

# CHARACTERISTICS OF VICTIMOLOGICAL BEHAVIOR AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Review Article

DOI: 10.5937/zurbezkrim2401009P	COBISS.RS-ID 141364481	UDK 343.966:378.147-057.175
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**Abstract:** In recent years, social-political and economic problems have profoundly influenced various aspects of young people's lives, particularly their awareness and behavior. University students, as a distinct social group, acutely feel the impact of ongoing societal processes, which in turn alter their behavior patterns in response to a new reality marked by an inevitable increase in the risk of victimization. This paper aims to investigate and generalize the findings of contemporary research on the victimological behavior of university students. The factors contributing to the victimizing behavior of university students within the contemporary social environment are examined. This study was conducted as a desk-based research project, involving a review of scholarly literature and the application of survey methods targeting a student population aged 17-23. The study identifies a group of students prone to victimization, characterized by maladaptive response styles, pessimistic assessments of their life prospects, and experiences of inferiority complexes. The study generalizes research findings on the factors leading to the victimization of university students and their victimological contributions within the context of the transformations in the modern Russian education system. It also explores the capabilities of these students that enable them to counteract the victimizing influences of external or internal environments.

**Keywords:** victimizing behavior, student, victimization, victimization factors, victim, educational environment, higher education institution.

## INTRODUCTION

The negative socio-political and economic processes in recent years have inevitably led to an increased risk of victimization among the student population. The characteristics of their transitional age, lack of life experience, and difficulties in choosing a life position significantly determine the specificity of their behavior. Student victimization is also influenced by numerous social

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problems: financial issues, employment and labor market challenges, internet addiction, and health problems (Возмилкина, 2016: 45). Contemporary conditions are marked by a high level of deterioration in both the physical and mental health of students, which is associated with changes in the lifestyle patterns of young people: irregular eating habits, insufficient physical activity, and non-adherence to the necessary regimen for their age. A study conducted by the Russian Academy of Education, involving nearly 22,000 first-year students from 22 universities across eight federal districts, revealed that 20.9% of freshmen experience emotional problems, such as increased excitability, tendencies towards depression, frequent mood swings, and anxiety. Behavioral disorders were observed in 8.7% of the participants. Students often alleviate emotional stress and tension through harmful habits (Соколова, 2022). Unfortunately, many students may be exposed to various forms of violence both within educational institutions and outside them. Insults that demean the honor and dignity of students sometimes come from peers and occasionally from teachers. Since higher education institutions predominantly consist of young individuals with still-developing psyches, disrespect, rudeness, and violation of their rights can provoke inappropriate reactions or lead to serious personality deformation. Disruptions in interpersonal relationships between students or between students and teachers can lead to conflicts and an increase in student victimization (Фролова & Байгужина, 2019: 7). The rising number of internet users increasingly affects communication methods. According to the Digital 2023 Global Overview Report, 73.3% of the total population in Russia used social networks in January 2023 (PR.STUDENT, 2023). The use of social networking sites continues to gain popularity, especially among the youth, due to their interactivity compared to traditional means of communication. However, this form of communication is not solely positive. The diverse information that young people primarily receive via the internet and social networks significantly impacts their psyche. The informational and psychological influence on the youth shapes specific ideological (social) ideas, perspectives, and beliefs, eliciting positive or negative emotions, feelings, and even mass reactions, thus forming stable representations (Крысько, 2022: 235). Intensive and uncontrolled use of the internet by students, belonging to specific social groups on social networks, sharing private life details, and exchanging various information all affect the internal state of young people. Under certain circumstances, these activities can trigger hostile thoughts, negative affect, and increased excitability (Kokkinos & Antoniadou, 2019). Due to their age and social status, students, compared to other age groups, are at a higher risk of engaging in cyberbullying or becoming victims of cybercrime. University students are often active users of social networks, while victims of cyberbullying are frequently teenagers and young people who possess certain personality traits and face various social difficulties. However, although the level of violence on social networks among this age group varies significantly, the results of most studies indicate that a considerable number of students become victims and/or perpetrators of cyber violence (Kokkinos & Saripanidis, 2017). This form of violence can escalate into

stalking, leading to victimization that can be physical, relational, and/or verbal (Gómez-Galán, Lázaro-Pérez, & Martínez-López, 2021). Many studies note that continuous abuse results in problems with the formation of students' social-adaptive potential in higher education institutions, potentially leading to significant changes in their personal characteristics with a distinctly negative outlook. The expectation of constant aggression from their immediate environment at the university may cause students to carry their negative communication experiences into new settings in the future, re-establishing violent interactions in both professional and family spheres (Андронникова, 2015; Дейнека, Духанина, & Максименко, 2020; Решетников, 2009). The sense of discomfort also affects the academic performance of students who are subjected to abuse. They are more likely to miss classes, have lower educational outcomes, and are more likely to drop out of school or transfer to other universities (UNESCO, 2019). Most students are insufficiently financially supported and, without adequate work experience, often remain uncompetitive in the job market or are forced to work for low salary, with their income only sufficient to cover current expenses. The desire to attain financial independence from their parents often leads university students to fall victim to various scams, primarily online. According to experts from Group-IB, fraud accounts for 73% of all online crimes, with the largest portion being fraud (56%), where victims voluntarily disclose their bank account details or transfer money to fraudsters (ПРАЙМ, 2021). Cyber fraudsters continually devise new ways to deceive people, offering quick and easy earnings, prizes, and more. For instance, in the spring of 2023, a large number of messages containing offers were sent, promising quick earnings through simple online tasks.

Scammers have been known to offer payments for writing reviews for various products and services for online stores, promising a decent sum in return for positive reviews and product likes. However, to transfer the money, victims were required to provide their bank account numbers (Игнатова, 2023). Cybercriminals are always looking for quick ways to make money. For several years, they have been using platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram to organize monetary rewards and gift giveaways. Social media users have been receiving messages about lottery winnings, which require them to pay a small sum as a percentage of the prize amount. Young people participate in chat rooms where various prizes are awarded, but to claim these prizes, they must first pay delivery fees or other similar charges (Московская область 24, 2024; БезФормата, 2023). According to an analytical report by the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation, the number of crimes committed using information and telecommunication technologies increased by 30.8% from January to November 2023 compared to the same period in 2022 (Министерство внутренних дел Российской Федерации, 2023). However, to measure cybercrimes accurately is challenging, as victims rarely report being defrauded. Studies on cybercrime show that less than 20% of victims notify law enforcement about cybercrime victimization. Reasons for this include fear of ridicule, shame, or discomfort (Ищук, Пинкевич, & Смольянинов, 2021: 99).

The purpose of this study is to investigate and summarize the findings of contemporary research on the victimological behavior of university students. Adolescence is a factor that increases the level of victimological vulnerability among students. However, the type of victimological contribution significantly depends on the degree of socialization of the young individual's personality. Therefore, it is crucial to study the characteristics of victimological behavior in students and identify the internal personality traits that may cause their victimization. These traits can manifest under certain external circumstances.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted as a desk research based on a review of international and Russian scholarly literature. The research method employed was a theoretical analysis of Russian and international publications available in electronic libraries such as ScienceDirect, Jstor, Google Scholar, CyberLeninka, eLIBRARY.RU, among others, using keywords like "student victimization," "victimization factors, i.e., student behavior," and "characteristics of students' victimological contribution." Special attention was paid to identifying articles describing research using models and relevant questionnaires. Additionally, surveys were conducted among the student population aged 17 to 24 from three faculties (Faculty of Environmental Safety, Faculty of Preschool, Primary, and Special Education, and Faculty of Physical Education and Sports) of the State University of Education, with a total of 198 respondents. Due to the small sample size, this study does not aim for any scientific generalization but reflects some trends within the context of the issues under consideration.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Special emphasis is placed on the phenomenon of peer violence in international and Russian research on student victimization. Researchers highlight the primary negative consequences of this phenomenon, including feelings of anxiety, depression, emotional and physical tension, and low self-esteem among victims. Students in their earlier years of study are more frequently subjected to violence, as this period marks a critical turning point in their lives, which is associated with the need to develop new models of independent behavior and lifestyle (Бондарев, 2013: 7). In recent years, many authors have increasingly discussed digital violence (cyberbullying or online harassment). This form of violence is often perpetrated using social networks, allowing for psychological pressure on the victim. The negative impact of communication on social networks prompts students to engage in risky and thoughtless behaviors that can lead to dangerous and critical life situations (Биктагирова et al., 2019). In research on victimization in the student environment, several directions can

be distinguished. One direction is connected with studying the victimological contribution of victims of victimization who have faced online harassment. For instance, the research by Kowalski et al. (2012) aimed to study the victims of cyberbullying. The results showed that over 30% of students encountered cyberbullying for the first time during their university studies. Additionally, there was no gender difference in victimization among the respondents, except among online game users, where men exhibited a higher level of vulnerability compared to women. Victims of cyberbullying often experienced emotional burnout, decreased motivation for learning, and a loss of self-confidence. An interesting study based on the general aggression model (Kokkinos & Antoniadou, 2019) aimed to investigate the relationship between several individual and contextual variables: attachment, personal characteristics, the frequency of internet use, problematic internet use, online openness, loneliness, psychopathology, and cyber victimization. The research was conducted among 175 students at a Greek university. Results showed that active internet users exhibit specific personality traits and face various social challenges and psychopathological symptoms. Another study on the experience of cyberbullying among undergraduate students was conducted at a research university in the USA (Byrne, 2021). This study, which included 459 students, used a victimization indicator. The results indicated that victims of cyberbullying rarely seek support from professors and university staff. Instead, they rely on technical means to cope with issues, such as blocking the attacker, changing privacy settings, and other measures. However, this often leads to their isolation from the online community, which can subsequently result in relatively stable personality deformities, depression, and difficulties in social interactions.

The impact of social media addiction, cyberbullying, and cyber victimization among students, which was examined through various sociodemographic characteristics, was investigated at the Medical Faculty of Yozgat-Bozok University in Turkey (Çimke & Cerit, 2021). The study included 518 students. Data were collected using a personal information form prepared by the researchers, the social media addiction scale, the cyber victimization scale and peer bullying scale. The results showed that social media addiction was higher among female students, while male students were more frequently victims of cyberbullying. Additionally, the research results indicate that social media addiction is higher among students who rated their upbringing style as inconsistent and unbalanced, as well as among those who reported aggressive personality traits. Various studies conducted among students at foreign universities have focused on different mental health problems among victims of cyberbullying, including depression, withdrawal, fear, and anxiety (Alrajeh et al., 2021; Ho, Li, & Gu, 2020; Yildiz Durak & Saritepeci, 2020). An analysis of recent studies on cyberbullying and cybervictimization among students conducted by Russian scientists shows an increase in this phenomenon within the student community. For example, a study conducted among 125 students from four Russian universities (Тельшева & Гордеева, 2023) demonstrates the widespread prevalence of cy-

berbullying among students. According to the survey conducted, 90.4% of students have encountered internet bullying, while 3.2% are constantly exposed to cyberbullying. One reason for the spread of internet bullying at universities, according to Т.А. Заглодина and Л.Е. Панкратова (Заглодина & Панкратова, 2021), is the pervasive integration of internet technologies into the educational process. A comprehensive sociological study was conducted in 2021 at the Russian State Vocational Pedagogical University. The analysis revealed that 26% of respondents experienced internet bullying in the student environment. Students living away from their parents are three times more likely to face online aggression. Additionally, the survey results showed that some university professors were sometimes the aggressors. Similar results were obtained in a survey of students from three faculties of the State University of Education, aged 17 to 24, conducted in the fall of 2023. The study on victimization showed that around 23% of students exhibit social media addiction, with girls being the most addicted (67%). During their studies, 17% of girls and 8% of boys faced aggression on social media. The second area of research on victimization among students is focused on determining the frequency of student exposure to bullying, identifying the profiles of aggressors, victims' reactions, the consequences of violence leading to their victimization, and analyzing gender differences in victimization. A study conducted by researchers (Pörhölä et al., 2020) aimed at examining victims of peer bullying among students and faculty was carried out across 47 universities in Argentina, Estonia, Finland, and the United States. The study results showed that a significant number of students experience bullying during their education by their peers and/or university staff. The highest levels of student victimization and peer bullying were reported in Argentina (25.2% of respondents) and the United States (11.9%), while the lowest levels were in Finland (5.3%) and Estonia (2%). Victimization by university staff was most prevalent in Estonia (16.2%), Argentina (9.5%), and the United States (8.9%), with lower prevalence in Finland (6.5%). The most widespread form of bullying in all countries included verbal attacks, mockery, or criticism related to personal characteristics, social discrimination. Most forms of bullying, including physical violence or damage to the victim's property, were reported among respondents in the United States. Gender differences in the roles of bullying also varied across different countries. Girls were more often victims of bullying by males only at universities in Finland, while in Argentina, Estonia, and the United States, male students were more frequently victims of peer violence. Additionally, interesting research has been conducted on bullying at Spanish universities, which was aimed at studying bullying in the student environment, as well as its typology, scope, and predictive factors (Gómez-Galán, Lázaro-Pérez, & Martínez-López, 2021). The main findings of the research indicate that peer violence among students is most commonly relational and verbal. Physical violence among students leads to peer condemnation and resistance towards the aggressor, and it rarely occurs at universities. Additionally, the research revealed gender specificity in predispositions to victim behavior: girls

suffer more often because young men tend to assume the role of the bully and rarely suffer themselves. Similar results were obtained in studies conducted in educational institutions in Portugal (Sinkkonen, Puhakka, & Meriläinen, 2014). Gender analysis of victimization was also addressed in research conducted by Arakelyan K. N. (Аракелян, 2014), whose results showed that young men are more prone to self-harming and self-destructive behavior, while girls are more prone to dependent and helpless behavior.

The third area of research is related to the study of sexual victimization among the student population. This type of victimization is more prevalent among first-year students, as young people during this period undergo changes in their worldview and develop a need for emotionally intimate communication, which is associated with a desire to establish close relationships with their peers. This has been confirmed by research conducted among students at the State University of Education. While approximately half of first-year students (mainly girls) experience sexual harassment from their peers (mostly verbal); however, this phenomenon becomes sporadic in later years. The prevalence of sexual victimization among the student population, as a serious social issue, is described in the research by Klassen and Shipunova (Классен & Шипунова, 2013), where they analyzed findings from both foreign and Russian studies. This research also highlights the problem of violence in interpersonal intimate relationships, where both girls and boys can be victims. One reason for the high prevalence of sexual victimization among the student population is their specific lifestyle (Шипунова, 2011). Additionally, the study of risk factors for victimization of interpersonal violence in the student environment, depending on social affiliations (such as participation in sports, student associations, study abroad programs, and various student organizations), was analyzed in research conducted among college students by American scientists (Swan, Mennicke, Magnuson, & MacConnie, 2020). The research findings indicate that nearly two-thirds of survey participants reported experiencing at least one form of interpersonal violence victimization, with the most common types being sexual harassment, peer stalking, and psychological abuse by a partner. Data from a study conducted at six universities in the United States (Cho et al., 2020) further highlights the prevalence of intimate partner violence among students. This study examined gender differences, help-seeking behaviors, and their outcomes, focusing on key variables such as intimate partner victimization, its consequences, help-seeking, and resulting outcomes. The analysis revealed a higher level of victimization among female students, which led to increased rates of depression and deterioration in both physical and mental health.

Analyses of research conducted by both Russian and international scholars indicate that students' susceptibility to victimization depends on their social-psychological characteristics. Utilizing the methodology proposed in the study by S. A. Falkina (Фалкина, 2014), different groups of victimized students can be identified, and each group is characterized by maladaptive response styles and pessimistic assessments of their life prospects. The first group in-

cludes students exhibiting aggressive victimizing behavior. These young individuals have a high level of internet addiction, attempting to assert themselves on social networks, often provoking conflict situations and displaying aggression towards other users. They are prone to cyberbullying, which in turn places them in dangerous situations, making them victims of cybercrime. The second group includes students of the active type, prone to risk-taking, reckless and self-destructive behaviors. They frequently share information and photos pertaining to nearly all aspects of their lives. They often engage with unknown individuals on social networks and in real life, which makes them susceptible to violence, including sexual violence. The third group comprises proactive students with hyper-social victimizing behavior. These young individuals exhibit principled stances, intolerance to injustice, and sensitivity, which can make them targets of criminal acts by aggressors and fraudsters. The fourth group is characterized by passive behavior. These students are often prone to dependent, helpless behaviors, which may stem from individual traits or an inability to make independent decisions in unfamiliar situations. These behaviors may also be shaped by parental upbringing strategies. A lack of social support and a sense of belonging frequently make them victims of violence, as they are unable to offer resistance. The fifth group consists of uncritical students, who are unable to accurately assess life situations, they are naive, and tend to act impulsively. These young individuals often fall victim to violence and various forms of fraud. Due to their lack of critical thinking skills, they may justify criminal actions, thereby exposing themselves to danger.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the review of Russian and foreign research on the victimization of university students indicate an increase in this phenomenon among students. As a distinct sociodemographic category, students are more inclined towards self-assessment, a constant search for life paths and attitudes, a pursuit of new ideas, and high-intensity communication, often manifesting feelings of anxiety and loneliness, which significantly influences their behavior. Analysis of the research demonstrates that students possess socio-psychological characteristics that predispose them to victimizing behavior (Стуколова & Волкова, 2016). This paper summarizes the findings of studies on the factors contributing to victimization and victimizing behavior among university students. Three main directions of research on victimization among students are conditionally identified. The first direction is associated with studying the victimizing behavior of students who have encountered internet violence, which often leads to various mental health issues among victims of cyberbullying, including depression, withdrawal, fear, and anxiety. The second direction involves determining the frequency and prevalence of various forms of violence against students, identifying the profiles of perpetrators, victims' reactions, and the consequenc-



es of violence leading to their victimization, as well as analyzing gender-specific differences in victimization. The third direction of research focuses on studying the sexual victimization of students and its consequences. The results of the conducted research allowed for the identification of five groups of students, each with distinct psychological characteristics and tendencies towards victimizing behavior. This understanding aids in comprehending the specifics of victimizing behavior formation among students. The identified characteristics can assist in determining directions for efforts aimed at preventing victimization in the student environment.

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Paper received on: 15/4/2024

Paper accepted for publishing on: 2/9/2024