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Research Report

# Children and the Cult of Beauty in the Online World



Children and the Cult of Beauty in the Online World

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## **1 Introduction**

Social networks have become an inseparable part of our lives. According to AMI Digital Index, social networks are used by 95% of the Czech population aged 15 to 26 years. Regardless of age, we spend on average 2 hours and 39 minutes a day on social networks. There is a plethora of activities we can do on social networks; as the name suggests, they are primarily intended for communication between people but they can also act as a source of inspiration, entertainment or education. Despite the considerable benefits, social networking has recently been associated with negative phenomena and scientists around the world are conducting research aimed at the degree social networks can have an effect on us. A widely debated topic is their effect on mental health, especially among teenagers. Depressive symptoms or anxiety are associated with social networking mainly due to people's natural tendency to compare their lives with the lives of others. We usually share the happy moments of our lives on social networks, while the less happy ones tend to remain hidden. In this way, we create a 'portfolio' of our own life. Then we compare our lives with other profiles and it may seem to us that others live a happier life. In addition to comparing material possessions and experiences, we also tend to compare our appearance. Networks are full of photos of perfect men and women whose appearance may be influenced, in addition to genetic predispositions, by countless filters, unnatural posing or even special programmes aimed at improving the curves of the body. In this way, a specific cult of beauty is created. However, the cult is not natural in reality but only on social networks. The aim of this research is to show how deeply rooted the cult of beauty is among Czech children.

The authors

## 2 Identification of the research

The research **Children and the Cult of Beauty in the Online World** was carried out in cooperation between the Centre for Prevention of Risky Virtual Communication of the Faculty of Education of Palacký University Olomouc, Department of Psychology and Abnormal Psychology of the Faculty of Education of Palacký University Olomouc and O2 Czech Republic as part of contract research (contract PDF/2022/0029).

## 3 Methodology

### *Procedure*

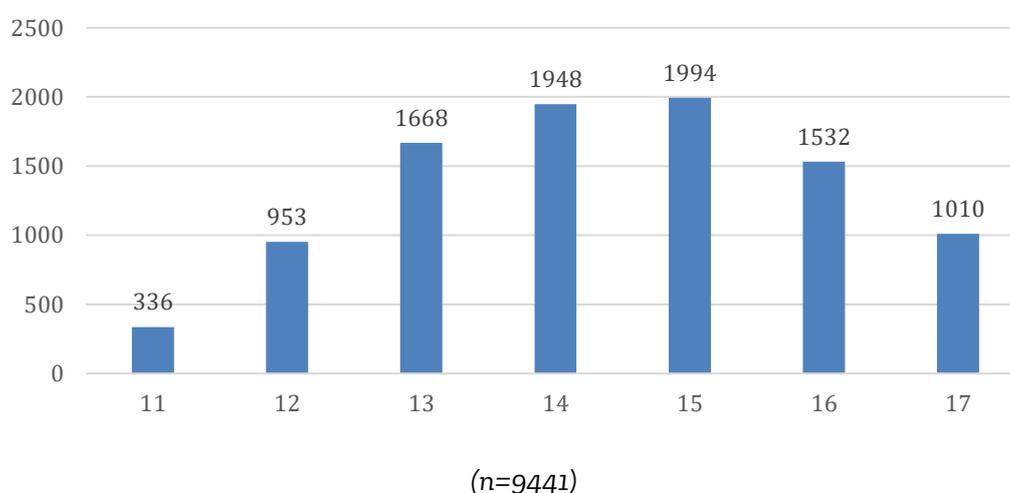
The basic research tool was an online questionnaire in Google Forms which was distributed to students through a network of elementary and secondary schools using the authors' data collection tool Research 1.0. The researchers addressed schools in the whole territory of the Czech Republic.

Data collection was performed from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2022 to 1<sup>st</sup> May 2022. This was followed by data cleaning, evaluation of partial outcomes and their interpretation. A detailed data analysis was performed by means of the Statistica software.

### *Description of the research sample*

The research sample was composed of **9441 respondents aged 11–17 years** (53.9% of girls, 45.59% of boys). The average age of respondents was 14.37 years ( $\text{Mod}(X)=15$ ); a detailed structure of the group of respondents is shown in the following graph.

Graph 1. Distribution of respondents by age



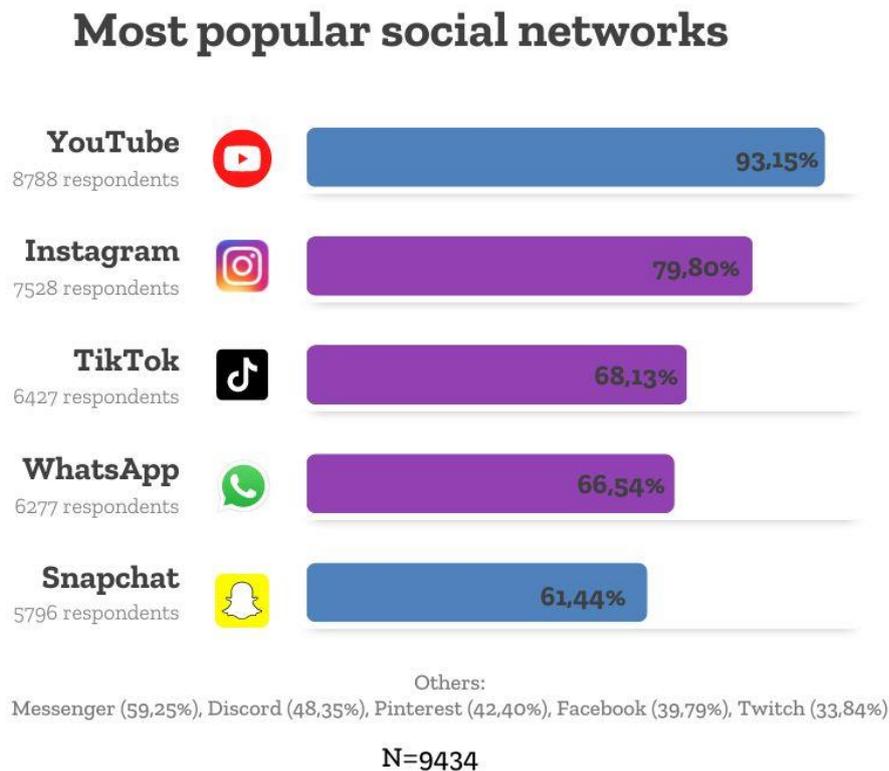
Respondents were recruited from all of the regions of the Czech Republic; the largest number of respondents were from the Moravian-Silesian Region (18.68%), Olomouc Region (13.19%) and South Moravian Region (11.20%).

## 4 Children on social networks

### 4.1 Social networks and profiles that children use

The first place in terms of social network use is occupied by **YouTube**, which is according to the research used by **93.15% of Czech children**. The second is **Instagram (79.80%)**, which came ahead of the popular **TikTok (68.13%)**. It is interesting that Facebook, which dominated in previous years, is used only by less than 40% of Czech children and in terms of popularity was ranked ninth. More popular platforms are for example Snapchat, Discord or Pinterest. This suggests that this social network is on the decline, at least among the younger generation.

Graph 2. Most popular social networks used by children and adolescents



**Children are most active on Instagram, where 56% of them share photos or videos.** Considerably fewer children publish photos or videos on Snapchat (30.74%) or TikTok (28.22%). More than 32% of children responded that they had a profile on a social network but did not publish their photos anywhere.

The most common reasons why children set up a social network profile are friends (65.79%) or classmates (25.67%) who are already on the social network. It was confirmed that children's motivation to establish a profile on social networks was generally of a social nature, as confirmed by the third most frequent answer: 23.34% of respondents established a profile on a social

network because everybody was there. A significant role is played by influencers, who made 17.07% of Czech children establish a profile on a social network. As far as the process of establishing a social network is concerned, 55% of children do it themselves, while 23% of children are assisted by their parents.

#### **4.2 Content that children create and share on social networks**

On each social network, children can share their photos or create different videos depending on which network they share the content on; for example, TikTok is known mainly for the creation of short videos, while on Instagram children can also share photos. **Children usually create content that documents their everyday lives** – photos and videos showing themselves, their friends or families (51.08%). More than a fifth (21.31%) of children use social networks to create humorous content. In addition, they like to film or take pictures of various animals (19.47%).

However, the content created by children also included some negative phenomena, albeit to a lesser extent: **57 respondents (about half a percent) said they created content aimed at self-harm, the same number reported content capturing violence.** Approximately one percent of children post videos dominated by marijuana or other drugs, two percent of children create videos with alcohol. Sharing their own content is similar to sharing foreign content. In addition to the above, compared with other types of videos, children often share the so-called **cringe videos** using humour that embarrasses the creator of the video or the person captured on the video. These videos are shared by 13.12% of children.

#### **4.3 Sharing photos and videos from children's profiles by their parents**

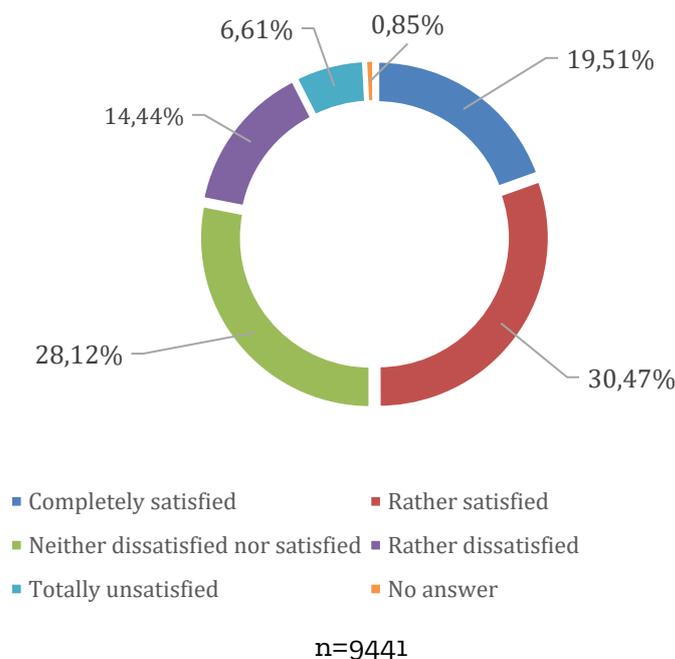
In the research, we also focused on whether parents share public photographs or videos of children from their profiles, that is, materials originally published by their children. **Approximately one fifth of children (20.60%) said YES – with their consent, while 9% of children said YES – but without their consent.** More than half of respondents (55.23%) said NO. Around 13% (12.82%) of respondents said DON'T KNOW whether their parents shared the material from their profiles on the internet. In this context, it should be understood that if the material is public, it can be easily shared on the internet without the author's consent.

## 5 Children and appearance

### 5.1 How satisfied are children with their appearance?

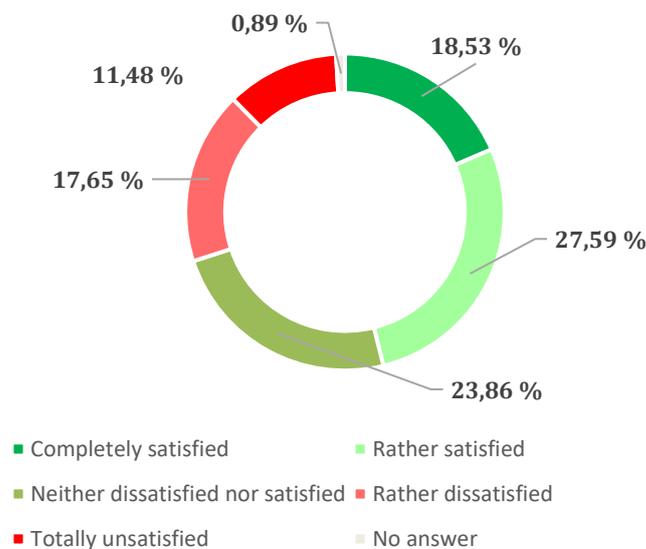
The perception of one's own appearance is one of the key mechanisms in adolescence which is involved in the development of self-value and self-esteem. In this sense, adolescents' satisfaction with their face and body was analysed. **50% of children are satisfied or rather satisfied with their face.** 28% of children have a neutral attitude to their face. A total of **21% of children** are dissatisfied or rather dissatisfied.

Graph 3. Satisfaction with one's face



**46% of children are satisfied or rather satisfied with their body.** 24% of children have a neutral attitude to their body. **29% of children** are **rather dissatisfied or dissatisfied** with their physical appearance. It can be assumed that children who do not have a positive attitude to their body or face will be more sensitive to offending, ridicule or bullying both online and in the real environment.

Graph 4. Satisfaction with one's body/figure



(n= 9441)

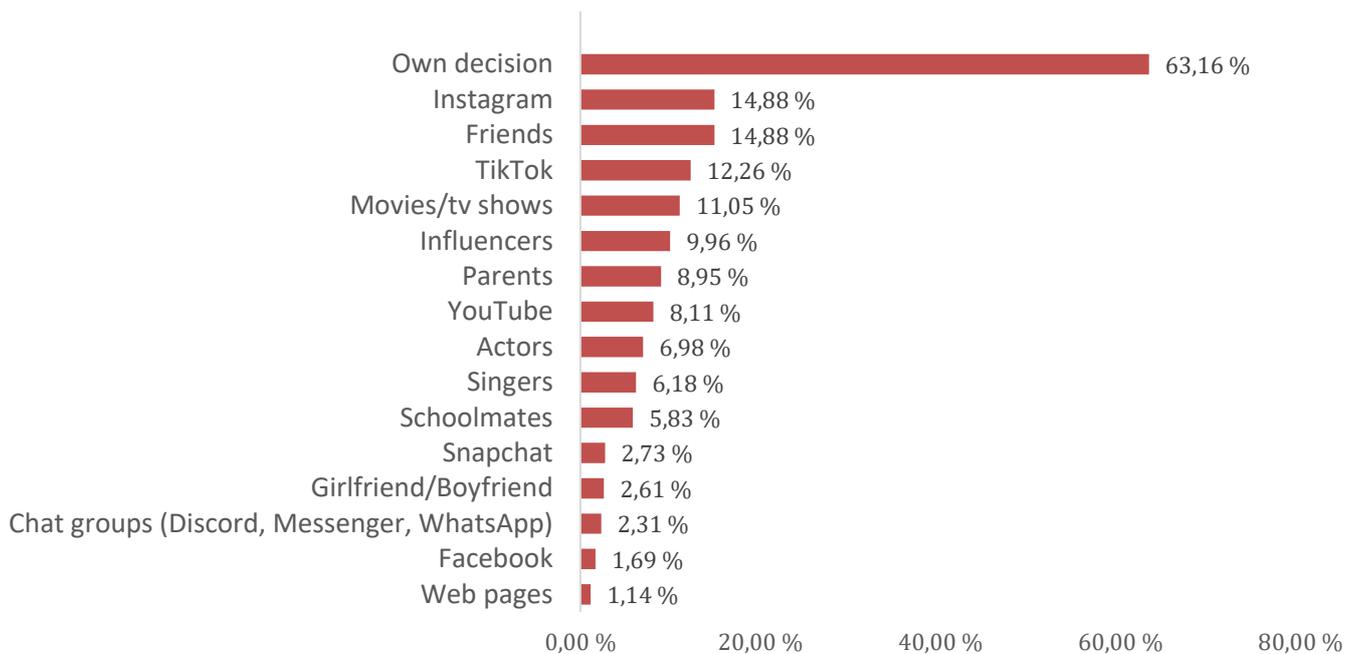
One of the aims of the research was to investigate the trends in children's appearance – how children improved their appearance or what improvements they desired. Most children want to improve their figure. For example, **34% of children would like to lose weight** (and 10.54% of children have succeeded), while **31.51% of children would like to build muscle mass** (7.54% of children have succeeded).

Another change that children would appreciate is their **hair colour**. Around 21.53% of adolescents have already changed their hair colour, while 20% would like to but have not done so. A relatively popular phenomenon among children is **tattooing, which is desired by 26.49% of children** (more than 6% already have a tattoo). An important aspect is the possibility to cover the tattoo. **Only slightly over 7% of children would like a tattoo that would be impossible to hide, while a temporary tattoo is desired by over 18% of children**. Piercing is also popular among children; 14.80% of respondents desire a piercing. Other options to improve appearance were not so popular. Some of them include improvement in **breast size and appearance (8.12%), improvement in butt size and shape (7.89%) or permanent make-up (6.68%)**.

## 5.2 What inspires children to improve their appearance?

The research also focused on what made children improve their own appearance and what inspired or motivated them. In the first place, children say **it was their own decision (without any foreign influence) – this was confirmed by 63.16% of children**. For some children, **the source of inspiration for a change in appearance are friends (14.88%). 14.88% of children also found inspiration on Instagram, 12.29% of children on TikTok**, other sources of inspiration for children are films or serials (11.05%), influencers (9.96%), some children changed their appearance under the influence of their parents (8.95%).

Graph 5. Sources of inspiration for changing children's appearance

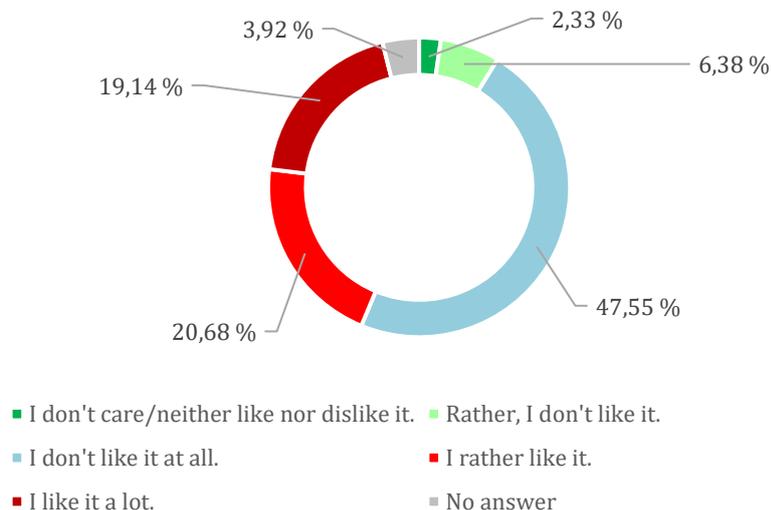


(n=7460)

### 5.3 Significant changes in other people's appearance as seen by children

In the next part of the research, the authors focused on significant changes in appearance, including various types of plastic surgery, distinctive tattoos, distinctive ear decorations and other types of body modifications. Almost half of children (47.55%) do not have a strict opinion concerning these changes in other people's physical appearance. On the other hand, **40% of children dislike significant appearance modifications**. Only 7% of children assess a significant change in other people's appearance positively.

Graph 6. Children's opinions about other people's significant body modifications



(n=9441)

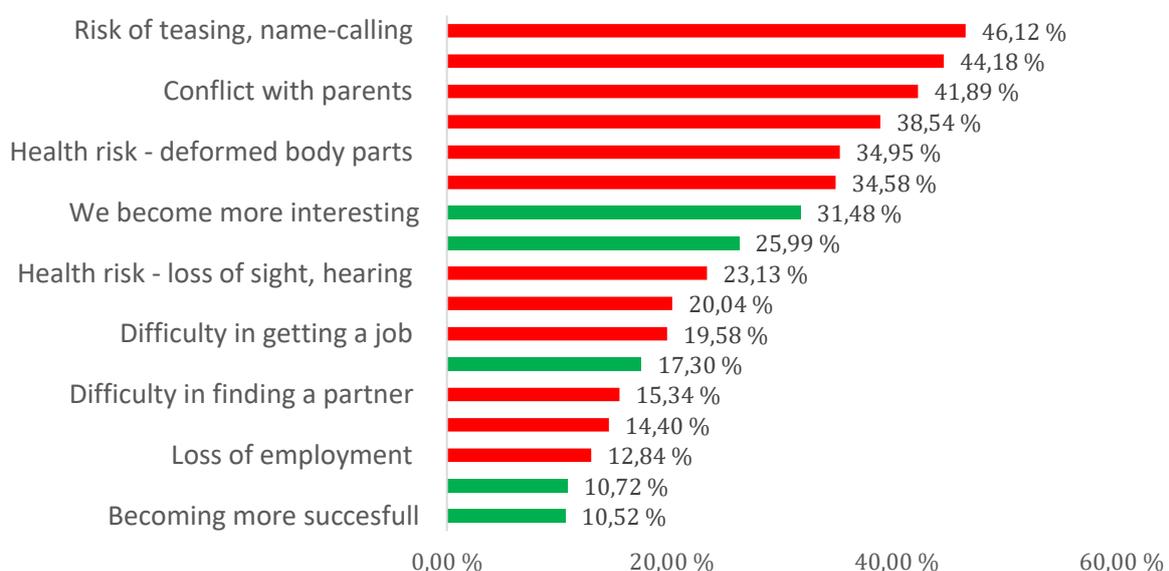
Naturally, the authors focused on whether children were aware of how a significant change in appearance could affect people's lives – on the one hand, the impact of physical modifications could be positive (increased chances of establishing a partnership, etc.), on the other hand, there are numerous negative aspects (health, psychological).

Almost **half of respondents (46.12%) are aware of the risk of ridicule and insults** they may be exposed to in the case of a significant change in appearance; in this context, **38.54%** are aware **of the risk of bullying or cyberbullying**. **41% fear conflicts with parents** as a result of appearance modifications. 19.58% understand that a significant change may be a barrier to getting a job, 15.34% confirm that it may compromise the chance of establishing a partnership or even lead to a breakup.

A separate set of effects is represented by **health risks** – 44.18% of respondents acknowledge the risk of infection, 34.95% understand the risk of body deformation, 34.58% consider the risk of allergic reactions to changes in appearance, 23.13% realize the risk of loss of vision or hearing and 20% are aware of the risk of frostbite (for example in the case of piercing).

However, the positive aspects should not be forgotten – **31.48% of respondents said they could become more interesting as a result of changes in appearance** and stand out from others. **For 25.99% of respondents, changes in appearance increase the chances of establishing a partnership**, 17.30% confirm higher chances of establishing friendships and 10.52% believe changes in appearance will make them more successful.

Graph 7. Risks and positives associated with significant changes in appearance



(n=8352)

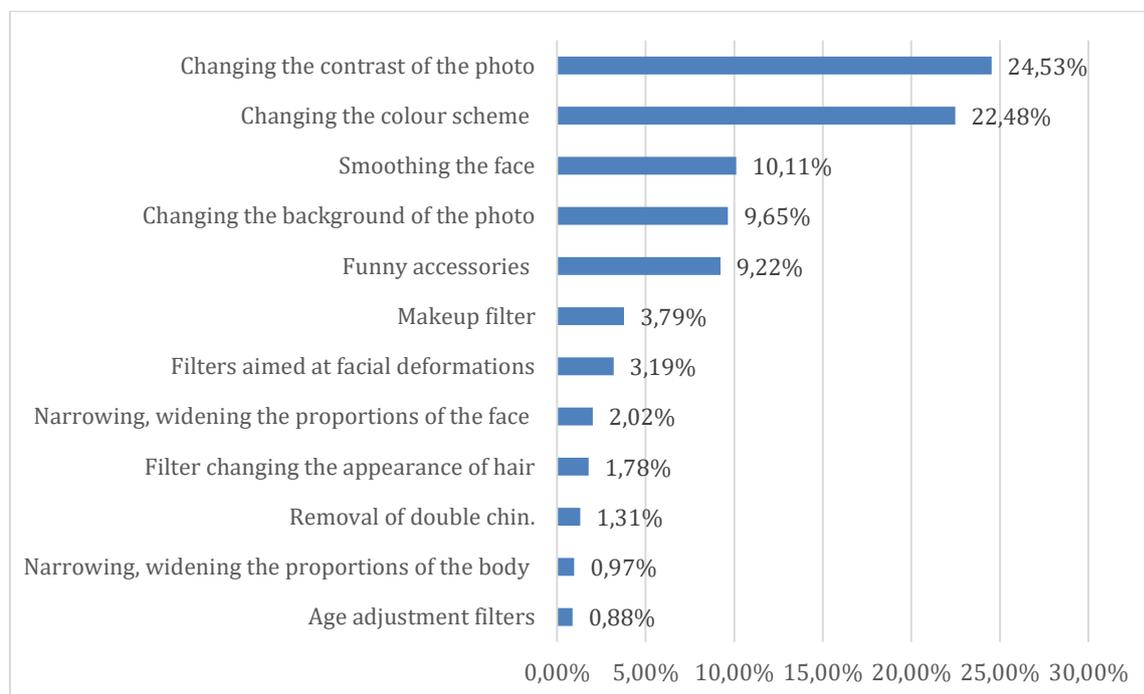
## 6 Children and photo editing

### 6.1 Do children edit their appearance in the online environment?

A very interesting part of the research focused on the issue of editing children's appearance on their photographs which are then actively shared through their online profiles. In other words, the authors analysed whether children edited their own photographs before publication – for example by using filters (or other similar tools). At the beginning, it should be mentioned that **more than half of children (58.35%) do not use photo-editing filters**. The rest of the sample edit their photographs in various ways before sharing them in the online environment.

The most common filter (24.53%) is photo contrast adjustment. As far as body part filters are concerned, **the most common is the face smoothing filter (10.11%) and make-up filter (3.79%)**. The filter to improve body proportions (for example, breast or butt enlargement) is used by less than a percent of Czech children.

Graph 8. Photo editing by children



(n=8872)

### 6.2 Children's motivation for photo editing

The reasons why children use filters are simple – most of them like it (27.49%) but also to make them look better than in reality (11.47%). Another type of motivation may also be different virtual

awards; 4.70% of children edit their photographs to receive more likes, while 3.16% of children do it to attract more followers. A detailed overview is shown in the table.

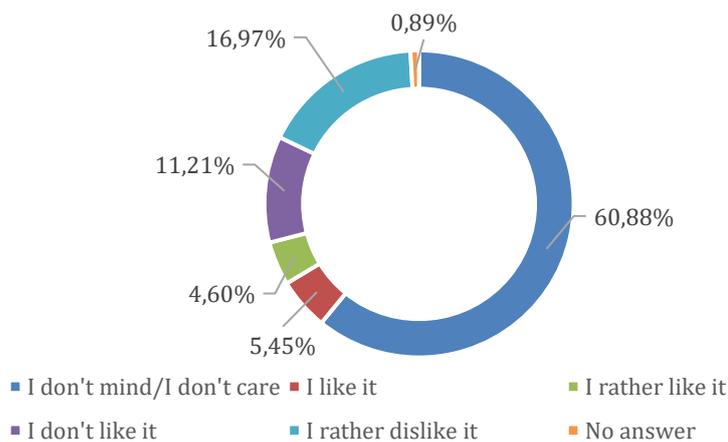
**Table 1. Children’s motivation for photo editing**

	Number (n)	Relative frequency (%)
<b>No, I don’t use filters</b>	4694	52.41
<b>I like it</b>	2462	27.49
<b>I want to look better than in reality</b>	1027	11.47
<b>I want the photo or video to be funny</b>	732	8.17
<b>I want to attract the attention of someone I like</b>	468	5.22
<b>I want to look differently than in reality</b>	448	5.00
<b>Other people also use filters</b>	441	4.92
<b>I want to get as many likes, hearts and positive emojis as possible</b>	421	4.70
<b>I want to look more interesting than in reality</b>	405	4.52
<b>I want to have as many followers as possible</b>	283	3.16
<b>I want to resemble my favourite model (celebrity, influencer, etc.)</b>	163	1.82
<b>I want to look worse than in reality</b>	48	0.54

(n=8957)

### 6.3 Children’s perspective of persons who substantially edit their photos using filters

The research also focused on how children perceive substantial editing of other people’s photographs. Czech children are tolerant to the use of filters, **more than 60% of children reported that they did not mind whether and how other people edited their photographs.** Approximately 28% of children had a negative attitude to substantial photo editing. But it depends on the type of photo editing.



Graph 9. Children’s perspective of persons who substantially edit their photos using filters

N=9441

## **7 Body shaming and other forms of appearance-related aggression in the online environment**

Significant phenomena in the online environment include various forms of bullying, aggression or body shaming. These phenomena are negative in their essence, but in the case of children and adolescents, their effects may be tragic. Therefore, frequent terms used in the description of adulthood are "Sturm und Drang" (storm and stress), as the psyche of adolescents is subject to conflicting impulses of the Promethean enthusiasm and deep sentimental world-weariness. In other words, this is a very difficult and sensitive period, when even minimal exposure to unjustified criticism, ridicule or bullying may seriously disrupt or affect the development of the individual. Therefore, a significant part of the research focused on this area.

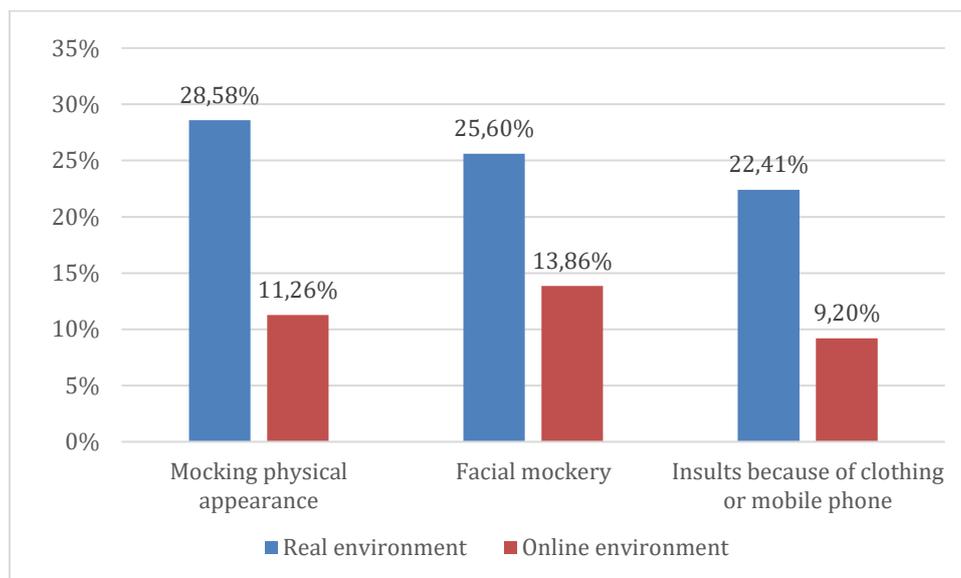
### **7.1 A third of adolescents have experienced online ridicule**

The research shows **that a third of adolescents have experienced situations in which they were exposed to ridicule concerning their profiles in the online environment.** As far as body shaming is concerned, 14% of adolescents have experienced negative comments concerning their face and hair, while 11% of adolescents have experienced insults concerning their figure. Every tenth child has been ridiculed for the content written on social networks. Less than 10% of children have been exposed to insults concerning their material possessions, such as clothing (5.2%) or the brand of their mobile phone (4.1%). A positive finding is that 70% of adolescents do not have a negative experience in the online environment related to reactions concerning the content of their profiles.

### **7.2 Ridicule in the real life has been experienced by every second child**

For comparative purposes, the authors also focused on adolescents' real-life experiences. Compared with the online environment, a significant and surprising increase was observed – a total of **53% of children had real-life experiences** with ridicule because of their appearance. 29% of the cases related to physical appearance, 26% to face or hair. 22% of children were insulted because of their clothing or mobile phone (brand, age).

Graph 10. Comparison of the most frequent insults in the real and online environment



(n= 9238)

### 7.3 We are not aggressors/haters

On the contrary, a very positive finding is that **92% of children** declare **that they do not ridicule or insult others in the online environment** as regards to their profiles on social networks.

In the real environment, the number is again higher; **insulting or ridiculing another person was admitted by 13% of children**. This mainly included ridicule aimed at appearance such as body or face (10%) and clothing (3%). In other words, 87% of children say that they do not ridicule anyone in real life because of their appearance.

## 8 Impacts of body shaming and other forms of aggression on adolescents

In addition to monitoring of the presence/absence of bullying, body shaming and other aggressive behaviours in the online and real environment, it is also important to analyse their impacts on adolescents' psyche and behaviour. Children's responses to ridicule in the online environment can be classified into three categories. The first group includes **changes in behaviour**. The second group is characterized by **changes in the social area**, while the third group involves responses **in the area of perception**. The impacts listed below reflect primarily the most frequent and most significant responses.

### 8.1 Behaviour

#### Escape as a defence

As far as **changes in children's behaviour** are concerned, the most frequent strategies include deletion of the ridiculing content (14%), less frequent use of social networks (6%) and in rare cases deletion of the whole profile (2%). Another defence mechanism used by children is escape to online or offline gaming reality (12%).

#### Addictive substances

Overall, **for more than 6% of children, their negative experiences in the online environment were the trigger for starting to use addictive substances**, whether it be generally acceptable and tolerated substances or illegal substances.

1.6% of children admitted using anxiety or depression psychopharmaceuticals, 1.3% reported using sleeping pills, 3.3% of adolescents said that they smoked cigarettes or consumed alcohol.

#### Potential risk of eating disorders

The authors also focused on the percentage of children who in response to ridicule in the online environment reported changes in behaviour related to unhealthy eating habits or changed self-perception. 7.5% of children started to restrict food intake and **5% of children even reduced their food intake to a minimum**. On the contrary, 2% of children declared an increase in food intake. A serious finding is **overeating and subsequent vomiting admitted by 1.3% of children**, which in real numbers means 96 children. **More than 7% of children began to perceive their body as 'fat', despite being assured of the opposite by people in their surroundings.**

#### Psychosomatic impacts

Defensive reactions, which can be also be identified as psychosomatic, occurred in 4% of children (312) including physical issues such as headache, abdominal pain, nausea, etc. Sleep disorders as a sensitive indicator of mental discomfort occurred in 7% of children.

#### Positive impacts

**In some adolescents, these negative experiences had a positive motivational effect, including activities promoting a healthy lifestyle, specifically sports activities with 10% of new active participants or workout with almost 5% of children.** As a result of these experiences, about 4% of children were motivated for healthy eating, while 8.4% of adolescents changed their dressing style and became more interested in fashion trends.

Table 2. Selected impacts of body shaming and other forms of aggression – behaviour

	n	%
<b>Positive impacts</b>		
Sport	745	10.2 %
Changes in dressing style	614	8.4 %
Workout	348	4.7 %
Healthy diet	271	3.7 %
<b>Escape as a defence</b>		
Deletion of content	1029	14.1 %
Escape to gaming reality	872	11.9 %
Less frequent use of social networks	453	6.2 %
Deletion of profile	181	2.4 %
<b>Addictive substances</b>		
Smoking cigarettes or alcohol consumption	240	3.3 %
Psychopharmaceuticals	117	1.6 %
Sleeping pills	93	1.3 %
<b>Risk of eating disorders</b>		
Restrictions on food intake	541	7.5 %
Feeling 'fat'	536	7.3 %
Reduction of food intake to a minimum	383	5.2 %
Increase in food intake	128	1.7 %
Overeating and subsequent vomiting	96	1.3 %
<b>Psychosomatic aspects</b>		
Sleep disorders	502	6.8 %
Physical issues	312	4.2 %

(n= 7294)

## 8.2 Social relationships

### Impact of negative experiences on social relationships

**Almost a quarter of children** who had been offended in the online environment (ridicule, hates) **became more cautious and limited their trust in people in the online environment.** 8.5% of children significantly limited their communication with others in the online environment as a result of these negative experiences.

1.65% of children started to take revenge in the online environment including insults and hates. Despite the fact that the percentage seems negligible, in real numbers this corresponds to 120 children.

The research also focused on the impact of negative experiences in the online environment on real social relationships outside the internet.

As far as social relationships are concerned, a positive finding is that **a quarter of children shifted towards real (non-virtual) social relationships as a result of their negative experiences** and started to focus on real friends in the real world. The opposite effect was observed in 5.5% of children, whose social isolation in the real world increased and their communication and free time spent with others decreased. 16% of children transferred their experiences from the online environment to real social relationships and showed less trust in other people. One percent of children started to hurt other people in the real world, this group included 80 adolescents.

Table 3. Comparison of the impact of negative experiences on the online environment and the real world

	Online environment		Real environment	
	n	%	n	%
<b>I started to trust LESS in other people.</b>	1736	23.83%	1165	15.99%
<b>I started to talk LESS to other people.</b>	629	8.63%	395	5.42%
<b>I started to hurt other people in return.</b>	120	1.65%	80	1.1%
<b>I started to talk more to friends in the real world.</b>	1767		24.25%	

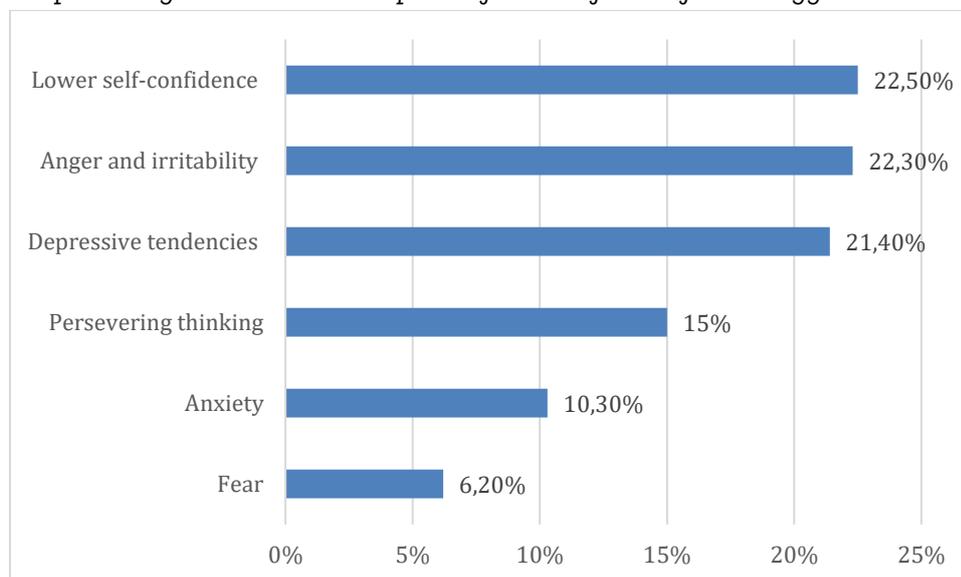
(n= 7286)

### 8.3 Perception

#### Negative emotional impacts in three quarters of children

The impacts of negative experiences in the form of ridicule and hates in the online environment also affect the area of **perception**. A total of **25% of children perceive these experiences rather positively** or believe that these experiences have strengthened them and made them more resilient. The rest of adolescents point to various negative impacts in this area. This particularly involves negative emotions. In this context, **anger and irritation was perceived by 22.3%** of adolescents; depressive tendencies in the form of **sadness/low happiness were perceived by 21%** of adolescents, 10.28% of adolescents perceived feelings of anxiety, while 6.22% perceived fear. In addition, **in 22.5% of children this perception was reflected in their self-assessment**, including lower self-esteem and higher self-doubt. Another significant finding is that **15% of children** responded to negative behaviour towards them in the online environment by showing **perseveration tendencies**, that is, adherence to a problem, constant repetition of a topic, inability to forget and worrying about the situation.

Graph 11. Negative emotional impacts of various forms of online aggression



(n= 7217)

#### Every tenth child admits self-harming tendencies

A very alarming finding is that **7.54% of children (representing 544 children) would prefer not to live, while 307 children (4.25%) admitted self-harming activities such as cutting or burning on different parts of the body.**

**In the online environment, children perceive their position better compared with the real environment.**

The process of building one's own identity, which is one of the main tasks in adolescence, includes the perception of how the child is accepted by others and the child's position in the world. As far as the **online environment** is concerned, **60% of children** feel complete or partial **satisfaction with their own position** in this environment, which is certainly a very good result. 24% of children have a neutral attitude. Another positive finding is that dissatisfaction was reported by only 13% of children. In the assessment of children's own position **in the real world**, the results are somewhat worse. Full or partial satisfaction was indicated by 57% of children. A neutral attitude to their position was suggested by 23% of children. On the contrary, complete or partial dissatisfaction was observed in 19% of children.

## 9 Summary

The research focused on social networks and their possible influence on the psyche of children and adolescents. In addition to YouTube, the dominant platforms used by Czech children are Instagram and TikTok. Children use these networks to share their everyday experiences. Approximately a fifth of children try to create funny content. The creation of potentially harmful content (self-harm, violence) was admitted by just over half a percent of children.

Users can edit their photographs on social networks using filters. However, more than half (58.35%) of Czech children do not use any photo editing filters. The most commonly used filters are face smoothing and make-up filters. The motivation to use filters is mainly entertainment and the desire to look better than in reality. Overall, children perceive photo editing using filters neither negatively nor positively. Only about 11% of children dislike photo editing using filters.

An alarming finding concerns children's satisfaction with their own body and face. Only every second child is satisfied with their face, while 46% of children declared satisfaction with their own body. 21% of children are dissatisfied with their face and 29% with their body. Children's dissatisfaction with their body is reflected in what they would like to improve on themselves. More than a third of children would like to lose weight, over thirty percent would like to gain muscle mass. Other means to improve appearance included, for example, changes in hair colour or tattoos. Around eight percent of children would like to change the size and shape of their butt or breasts.

The research provides an interesting comparison in the section on ridicule and hates in the real or virtual environment. Although cyberbullying is an important topic, it was observed that ridicule is still dominant in the real environment. While a third of Czech children experienced ridicule in the online environment, it was over 50% in the real environment. Most often, children ridiculed somebody's appearance, clothing and mobile phones. Only 8% of children admit having ridiculed somebody in the online environment and 13% in the real environment.

If a child becomes the victim of ridicule, it can have both negative and positive impacts. For example, ridicule made 10% of children more physically active. On the other hand, 7.5% started to restrict food intake. A frequent strategy for children is escape – for example, by deleting the content which was the reason for ridicule or by playing computer games. This experience was the trigger for smoking cigarettes or alcohol consumption in three percent of children. However, the results show that online ridicule can result in serious consequences – more children started to trust other people less after internet ridicule compared with the real environment. Moreover, over 4 percent reported self-harm activities after being ridiculed on the internet.

In addition to children's behaviour, the authors were also interested in the behaviour of their parents in the sense of the so-called sharenting, that is, sharing photographs or videos of their own children on social networks. According to children, this content is shared by 20% of parents with children's consent and around ten percent without children's consent.

## 10 Citations



This new research focuses on a topic that entered the Czech media space as a result of foreign studies analysing (primarily negative) impacts of social networks on child internet users. It should be mentioned at the beginning that for the majority of Czech children, social networks are very important; they provide a space where they can communicate with friends, publish self-presentations and create their own virtual identity represented by profiles, including various content (texts, photos and videos). But what children publish in the online world may not be a true reflection of reality. As was expected, approximately 40% of Czech children edit the photographs that they publish (using various filters) but only a small part of them fundamentally change their appearance – especially the face (every tenth child). Only a fifth of Czech children are dissatisfied with their face, while dissatisfaction with their own body was reported by almost half of children (29% of Czech children were completely dissatisfied).

Unfortunately, the world of external beauty is associated with a number of problems. Probably the most common is body shaming. A third of Czech children confirmed having been subject to ridicule concerning their online profile, 14% of children experienced negative comments related to their face and hair, 11% of children were insulted because of their figure. As suggested by research studies, body shaming is certainly a problem that needs to be solved, for example through various preventive awareness-raising activities, strengthening of children's social skills but also by increasing their psychological resilience. A natural part should be a healthy school climate in order to minimize the emergence of undesirable forms of behaviour.

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Social networks represent an interesting phenomenon of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the one hand, they make life easier for us every day by improving communication but on the other hand, we are witnesses of the negative impacts they bring. For the human brain, it is a difficult task to cope with something that stimulates the system of rewards using likes or hearts than ever before. Another important factor is the societal essence of social media. Since the times when leaving the pack meant certain death, we have developed a strong tendency to be accepted by society, which is related to the desire to be liked by other people. Therefore, it is not surprising that in pursuit of social recognition, adolescents and even adults share photos which are slightly improved or may not truly describe reality, in extreme cases they change their appearance because of their photos. The results of the research surprised me in several ways, especially the fact that around half of children are dissatisfied with their body and face. It is questionable to what extent these numbers are caused by social networks. Anyway, something needs to be done about this – for example in schools. In my opinion, more attention should be paid to education in the field of media mental hygiene, where students would learn that not all photos on social networks are perfect in reality.

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In contemporary society, the ideal of beauty is shaped by mass media, social networks, influencers, fashion magazines and the ubiquitous advertising based on unrealistic visual content, especially in relation to what is considered the standards of beauty. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these standards are affected by negative stereotypes and accentuating the physical appearance as a prototype of success and popularity. On the internet, children and adolescents are confronted with physical ideals that do not correspond to reality and thus may affect the perception of their own body and incite feelings of uncertainty and insufficiency.

Body shaming, defamation and ridicule based on physical appearance, especially the figure, are considered forms of bullying and social aggression, which is in the online environment further intensified by the anonymity of the aggressors. The consequences of body shaming cannot be ignored and downplayed, as these negative experiences may result in a series of physical and mental problems that can manifest in the area of behaviour, social relations and emotional perception. The most serious consequences of negative experiences in the online environment include especially the potential risk of eating disorders, substance abuse, development of depressive or anxiety manifestations, negative self-assessment and even self-harming behaviour.

We consider the above most urgent, not only in relation to the increase in psychiatric diagnoses among Czech children and adolescents but also because of the effects of the measures during the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused a further increase in the time spent on the internet by children and adolescents. We believe that the key to addressing this situation is a comprehensive approach, which should include families, educational institutions and, last but not least, psychology and psychiatry professionals. In this context, however, it should be pointed out that this will be a long-term and demanding process.

PhDr. Jana Kvintová, Ph.D. and Mgr. Lucie Křeménková, Ph.D.



The study Children and the Cult of Beauty in the Online World is the seventh in a row investigated together with the E-Safety project of Palacký University. After two years, we have returned to the virtual world of Czech children, this time to open a social discussion on how social networks affect the perception of their own appearance and body. This joint research activity is very important to us because it helps us identify the current risks in the online environment and address them. We have again managed to obtain unique data which have so far not been presented in the Czech Republic on such a large sample of respondents. A large part of the research is devoted to the phenomenon of body shaming. Just as other manifestations of bullying, this form of ridicule has moved to the internet in recent years and children and adolescents are those who are increasingly confronted with it. Therefore, it is also becoming increasingly relevant for our educational portal [www.o2chytraskola.cz](http://www.o2chytraskola.cz) and the popular educational website [www.bezpecnevsiti.cz](http://www.bezpecnevsiti.cz). Both websites provide detailed information about this risky behaviour on the internet and much more. We are also planning to prepare specific content focused on body shaming as well as to include methodological resources for teachers that will help them open these topics in classes.

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