in high schools in Canada indicated that cyberbullying is a form of harassment through the use of electronic communications such as email and cell phones. More than 20% of students participating in the survey said they had experienced cyberbullying and a few students admitted to involve in

this action, mainly through social networks, anonymous messages and emails [18]; Another research by Li (2010) surveying the nature and adolescents' experiences of cyberbullying found that cyberbullying is understood as a new phenomenon stemming from the advancement of technology including the internet, mobile phones and personal digital assistants, and indicated that about 25% of students are victims of cyberbullying [19]. UNICEF (2019) conducted a poll on violence with the participation of over 170,000 people in 30 countries. Accordingly, 1/3 of young people in the survey said they were victims of cyberbullying, and 1/5 of all survey participants had dropped out of school due to cyberbullying and violence [16].

Author Doan Thi To Uyen (2020) pointed out the advantages and limitations of child protection in cyberspace, the causes of the limitations together with some solutions for child protection in cyberspace from a perspective of jurisprudence [15]. Vietnam has also issued a Decision approving the first-ever National Programme on Child Online Protection for 2021-2025 which aims to protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse on the internet and support them to have safe and healthy online interactions." [2]. The seminar "Reality and solutions to protect children in cyberspace" (2022) organized by the Vietnam Information Security Association (VNISA) in collaboration with the Vietnam Cyberspace Emergency Response Center (VNCERT/CC) has discussed opportunities for students to learn, entertain, and explore the world on cyberspace and the negative impacts of bad and toxic information spread across the internet and the potential risks of abuse. The seminar also raised the critical necessity of a healthy online environment, and digital skills for children to recognize and use the Internet safely [7].

Research by Nguyen Thi Thanh Thuy and Do Van Trong (2023) has indicated potential safety risks for women and children on social networks, the issue related to the development of safe cyberspace, and some solutions for the safety of women and children in cyberspace [12]. Author Nguyen Huu Thanh has focused on clarifying the current situation of internet usage and its impact on children as a basis to give solutions to strengthen child protection in cyberspace [10]. The "Research on the current situation of cyberbullying and some related requirements among students at some secondary schools in Hue City" (2023)

has clarified the current situation of cyberbullying among students at some secondary schools in Hue City and analyzed some factors related to the current situation of cyberbullying for research subjects [9]. The report by Hamaseh Naderi (2024) identified the future challenges children face on the internet, the harm and their safety in cyberspace. Accordingly, the author indicated aspects including easy access to unethical resources, causing intellectual doubt, value conflicts, internet addiction, social isolation, waste of time, reduced family communication, and increased generation gap. Among them, easy access to unethical resources, internet addiction, and waste of time are the three aspects with the most significant influence [20].

It can be said that issues related to child abuse in cyberspace in recent years have emerged as a global concern of interest for many researchers, and approached from various perspectives. However, the learning and understanding of child abuse in cyberspace still have many gaps in need of being clarified to outline better directions for cybersafety education for the younger generation.

3. Research methods

3.1. Group of theoretical research methods

Through collecting, reading, and learning documents, books, newspapers, etc., the article has analyzed, synthesized and generalized a number of research contents related to child abuse in cyberspace.

It systematized several theoretical issues of child abuse in cyberspace as a basis for learning and researching the practice of high school students' awareness of child abuse in cyberspace.

3.2. Group of practical research methods

Questionnaire survey: A questionnaire survey is designed to collect opinions to learn about students' awareness of child abuse in cyberspace.

Discussion and interview method: Conduct conversations, discussions, and interviews with high school students to collect more information about students' awareness of child abuse in cyberspace.

Observation method: Observe and monitor some expressions and behaviors of students in cyberspace.

3.3. Data processing method

Using mathematical and statistical formulas to process data as a basis to assess the students' awareness of child abuse in cyberspace.

4. Research results

4.1. Concept and identification of child abuse acts in cyberspace

4.1.1. Concept of child abuse in cyberspace

* Abuse and child abuse:

Abuse: According to the Vietnamese Dictionary, “abuse” is a state of being infringed to the extent of harm [8]

According to Radda Bamen Save the Children Sweden: Child abuse is all acts of physical or mental harm caused randomly by people responsible for a child’s development or by acts of violence, sexual abuse and psychological impacts threatening the physical, mental and emotional development of children [13]. Abuse includes physical abuse and mental abuse [14].

* Child abuse in cyberspace:

According to the Law on Cyber Security 2018: “Cyberspace is defined as the network of information technology infrastructure, including telecommunications networks, internet networks, computer networks, information systems, information processing and control systems, and database; is a place where people perform social behaviors without limitations of space and time” [3].

Code of conduct on child protection in cyberspace (2021) of the Ministry of Information and Communications introduces the concept “Child abuse in cyberspace is an act of harming children’s physical, emotional, psychological, honor, dignity, and privacy through computer networks, telecommunications networks, and networked electronic media” [1]

4.1.2. Identification of acts of child abuse in cyberspace

The Code of conduct for child protection in cyberspace (2021) of the Ministry of Information and Communications defines acts of child abuse in cyberspace including [1]: (1) Stealing children’s personal information; Posting children’s personal information without the consent of parents and children as prescribed by law; (2) Producing, possessing, buying, selling, and distributing images and videos with content harmful to children, including child sexual abuse material; (3) Cyberbullying: intentionally insulting, threatening, harming, harassing, attacking or ostracizing others through digital media and platforms;

(4) Child seduction: using cyber means to build trust in children with aim to harm children; (5) Other acts as prescribed by law.

4.1.3. Impact and causes of child abuse in cyberspace

Impact of child abuse in cyberspace:

- **Physical injury:** Many children making friends through social networks accidentally become victims of bad people on social networks. In early January 2024, Tay Son District Police (Binh Dinh) received news that N.N.Q (2007, residing in Tay Son District) was sexually abused. According to the victim’s testimony at the police station, from December 2022, Q. got acquainted with a young man named T on facebook. On January 4, T. invited Q. to hang out by motorbike for the first time with 2 other young people. T. took Q. to a deserted place in Phu Phong Town (Tay Son District) and then forced to commit immoral acts against Q together with his accomplices [4]. This is just one of many other abuse cases stemming from relationships on social networks in which victims suffered from many physical injuries such as disease, bleeding, infertility, injury, and even were murdered or killed.

- **Psychological injury:** Victims of cyberbullying or image misuse for production of video clips or image edit to dark websites, sexual abuse... can suffer from certain psychological effects such as mental panic, complex, shame, low self-esteem, confusion, fear, psychological trauma, suicide intention...that can last for a long time or affect throughout their life [5].

- **Social injury:** Acts of child abuse in cyberspace have a great impact on society such as the feeling of anxiety, insecurity, loss of trust and social isolation; violation of social and state ethics, and a huge amount of money that the victim’s family spend every year to prevent and handle related incidents. In addition, physical and mental injuries affect the quality of life of abused children, causing negative impacts on their studies and work, and resulting in instability for future social development.

- **Economic damage:** Fraudulent appropriation of property is increasingly popular with more and more sophisticated and cunning methods and tricks. Children’s accounts on social network can be easily hacked, or they can be tricked by winning prizes through links, online trading or game cards... These

acts all cause economic damage to children whose their parents have to be responsible for their children's actions.

Causes of child abuse in cyberspace

- Causes coming from children themselves:

Children aged 0-18 are undergoing a period of rapid personality formation and development, especially those in the age of secondary school (11,12 to 14, 15 years old). Children in this period have many passions to explore the world with high curiosity. Meanwhile, cyberspace is an open world which children are easily drawn into naturally and uncontrollably though they have not accumulated enough "experience" to distinguish the good, the bad, and the dangerous, so they are very gullible... Many children who are threatened or coerced, have a feeling of complex, low self-esteem, and fear, so they do not dare to share with parents, teachers, and friends, but instead listen to the other person's commands, suggestions, and enticement, leading to injuries in various aspects.

- Causes coming from the family: In many families, parents are so busy to earn money that they have no time to take care of and accompany their children, or parents are lax in management or lack knowledge and skills in information and communication technology to educate their children to select positive content and ignore negative ones. Some families with conflicts makes the family atmosphere always surrounded by tension, so children feel lack of affection and unloved, so they start to seek fun outside. In the families of which parents divorce, separate, suffer from social evils, violate the law, have no conditions to care for and raise their children, leaving them to manage their own lives; In addition, parents of some families have no good relationships with their children without attachment, listening, sharing, trust and respect... All factors above cause mental instability for children and are favorable conditions for bad people to commit bad acts by taking advantage of the child's vulnerable psychology.

- Causes coming from the school: Teachers are responsible for directly managing children in class but do not have enough measures to thoroughly handle students' internet usage and other behaviors in cyberspace. Though the use of online groups, homework assignments, and online learning methods

is very trendy, it leads an increase in opportunities and risks for children to experience and commit many behaviors beyond control. In addition, the education ways of the schools for cyber abuse prevention still have many shortcomings, and the methods and forms of implementation should be taken into account for success and effectiveness.

- Causes from society

+ The rapid development of information technology, the Internet, and telecommunications networks: According to the statistical report, the Internet in Vietnam in 2023 grows strongly with 77 million users (accounting for 79.1% of the population). Social networks have also become an important platform with more than 70 million participants, mainly young people [6]. It is impossible to deny the benefits of information technology, communications, and social networks to people's lives, but a "vast society" in cyberspace contains many risk factors due to the indirect, convenient, and rapid interaction, which is a favorable condition for bad people to take advantage to commit harmful acts in cyberspace.

+ From the moral "corruption" of a part of society: The subjects who commit acts of child abuse in cyberspace often have bad personality qualities with vile motives and purposes, unhealthy lifestyles, and enjoyment desire... A number of people who have a poor understanding and lack a sense of respect for the law, people, and social ethics...

+ "Crowd" effect from the community: Cyberspace is characterized as "a place where people's social behaviors are not limited by space and time", so they are easy to access, register, login, and drawn into due to curiosity, especially social networks. Many fanpages have tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands or even millions of followers. When any content is posted on those fanpages, it will attract hundreds of thousands or millions of comments and shares, leading to "crowd" effects on the internet that make people, intentionally or unintentionally, become a victim in cyberspace.

+ Causes from cyberspace management and control and law-related factors: As mentioned above, the internet system, telecommunications

network, and social network in recent years have developed too rapidly while human resources, control tools, and well-intentioned communication activities cannot meet the demand. The Law system from Law on Children, Criminal Law and sanctions for child abuse in cyberspace still has many shortcomings and inadequacies, so the level of protection and deterrence is not high, which is a gap that bad guys have taken advantage to commit wrong acts in cyberspace.

4.2. Awareness of students at Tuyen Quang High School of some issues of child abuse in cyberspace

Tuyen Quang High School is a public education facility belonging to Tan Trao University, located at Km6 of Trung Mon - Yen Son - Tuyen Quang, providing education from Primary to High School. The survey about the awareness of students at Tuyen Quang High School of some issues of child abuse in cyberspace was conducted for 107 students from grades 6 to 9, 100% of whom have mobile phones and social network accounts and daily access the internet. The results obtained are as follows:

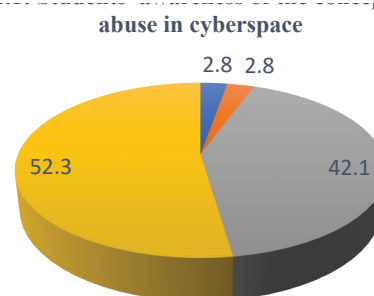
4.2.1. Students' awareness of the concept of child abuse in cyberspace

*** Students' awareness of the concept of cyberspace**

To find out students' awareness of cyberspace, we gave the question, "What do you think about cyberspace?" and obtained the results as follows: 4.7% of students understand cyberspace as a social network to update information, learn, share, trade, make friends, and interact with each other; 39.3% of them think that cyberspace is the Internet system that connects people to the world, to study and work more easily, conveniently and quickly; 53.3% of them correctly understand that "cyberspace is a connection network of information technology infrastructure, including telecommunications networks, internet networks, computer networks, information systems, and information processing and controlling systems, and databases; a place where people's social behaviors are limited by space and time".

*** Students' awareness of the concept of child abuse in cyberspace**

Survey results are shown in the chart 4.1:



1. *An online fraud*

2. *Acts of cyberbullying*

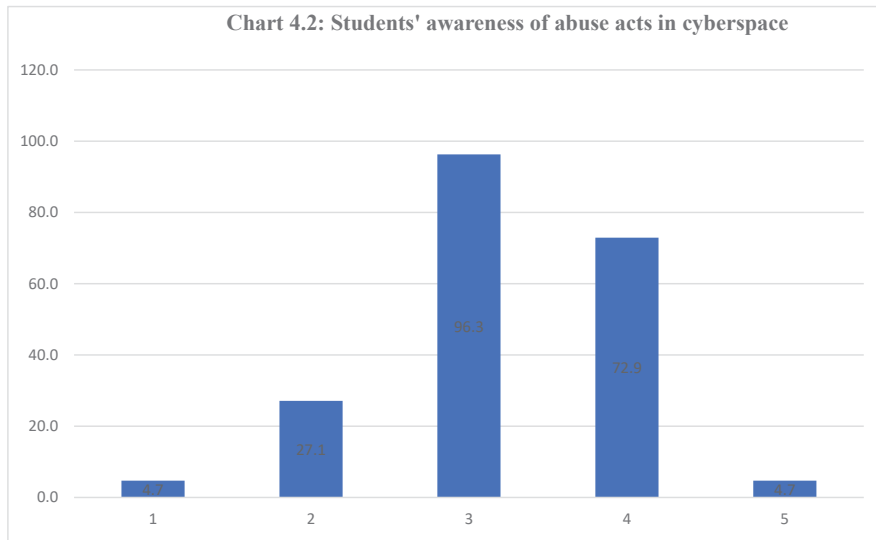
3. *Act of sexual harassment and defamation of the honor and dignity of children in cyberspace?*

4. *Acts that harm children's physical, psychological, honor, dignity, and privacy through computer networks, telecommunications networks, or networked electronic means?*

Chart 4.1 shows that very few students think that child abuse in cyberspace is online fraud (2.8%); is cyberbullying (2.8%); the percentage of students who choose option 3 (42.1%) and option 4 (52.3%) are the most with less difference. We understand child abuse in cyberspace as "an act of harming children's physical, psychological, honor, dignity, and privacy through computer networks or telecommunication networks, networked electronic means" but only 52.3% of students answered correctly; Most students still understand it in a narrow scope when thinking that cyberspace abuse is sexual harassment and defamation of honor and dignity in cyberspace.

4.2.2. Students' awareness of child abuse in cyberspace

Child abuse in cyberspace occurs in many different ways. The survey results in Chart 4.2 show that: Most students believe that the main act of child abuse is cyberbullying (accounting for 96.3%), followed by child seduction (72.9%), production, ownership, trading, and distribution of images and videos with harmful content to children, including child sexual abuse materials (27.1%). Very few students choose behaviors such as stealing children's personal information; posting children's personal information without the consent of parents and children as prescribed by law and other acts prescribed by law (4.7%).



1. Stealing children's personal information; posting children's personal information without the consent of parents and children as prescribed by law

2. Production, ownership, trading, and distribution of images and videos with harmful content to children, including child sexual abuse materials.

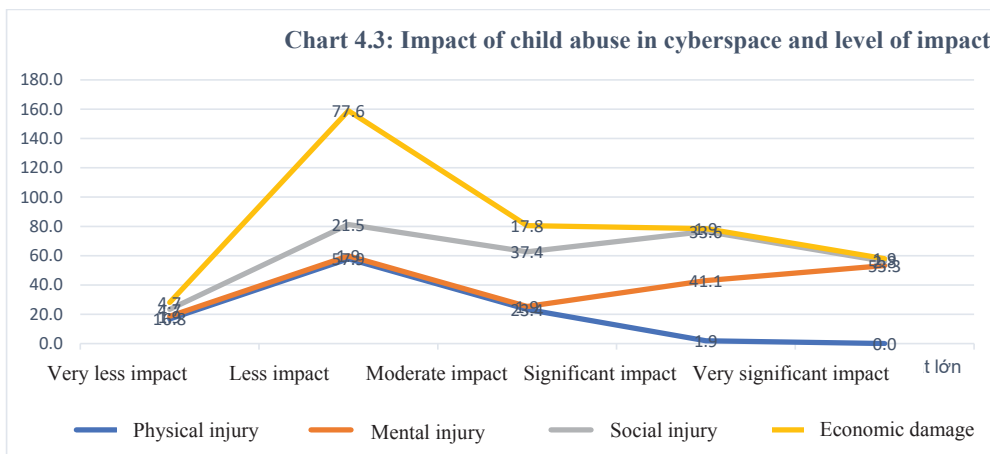
3. Cyberbullying: intentionally insulting, threatening, harming, harassing, attacking or ostracizing others through the use of digital media and platforms.

4. Child seduction: using cyber means to build trust in children with aim to harm children.

5. Other acts as prescribed by law.

4.2.3. Students' awareness of the impact of child abuse in cyberspace

We present aspects of impact including physical injury, mental injury, social injury, and economic damage with 5 levels. The results indicate that students mainly pay attention to the impact of mental injury with a significant level (41.1%) and very significant level (53.3%).



Physical injuries and economic damage were selected and assessed by the children at very little to moderate impact. Social injury is also not clearly recognized with the impact assessed at a medium level (37.4%) and significant level (33.6%). Through conversations with some grade-8 students to learn more about this issue, they said that cyberspace is an indirect

and virtual connection network, so there will be less physical, economic, and social injury.

4.2.4. Students' awareness of the causes of child abuse in cyberspace

We presented 4 causes of cyber abuse and 5 levels of impact: Survey results are shown in Chart 4.4:

Chart 4.4 indicates that: Students suppose that the main cause is from the family (40.2% with a very significant impact; 39.3% with a significant impact); Followed by causes from the student with 28.0% at the impact level 5 and 43.0% at the impact level 4. The causes from the society rank third with 51.4% at the impact level 4 and 21.5% at the impact level 5. Factors from the school are considered to have the least impact.

5. Conclusion and discussion

Cyberspace with its “open” characteristics without limitations of distance and time has greatly affected all aspects of social life in general and people in particular, both positively and negatively. The child abuse in cyberspace in recent years has had an unceasing increase with various complicated and sophisticated acts and tricks that have a strong influence on physical and mental health, economy, and society. Identification of the causes will assist educators and social managers in preventing and actively intervening for a safe environment and sustainable development.

Through learning about and understanding the awareness of students at Tuyen Quang High School of some issues of child abuse in cyberspace, we find that a part of students have no correct understanding of the concept of cyberspace and child abuse in cyberspace; they have no comprehensive identification of acts of child abuse in cyberspace; no full aware of the impacts of child abuse in cyberspace. Students think that the factors from the family, from students themselves, and from society are the main causes leading to child abuse in cyberspace.

Based on the researched content, it is concluded that building a safe cyberspace for children in particular and the community in general is very important and essential. Prevention of risk factors should be a top priority because of its advantages. The school plays an important role in orienting children’s awareness, training skills and managing students in class. Family is the foundation of education through building good family relationships, taking care of and monitoring children’s use of cyberspace by parents, as well as managing their own behaviors in cyberspace as an example. The social community needs to be propagated and supervised more for a “clean” community in cyberspace; Legal corridors as well as network-related service providers should take many strong measures to create “barriers” to protect children in cyberspace.

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