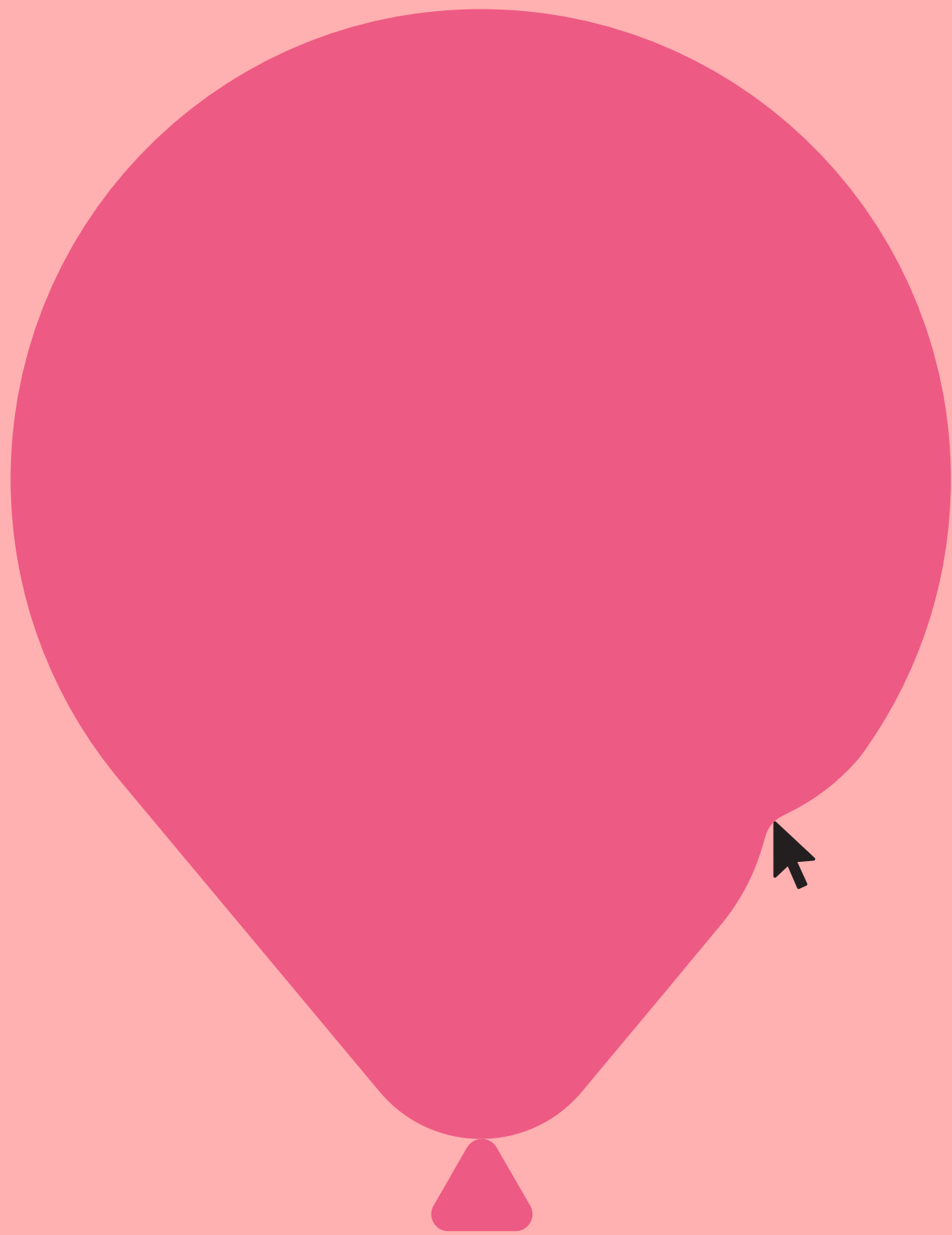Gender-based content analysis

Sexist Hate Speech

against young girls

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Introduction

Content which is created and shared online is still largely perceived as harmless and this contributes to significant devaluation of its impact in the offline world. Sharing fabricated and malicious content, which is often disturbing to the people it is aimed at, is still treated as a phenomenon that takes place in isolation, in an 'unreal' world, and as a result its negative effects in the 'real' world, are acquitted. Negative behaviour is not recognised as a form of violence or hate speech and is not properly addressed, which encourages the public to create and share new content that has a negative effect.

Freedom in terms of anonymity that social media enable has created a space that has significantly encouraged people to verbalize their opinions and attitudes, but also to create fabricated and malicious content, without fear of liability, i.e. that they will be sanctioned. Although harassment in the online space has been present for a long time, the development of social media as public platforms for sharing and consuming information has allowed for its greater reach, given the speed with which certain content can be spread to a large audience. Thereto, the harassment of a certain person takes place through the public online space, which enables mobilizing support for the disturbing content and additionally creating new. This type of harassment could cause significant damage to the psychological and emotional state of the person subjected to this content, which, in particular if it is a young person could have permanent effects on its entire life and further development.

According to their characteristics, social media platforms represent a fertile ground for the creation and spread of gender-based hate speech and gender-based harassment, mostly by perpetuating gender stereotypes in the online space. Therefore, social media platforms are one of the key instruments of anti-gender campaigns, through which gender disinformation is spread, but also an instrument with which women in public life are subjected to attacks

and smear campaigns, in order to limit and discourage their participation in the public sphere.

Media and their reporting have particular importance for the creation and sharing of malicious content, taking into account that the publication of news reports on social media is often the basis for the creation of such content, particularly if they are not regulated by the media. The purpose of this analysis is to identify malicious content and misogynistic narratives targeting young girls, published in comments on news reports on social media, as well as to highlight the impact of such content on the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. The ultimate goal of this analysis is to contribute to informing and increasing the knowledge and self-confidence of women and girls to recognise and effectively tackle such content.

This analysis, entitled Sexist Hate Speech Against Young Girls, is the second analysis of gender-based content produced by the Institute of Communication Studies within the project Fact-Based Journalism for Raising Awareness and Countering Disinformation in the Media Space in North Macedonia, implemented with the support of the British Embassy Skopje.

Methodology

The main focus of this analysis is gender-based malicious content targeting young girls. The research was conducted by applying a qualitative analysis of news reports and comments on news reports published on social media (Facebook and Twitter), posted in the period from March to May 2023. The purpose of this analysis is to identify malicious content targeting young girls, published in the comments of news reports on social media, as well as to indicate the impact of such content on the perpetuation of gender stereotypes.

The analysis includes research of two case studies investigating malicious content directed at young girls. Despite the fact that in both studies the cases are about missing girls, the starting point in the selection of the cases for analysis was not the background of the case, but the content of the comments they triggered on social media. Taking into account that both cases, in addition to similar themes, took place one after the other, in a short time period, they also provided a good basis for comparison, that is, establishing correlation in terms of the reactions they triggered. The first study included a case study analysis of two missing minor girls from the Chair neighbourhood in Skopje, while the second study refers to two missing girls in the Centre neighbourhood in Skopje.

For the purposes of this analysis, a sample of 140 news reports and more than 1,500 social media comments related to the two case studies were analysed. News reports from all online media that reported on the cases subject to this analysis were examined, without further selection of individual media, and the comments on those social media posts. At the same time, taking into account that the focus of the analysis was on comments on social media, primarily on the Facebook platform, the content analysis was done through several specific aspects:

- use of sensationalist language in posts and news reports by media;

- use and perpetuation of gender stereotypes in the content of the comments, especially through sexualisation;

- use of sexist speech and hate speech;

- creating and spreading fabrications;

- promotion of a culture of violence, particularly gender-based violence;

- responsibility for the case and tendency towards maturation.

Within the analysis, the initials that directly refer to the identity of the minor girls are not given, and the contents with grave insults and their sexualisation are not presented. As part of the analysis, screenshots of several relevant comments were selected and displayed, by covering the identity of their creators.

Context of the Analysis

The public dissemination of misogynistic narratives through social media can have significant impact on the personal and emotional development of children and young people, but also have long-term damaging consequences in maintaining and deepening gender inequalities in society. These narratives are often verbalized in the form of everyday use of relatively misogynistic and derogatory sexualising language, criticism of female sexual activity, jokes about sexual violence, blaming victims of gender-based violence, maturation, or attributing characteristics, i.e. the responsibility of an adult on minor girls, objectification and ridicule of girls based on their appearance, ridicule of girls who perform non-stereotypical gender roles, etc.

Creating, sharing and disseminating content that attacks certain individuals based on their gender, including their gender identity and sexual orientation, constitutes gender disinformation or misinformation, often characterised by misogyny and homophobia.[1] Through these narratives, the persistence of gender stereotypes in society is supported and gender-based violence is encouraged, as an instrument for maintaining traditional gender roles. The approval and encouraging violence against women are among the most frequent and common expressions of misogyny.

According to the Macedonian glossary, gender-based and sexist hate speech, which is a form of online violence, refers to any type of communication, through speech, text or non-verbal behaviour, that attacks, humiliates, insults and discriminates against a person based on sex, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity and includes, among other things, sexual shaming and

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1   IGF. (2021). *Exploring the concept of Gendered Disinformation*. Available at: https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/62/20661

trolling.[2] Moreover, online violence includes the various forms of violence on the internet carried out through technology and is defined as the deliberate infliction and repetition of harm by using computers, mobile phones or other electronic devices, most often through the use of textual or graphic content.[3]

According to research, social media pressures both girls and boys in different ways, with exposure to online harassment having a disproportionate effect on young girls' online activity, where gender norms are reinforced.[4] It is estimated that one in ten women over the age of 15 experience online violence.[5] However, not only are women more likely to be exposed to online violence, they may also suffer serious physical, psychological or economic consequences.[6] Furthermore, harassment can be exacerbated when it is perpetrated on the basis of gender in combination with other factors, including age, ethnic or racial origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, etc.

Being exposed to content that is offensive and malicious can cause fear, anxiety, stress, humiliation and other negative emotions in the people who are subject to this content. Harassment caused by online content can leave lasting trauma for women and girls, where the public memory of shame and blame can lead to the internalisation of trauma and cause mental health disorders, which can range from anxiety, depression, stigma, to self-harm as an option to deal with trauma and suicide as the only way to end such trauma.[7] Data from a survey that was conducted in three secondary schools in North Macedonia showed that 78% of the respondents were victims of harassment online, of

2   Vasileva, A., Martinoska, A. and Milenkovska, S. (2023). *Glossary of gender-based violence committed with (mis)use of technology. UNFPA*. Available at: https://mtspresursencentar.mk/publication/1993_poimnik_na_rodovo_baziranoto_nasilstvo_izvrsheno_so_zloupotreba_na_tehnologija_0.pdf

3   Ibid.

4   EIGE. (2019). *Gender equality and youth: opportunities and risks of digitalization*. Available at: https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/gender-equality-and-youth-opportunities-and-risks-digitalisation?lang=pl

5   EIGE. (2017). *Cyber violence against women and girls*. Available at: https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls

6   EIGE. (2022). *Combating Cyber Violence against Women and Girls*. Available at: https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/combating-cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls

7   University of Ljubljana. (2017). *Cyber Violence against Women & Girls REPORT*. Available at: https://www.stoponlineviolence.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Cybersafe_Report_200623_web.pdf

which the largest number were women and members of the LGBTI community, categories that are also the most frequent victims offline.[8]

What is particularly worrying is that 11 respondents reported having suicidal thoughts after being subjected to this type of harassment.

Despite variations across countries and age groups, multiple studies indicate that the majority of social media users have faced harassment on Facebook.[9] This also points to the need for regulation of malicious content created by media, but moreover to those created by the general public, taking into account the negative effects that this content can cause, especially on younger users.

In addition, gender-based hate speech and gender-based violence in the online space are still insufficiently recognised by the relevant institutions in North Macedonia. Despite the definition of online sexual harassment in the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, as well as its recent criminalisation, we are still faced with its non-recognition and in-(appropriate) treatment. Gender-based hate speech is recognised by the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination and the Commission on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination in its actions.

Regarding the regulation of hate speech from a criminal point of view, several criminal acts in the Criminal Code are related to hate speech, including: endangering security, causing hatred, discord or intolerance on national, racial, religious or any other discriminatory basis, dissemination of racist and xenophobic material via computer systems, approval or justification of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, racial or other discrimination. Although this phenomenon is recognised in the Criminal Code within some acts as a crime, there is no separate article that directly incriminates it as a specific crime. The thread of vagueness and deficiencies in

8   Anastasovska, S. and Mitov, O. (2021). A*nnual report on the situation with hate speech at the local level in the cities of Tetovo, Bitola and Shtip for 2021*. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights. Available at: Annual report on monitoring local hate speech in the cities of Tetovo, Bitola and Shtip in 2021 - Helsinki Committee for Human Rights : Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (mhc.org.mk)

9   University of Ljubljana. (2017). *Cyber Violence against Women & Girls REPORT*. Available at: https://www.stoponlineviolence.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Cybersafe_Report_200623_web.pdf

the legal framework is followed by the lack of regulation of hate speech in the online space. This lack is also reflected in judicial practice, where we encounter ineffective prosecution of perpetrators and a significantly small number of verdicts for hate speech. Thus, for example, the Department of Cybercrime and Digital Forensics within the Ministry of Interior (MoI) is the only institution that has access to evidence collection mechanisms in the online space, but the procedure to locate the perpetrators is slow and most procedures take too long and end in failure. Moreover, the Public Prosecutor's Office has no legal practice of prosecuting hate speech online, which could have helped to potentially increase the preventive role of laws to discourage those who abuse freedom of speech on social media. Consequently, there is also a lack of prevention of hate speech, since if a phenomenon is not recognised and regulated, we cannot gather data for its gravity, the consequences it has and the need to prevent it from occurring.

The term 'online media' refers to platforms (forums, social networks and other platforms that enable the free exchange of information, ideas, views and opinions) and any other independent electronic publication (blogs, web presentations, etc.), except for those that are registered in some record in accordance with the law. In the latter example, it is left to the will of the creator of the online publication (blog, website, etc.) whether they want to register that publication as a public bulletin, for it to be considered as a media outlet for public information and to be subject to media legislation, and on the basis of such status to enjoy certain rights, but also obligations.[10]

The traditional media sphere of public information in North Macedonia is regulated by the Law on Media[11] and the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services.[12] Although these laws do not regulate online media, there are a number of other laws that do regulate them to a certain degree, including: the Criminal Code, the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation, the Law on Copyright and Related Rights, the Law on Personal Data Protection, the Law on Free Access to Information, the Law on Prevention and Protection from

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10 Bachoska, J. (2017) *Strengthening Professional Standards or Erosion of Free Speech: Regulating Online Media in Macedonia.* Institute of Communication Studies, School of Journalism and Public Relations. Available at: https://iks.edu.mk/attach/Regulacija-na-onlajn-mediumi-rezime.pdf

11 Law on Media, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 184 of 12/26/2013

12 Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 184 of 26.12.2013

Discrimination, the Law on Labour Relations, the Law on Archive Material, the Law on E-Commerce and others.

Regarding social media platforms, their regulation is almost non-existent. Although social media increased the opportunities for freedom of expression, for faster and easier sharing of information, and enabled smooth communication on global level, they simultaneously created a space for spread of disinformation and hate speech. On social media, hate speech has gained momentum in recent years and is one of the main sources of misogyny and sexism. What is positive is that European legislation is keeping up pace and already since December 2018 has addressed the problem of nonregulation of social media. This means that North Macedonia will also have to harmonise the legislation in the area of video sharing platforms and social networks, i.e. social media. Latest information from the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services is that experts from the European Commission have been already working on harmonising the Macedonian media legislation with the amended EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD).[13] Although this is a good signal, there is currently no regulation of social media in the country, which has created a vacuum in which hate speech and the spread of harmful content thrive. Moreover, although online media are subject to regulation in the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation, in which they are included within the term 'electronic publications' as media through which insults and defamations can be disseminated, this does not apply for hate speech.

13   MKD.mk The time has come to regulate social media. Available at: https://www.mkd.mk/node/478487
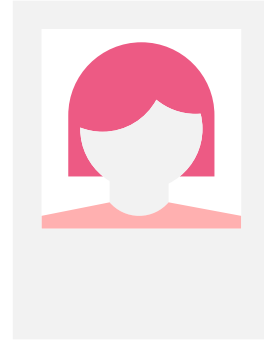
Case Study:
Missing Girls in Chair

Within the scope of this case study, there was analysed content regarding the case of two missing minor girls from the Skopje neighbourhood of Chair at the end of March 2023. According to news reports that were published after the disappearance of the two girls and according to the announcements of the Ministry of Interior (MoI), the case involved a 12-year-old and a 15-year-old girl who left their homes and did not return. The report for the 12-year-old girl was filed by her father on 30/03/2023 at 20.30 hrs, while the report for the 15-year-old girl was filed on the same day by her father at 22.00 hrs, both at the Bitpazar police station. According to the information from the MoI, the 15-year-old girl had left home several times in the past and was brought back. The MoI press release stated that measures were being taken to return the missing persons.

Initial media reports only referred to the disappearance of the 12-year-old girl, providing details about the girl including name and surname, height, appearance, all accompanied by photos, neighbourhood, school, information around the time of disappearance, details of police reports and shared contact phone numbers if anyone spots her. Statements from the girl's father with an appeal to help him in the search were also shared in the news reports. In later reports on the same day, on 31/03/2023, information began to circulate that the

12-year-old girl had gone missing while at school, where she had been called out during class by an older girl, and had not been seen again. Although the report on the disappearance of the second, the 15-year-old girl, was submitted an hour and a half after the report on the first, the news only refers to the 12-year-old missing, stating that she was taken somewhere by another girl, who was later found to be the reported 15-year-old girl. The news reports on the case from the very beginning contain details about the girls' names and surnames, some details of their lives, the neighbourhood they live in, statements from their parents and people who were close to them.

Later, news reports conveyed the news that the 'Sverceri' fan club was calling on its members to join the search for the two missing girls, and the very next day, on 01/04/2023, news was shared in several media that the girls were found at 13.30 hrs on John Kennedy street, near a shop in the park, by police officers from the Bit-Pazar police station.

In this study, 80 news reports published on social media regarding the case were analysed, as well as over 700 comments on social media posts in Macedonian and Albanian language, primarily on Facebook. From the analysis of the news reports, it was noted that the sharing of detailed data and photos of a 12-year-old girl could negatively affect the girl's life and cause harmful consequences. For the most part, the headlines referred to the seriousness of the situation and the need for help to find the girls. From the analysis of the comments, there can be observed a positive convergence of a large number of users with the sole intention of helping in the search for the missing girls, but at the same time there were also malicious posts that have the potential to negatively affect the girls' life in future.

Most of the comments that were analysed included appeals for help, calls for help from God, prayers and emoticons. An equally large number of comments were in the direction of supporting the family, expressing sympathy with the parents and messages to find the girl or girls healthy and alive as soon as possible. A large number of comments are directed towards condemning the educator who allowed the 12-year-old girl to leave the school after being called by the 15-year-old girl who was also missing.

Translation: "As long as there is employment on party affiliation basis in the education sector, these things will happen, unfortunately. Minding the exceptions, but 90 % are either illiterate, or irresponsible. To allow a minor to leave in the middle of the lesson, and it was not the parent who summoned them, is a total carelessness. God help that the girl is found alive and healthy."

There are comments that even contain statements that the whole country should be under surveillance so that such things do not happen, and Turkey was pointed out as an example.

Translation: "In Turkey, the whole country is under video surveillance. We need to implement that urgently. First the schools, then the whole town should be under surveillance. That is why all kinds of stuff happens here, from kidnapping to robberies, setting building and cars on fire… and the most horrible is this, missing children."

Some of the comments contain condemnation for the parents and the missing girls, saying that they are bad children, that they deserve to be beaten and that they are not well-behaved because only girls go missing, not boys.

Translation: „M.K. should be tied up in the basement, bad child."

Translation: „Alas, only girls get lost, why, for example, didn't boys get lost once."

In the comments, content was noted indicating that girls should not be walking alone at night and that more control over them was needed. The blame for disappearing in this manner is attributed to the *lack of control* over female children and the control that men in the home had in the past. Such thinking is a product of deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes that normalise control of women and girls by men, especially in families. Moreover, they normalise gender-based violence as a tool for establishing control over women's bodies. In this context, the comments are actually indicative of the low social awareness of the wider population and the still present traditional, misogynistic attitudes towards women, which can only lead to further marginalisation of women and girls.

greota ..ama mislam deka otišla za organi .Koga im vikam na moive maloletni vnuki od brat kade setaat nokje vo 1 h ne sum loša tetka .tuku tetka koja mozebi i poveke misli od nivnite roditelji. Jas da imam cerka maloletna ne bi ja pustila so taksi noke da se vraća od grad ....a I sekoj prav roditel ako e prav taka treba da postapi,bidejki ova vreme sega e ludo ,a I psihopati setaat po ulica ...Ne e ova vreme ona vreme koga možese da se spie i na klupa vo park a nikoj da ne te pipne,ne ova ona vreme koga slobodno mozese da spies i na livada.Go traževte zapadot .eve go dojde i kaj nas.

Ми се допаѓа   Одговори   12 седм.   👍 15

Regarding the publication of news reports related to the involvement of the 'Sverceri' fan club in the search, most of the comments applauded and expressed respect for the move and encouraged as many people as possible to join the search regardless of faith and nationality, while criticizing the authorities and the police, who were seen as not showing sufficient seriousness in the search.

Translation: „I don't know where the police are, why they are not taking any action, why should citizens self-organise, why are the cops getting their salaries, only to write fines"

Against the comments that encourage the inclusion of all people in the investigation, regardless of religion and nationality, there are also nationalistic comments and discussions that defocus from the real problem and the gravity of the situation.

Translation: „The state and the police are sleeping. Because they are children of Albanians, if they were Macedonians or Bulgarians, the army would have been activated."

As mentioned, though the disappearance of the two girls occurs simultaneously and both disappearances are reported to the police almost at the same time, the news reports for the most part only report about the disappearance of the 12-year-old minor. It is noteworthy that it is only in comments by Facebook users that the news is present that both minors are missing and that actually the girl who called the 12-year-old from school is missing at the same time. When this is confirmed in media reports with pictures of the 15-year-old minor, speculations about their connection also appear in the comments of the posts. In the comments of the news report on 4NEWS.mk entitled: *'Sverceri' fan club are starting the search for x and y from the Skanderbeg monument at 22.00 hrs,* a comment was noted that it might be a teenage *tantrum* and that one of the girls had a history of running away from home.

Translation: „Hopefully they are alive and without traumas. They might have run away from home. One of the girls had a history of running away from home. Let's hope that they are not kidnapped and that this is just a teenage tantrum."

As a follow-up to this comment, a whole discussion develops, where one of the comments points out that the girls were related and that the older girl is a lesbian, who goes to school with a knife and runs away from home, that she

took the younger girl. The following comments are speculation that this was true and that someone took pictures of them together and reported them to the police, and that they hope the police would discuss this with the parents.

Separately from this discussion, after finding the girls, comments appear in the same context about whether someone asked them where they were, accompanied by swearing and abusive words that they were together, and that they were together because they were lesbians and wanted to do *all kinds of things*. Speculation about the sexual orientation of the girls is fuelled even more after a shared post described the case of the disappearance not as a kidnapping, *but as an attempt to taste freedom away from broken families and homes* of two girls with different sexual orientation. In addition, it is noted that the reporting of the news in media was manipulative, with the sole intention of gaining attention and sensationalism.

The reasons for the disappearance of the girls remained unknown and are irrelevant in every respect to the general public. But the assumptions about their disappearance and the comments that contained speculations about the sexual orientation of the girls, which basically spread intolerance towards diversity, as well as those with insults and speculations about the bad intentions and bad behaviour of the older girl, can have a serious negative effect on the development of the girls and their life in future.
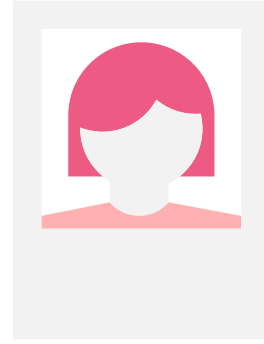
Case Study:
Missing Girls in Centre

In this case study, contents related to the case of two missing minor girls from Strumica in the centre of Skopje, in May 2023, were analysed. Several news reports were published in the media about the case, according to which the girls, who had come to Skopje on a one-day school trip, were last seen by their teacher in front of the Vero Jumbo shopping centre and were supposed to go for a walk and return at a certain time at the place where their buses were parked, but they did not show up. Moreover, attempts to contact them by phone were unsuccessful as both girls' phones were switched off. The case was reported to the Sector for Internal Affairs - Skopje, from where they shared a press release that measures were being taken to find them and it is shared by most of the media. At the same time, public calls and telephone numbers of parents and relatives of the girls were shared, asking for help in finding them.

Bearing in mind that these were missing persons, for whom help was requested to find them, their names, ages and photos were published in the news reports. A large part of the news reports used sensationalist terminology in reporting on the case, with some of the headlines and texts being repeated, hence we find several news reports with identical titles, such as: *BREAKING NEWS: MACEDONIA ON ALERT TONIGHT! Two girls who came from Strumica are lost in Skopje; PHOTO: The search is on for two girls lost in Skopje, who came on a school trip from*

Strumica; The police are looking for the missing girls from Strumica who got lost in Skopje this afternoon.

A little later after the first reports about the case, media shared a recording and images from a surveillance camera from a facility near the Vero Jumbo shopping centre, which showed that the girls went down a side street and headed in the direction of the Olympic Swimming Pool. Later, news reports were published about intensified search for the missing girls, by including additional number of MoI staff. The girls were found later in the evening in the Kisela Voda neighbourhood.

Within this study, 60 news reports published on social media regarding the case were analysed, as well as over 800 comments on social media posts, primarily on Facebook, as well as on Twitter. In addition, the posts have more than 4,000 shares and note audience engagement of over 9,000. From the analysis of the comments on social media in relation to news reports on the case, several aspects can be specified. In general, most of the comments were in the direction of expressing support for finding the girls quicker and sharing information in order to help. However, in a significant part of the comments, accountability is demanded for the situation, and it is primarily directed at three instances: the teachers who were responsible for the students on the school trip, the girls' parents and the girls themselves. It is some of these comments that include insults and misogynistic speech and are the basis for developing further discussions to support the negative narrative.

Large number of comments are directed at the (ir)responsibility of the girls' parents, i.e. they look for the problem in their home upbringing and in the girls themselves, which indicates the normalisation of the control of the behaviour of women and girls through families, most often through some form of gender-based violence. Moreover, in almost every published news report to which there are multiple reactions (for example, the publications of Focus[14],

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14   Available at: https://www.facebook.com/615792920552798/posts/706223801509709?paipv=0&eav=Afbk2k
        8YQguIvVYeztvW88qSK9Zzb7490ceou-cI5ARR2eHxiNRHGr7Qg-KbZs2GW3k&_rdc=2&_rdr

Strumica Today[15], A1on.mk[16]) there are comments blaming the girls for their inappropriate and irresponsible behaviour. Most of the comments with malicious content appear after the release of the video and surveillance images of the girls talking on the phone, and based on their behaviour within those few sequences, assumptions were made about their disappearance and the first suspicions are raised about the reasons. Hence, in a large part of the comments, doubts are expressed that the girls may have switched off their phones intentionally, but also that they did not ask anyone for help and directions or a phone number to call or report to the police.

> Na snimkata izgleda bas tocno kako da znaat kade odat a ne kako da se izgubeni bidejki ako se uzgubea ke prasaa nekoj na kade da se upatat.
>
> Like   Reply   5w   😊😲 16

Translation: „On the video it looks as if they know exactly where they are going, not as if they are lost, because if they got lost they would have asked someone for directions."

> moe mislenje sigurno se dopisuvale so nekoj i kazale deka ke odat za sk aj da se videme tam i tam i se gubi traga inaku i tel da se iskluci ke gi usluzi nekoj ako se izgubat policija na sekoja ulica sami ke se prijavat
>
> Like   Reply   5w   😊😲 19

Translation: „In my opinion, they might have been writing to someone, and said that they were coming to Skopje and said let's meet at some place and their trace is lot, otherwise even if their phones got switched off, they could get help by someone, if they were lost there is police at every street they would report themselves"

In the comments, discussions are developed through the analysis of the actions of the girls and assumptions are being made, which also contain direct insults addressed to them. The comments claim that they were obviously in a good mood when they separated from the group, that they knew exactly where they were going, that they already had a plan and had arranged to meet someone. At the same time, their behaviour is condemned considering that they disturbed their parents, but also all citizens.

> Ovie znaele kade odat i sega ucitelkata im e kriva. Golemi se i znaat da se krijat, imale nekoj plan. Ajde ke gi najdete vo nekoj park kako sedat po zavrsenata misija.
>
> Like   Reply   5w   Edited   👍 41

15   Available at: https://www.facebook.com/627496366057072/posts/653090966830945?paipv=0&eav=AfZfzB Gl0B3fkreUIdTK6f7WwJEUlTMX789kkD8SjzPZyrDqSz-6CiGUWe8rUVsfC-w&_rdc=2&_rdr

16   Në dispozicion në: https://www.facebook.com/281596268582644/posts/6126607680748111/ ?paipv=0&eav=AfYXdsX36NJl4t8GPM6jc4bMub30LDtNeGsBIOGdNrCmcNw4gAtbmoqE8N raAW1P1vI&_rdc=2&_rdr

Translation: „These two knew where they were going and now as if it is the teacher's fault. They are big and know how to hide, they had a plan. You will find them in some park sitting after they have completed their mission."

ova planirano napustanje na grupata ,setanje na dve guski vo magla koi sigurno imale telefoni cela drzava ja voznemirija,odgovornost i kazna a za roditelite povekje da rabotat so decata

Like   Reply   5w

Like   Reply   5w

zaminale negde vbiblioteka sigurno 😄

Like   Reply   5w

Top fan

Nese devojcina tuku Magarici otise po skopje na Boli zivot

Like   Reply   5w

Oni pred da odat se dogovorile so nekoj na fb ili telefonski ima raznorazni

Like   Reply   5w   10

kako ne

Like   Reply   5w

videte prvo kakvi sé nepoznati prijateli imal pa posle sekoj ne e za prijatel na fb

Like   Reply   5w

pa toa deca se sepak

Like   Reply   5w

deca se Ama od toa dopuštanje neli gledas so se slucuva u Srbija od takvi samo

Like   Reply   5w

ama THIS IS SPARTA

Like   Reply   5w

точно така.
Де се изгубиле учителката е крива не е никој крив Самите се криви и родителите.

Like   Reply   5w   2

Translation: Such a plan to leave the group, walking around of two 'geese in the fog' who certainly had phones, they have upset the whole country, accountability and punishment for the parents, they should work with their children more

They might have left to the library as if … ha ha ha

They are not girls, but cows, they have gone to Skopje for partying

before leaving, they made arrangements with someone over FB or over the phone, there are all kinds of people

as if

first, check their unknown friends and then…not anyone can be your friend on FB

they are still children

they are children yes, but that pampering, you see what happened in Serbia because of such children

but THIS IS SPARTA

correct. As if it is the teacher's fault that they got lost, it is nobody's fault. It they who is to be blamed and their parents.

What is significant is that some of the commentators completely ignore the fact that these are minor girls in a town they (probably) do not know well, which is particularly evident through comments claiming *they are not young children*, as well as comments with which they are insulted and sexualised, even associated with prostitution, human trafficking and similar.

> ...vo pravo si, znaeme dovolno za zarabotkata na brza para, cena za pola cas, za eden cas … komplet, polovicno … nema shansi da se izgubile, ne se prvacinja ?
>
> Like   Reply   5w

Translation: "you are right, we know enough about fast money making, the price for half an hour, one hour…. fully, partly…there is no chance that they got lost, they are not first-graders?"

> Hajt sejon nzhurka per nja 2 dit dot kthehen se nukan hup mosubani merak per nja 2.3 dit dot kthehen ktupari jan
>
> Like   Reply   5w

Translation: "Yeah, they're partying, they'll be back in a day or two, they're not lost, don't worry, they'll be back in 2-3 days, they're here somewhere, they're not lost."

In the comments, there are also assumptions that the girls lost themselves intentionally in order to be in the centre of attention and become famous, with the social network TikTok being mentioned on several occasions.
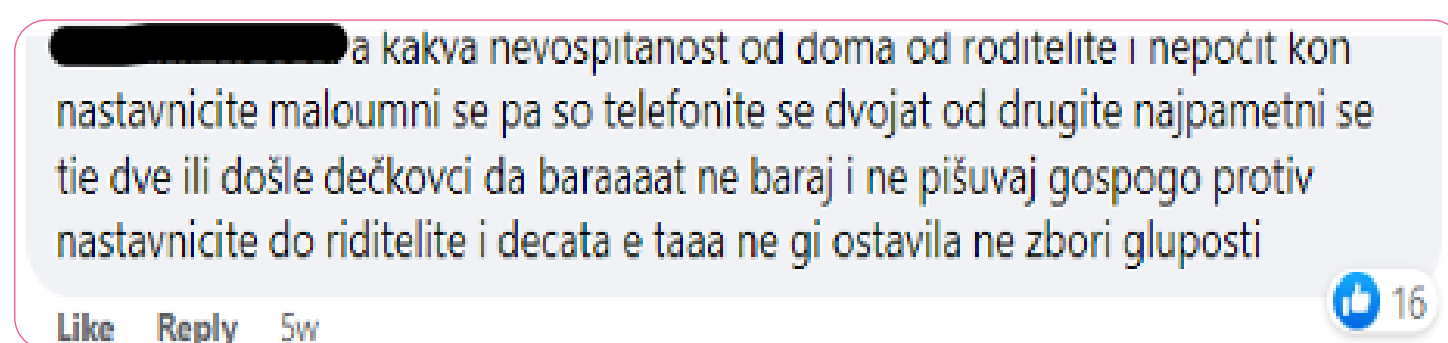
> duhet me mshel Tiktok'i se u prish mileti ej
>
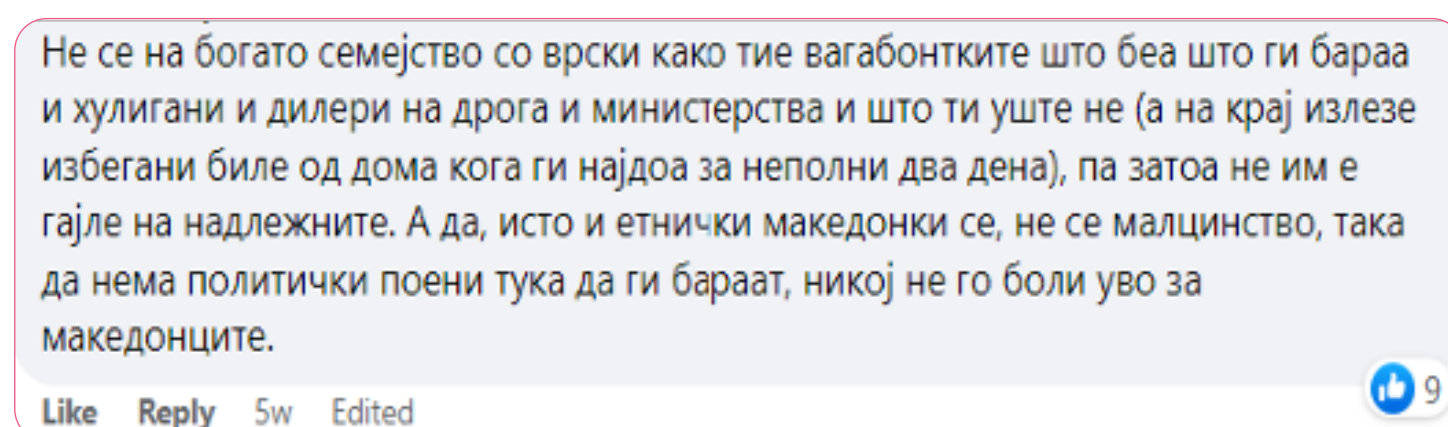> Like   Reply   5w   Edited   👍😂 10

Translation: "Tik-Tok should be stopped because people's behavior has deteriorated, huh"

Through these contents, certain gender stereotypes and prejudices that still exist in our society are confirmed, whereby women's behaviour is connected with the need for attention and they are sexualised for the purpose of insulting their personality and actions.

Some of the comments that hold the teachers accountable even develop arguments in their defence, placing the blame exclusively on the two girls and their ulterior motives for their actions.

> ▬▬▬▬▬▬ a kakva nevospitanost od doma od roditelite i nepoćit kon nastavnicite maloumni se pa so telefonite se dvojat od drugite najpametni se tie dve ili došle dečkovci da baraaaat ne baraj i ne pišuvaj gospogo protiv nastavnicite do riditelite i decata e taaa ne gi ostavila ne zbori gluposti
>
> Like   Reply   5w   👍 16

Translation: "Such bad home upbringing, from their parents and disrespect towards the teachers, they are retarded, and with their phones, they separated from the others, play smart those two, or have they come to look for boyfriends, do not ask and do not write madam against the teachers, the parents and the children are at fault, the teacher has not lost them do not talk rubbish"

> Не се на богато семејство со врски како тие вагабонтките што беа што ги бараа и хулигани и дилери на дрога и министерства и што ти уште не (а на крај излезе избегани биле од дома кога ги најдоа за неполни два дена), па затоа не им е гајле на надлежните. А да, исто и етнички македонки се, не се малцинство, така да нема политички поени тука да ги бараат, никој не го боли уво за македонците.
>
> Like   Reply   5w   Edited   👍 9

Translation: "They are not from rich families with connections like the vagabonds that were, and who were sought after by hooligans and drug dealers and ministries and whomever (and in the end it turned out, how come they ran away from home when they were found in less than two days) that is why the authorities do not care. And also they are ethnic Macedonians, they are not a minority, so they do not score politically by searching for them, nobody cares for the Macedonians. "

In addition, the comments also contain insults against the girls on the basis that they are from *the province*, and also draw comparisons with the case of the missing girls in Chair, especially on ethnic grounds.

As mentioned, some of the comments condemning the behaviour of the girls seek the responsibility for the case in their parents and the inappropriate upbringing of the girls.

> Раскалашеноста на децата од страна на родителите- ефектот е дрско ,
> неодговорно однесување
>
> Like Reply 5w   👍❤️ 15

Translation: "The effect from parents pampering children is tacky, irresponsible behaviour"

> Kade be izgubeni so telefoni vraka shetkarat taka gi vaspita od doma
> nif koga ke se vratat doma ubavo peglajne i shishajne nularica
> stramota ova shto go praat si gi voznemiruvat roditelite familijata i red
> drugi .

Translation: "How come they are lost when they have phones and walk around like this, who taught them like that from home, when they return they should be spanked and their heads shaved, such a shame, this that they are doing, they are upsetting their parents, family and many others."

In addition, comments *contain parenting lessons* and explicitly encourage the punishment of girls by their parents once they return and by stimulating various forms of violence. In addition to the comments, one can find various ideas for appropriate punishment of the girls, which, in addition to the parents, should also be applied by the responsible people in the school, such as confiscating their phones, forced labour, lowering grades, bans on school trips, etc.

> Ova Sega ne se deca gavoli se, ccccccc bez mozok ke potresuvaat cela drzava pa i
> zgora na se isklucile tel i mirno si setaat, abre kotekot samo kako porano sto bese pa
> dali ke smejat da se oddalecuvaat od grupata i svoevolno da begaat...Roditeli kaj vi e
> svesta sto cekate? znaete Li kako da vospituvate deca ili samo znaete da dremete na
> tel celo vreme, a decata sto sakaat neka pravat, treba rabota i zborenje sekoj den so
> site deca osvestete se!!!
>
> Like Reply 5w Edited   👍 87
>
> > ⬤ ▬▬▬▬ tocno.i po edna prekrsocna za roditelite,oti decistata im se
> > nemirni.neka gi sovetuvaat ili kaznuvaat doma ili neka gi naucat na
> > pamet,jakite stikli,ke setaat sami niz Skopje,a gi odnele u vero.telefonite
> > odzemanje i na psiholog nosenje...
> >
> > Like Reply 5w   👍 11
> >
> > ⬤ ▬▬▬▬ mislam deka roditelite im se pogolemi "gjavoli", zosto od niv
> > poteknuva se, i vospituvanje , sovetuvanje...koj kje bide nekoj roditel on si
> > odgovara za odgoj na decata.
> >
> >   👍 6
> > Like Reply 5w

Translation: Now these are not children, they are devils... they have no brains, they are upsetting the whole country and on top of everything they have switched off their phones and are walking around calmly, only beating for them as it used to be and then we will see if they would separate from the group and walk around on their own... Parents, where is your consciousness, what are you waiting for? Do you know how to raise children or only know how to hang around on your phones,

and leave the children on their own, you need to work with the children and talk to them every day, get your heads straight!!!

correct. And there should be fines for the parents because their children are ill-behaved. They should advise them or punish them at home, or teach them a lesson, as if they are some hot shots, they would promenade Skopje and they took them to Vero... take their phones and take them to the psychologist ...

I think the parents are bigger 'devils', everything comes from them, the upbringing, the counselling... when a person is a parent, they are responsible from raising their children.
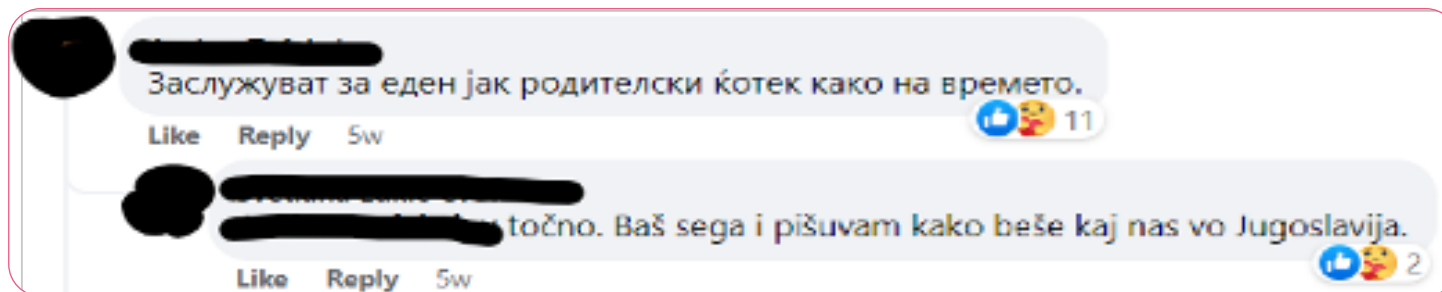
Translation: They deserve a good parenting beating, just like in the old times correct.
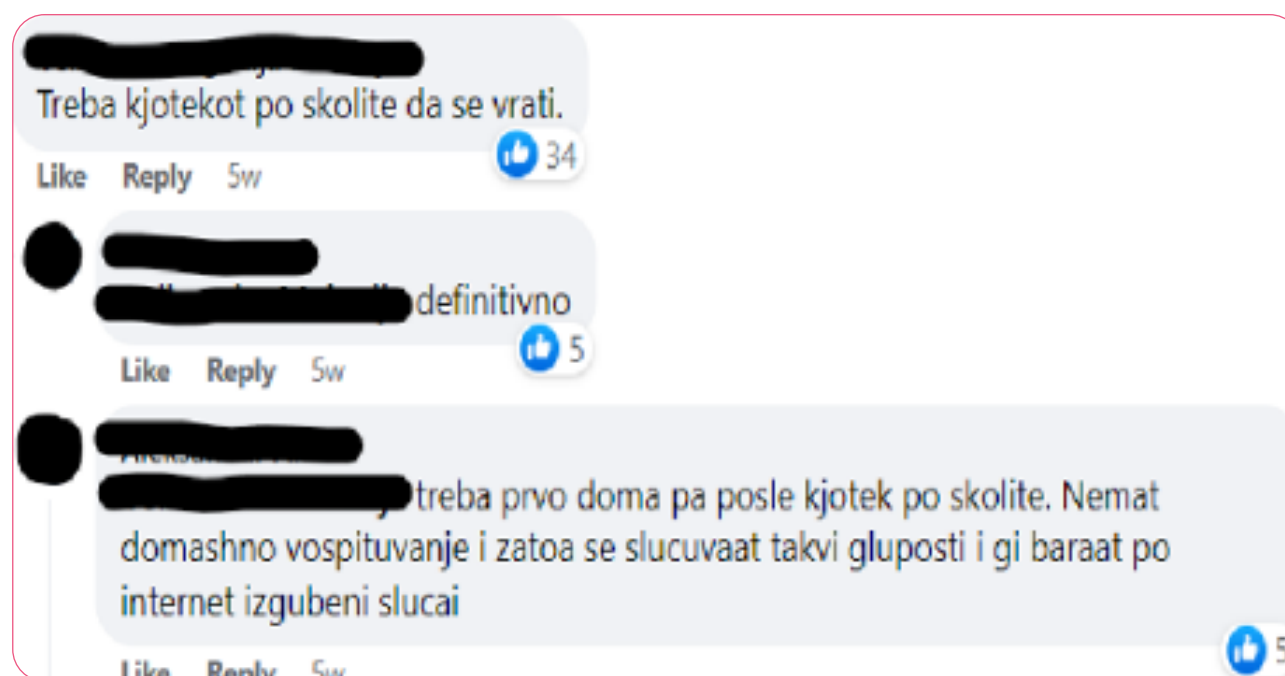
Now I am writing how it was in Yugoslavia.

Many of these comments use the so-called in my time narrative, through which the authors draw a comparison with the behaviour and upbringing of children in the time in which they grew up and the disciplinary tools that were used as appropriate to avoid this type of behaviour demonstrated by today's children. At the same time, most of these comments support the use of physical violence, both by parents and in schools.
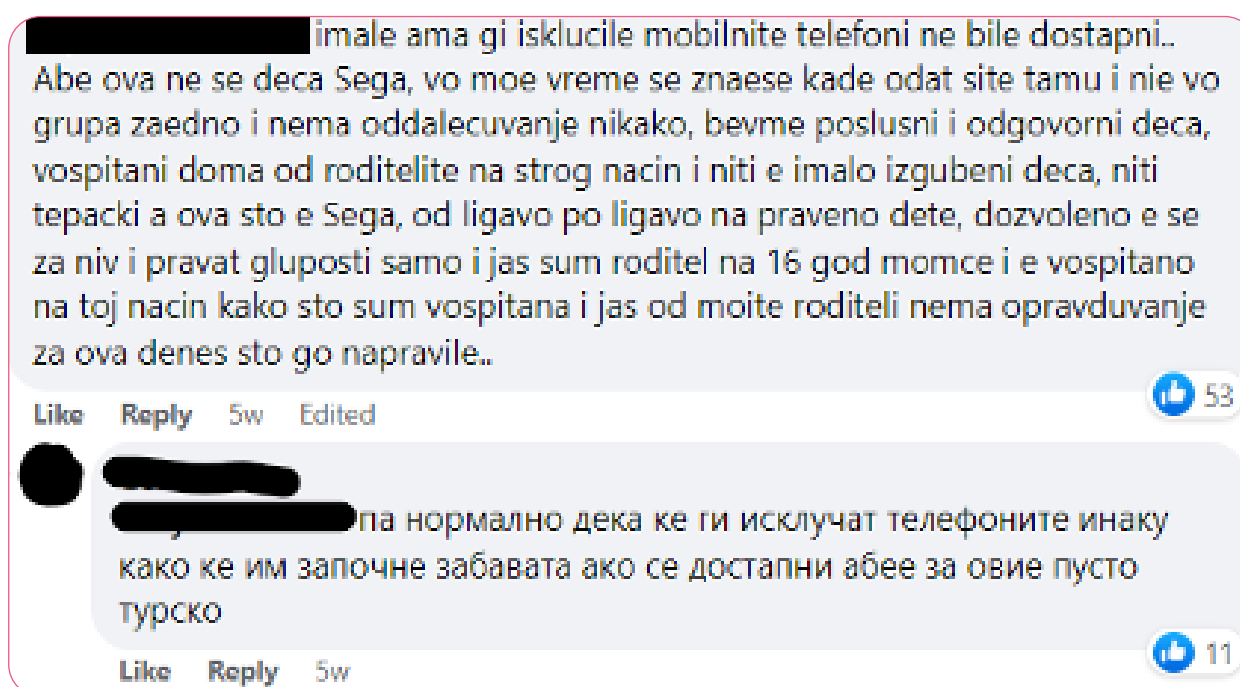
Translation: They had but they switched off the mobile phones, could not be reached. These are not children now. In my time, it was clear, one should go where everybody else went an we moved as a group and no separating, we were obedient and responsible children, well brought up at home in a strict manner and there were no missing children, neither fights and what is happening now, more and more spoiled children, everthing is allowed and they do stupid things, I am also a parent of a 16-year-old boy and he is brought up in same way as I was from my parents and there is no excuse for what these children have done today
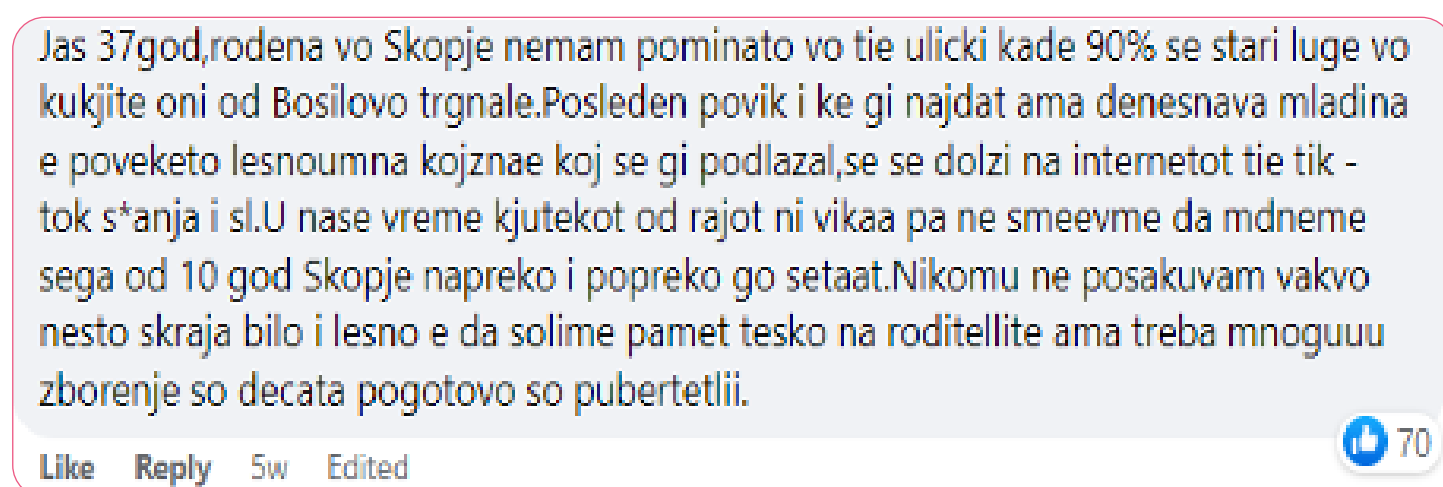
Of course they would switch off their phones, how would they party if they are available... they deserve only the good ol' Ottoman times

Treba kjotekot po skolite da se vrati.
Like   Reply   5w   34

...definitivno
Like   Reply   5w   5

...treba prvo doma pa posle kjotek po skolite. Nemat domashno vospituvanje i zatoa se slucuvaat takvi gluposti i gi baraat po internet izgubeni slucai
Like   Reply   5w   5

Translation: Beating should be reinstated in schools.

definitely

first at home and then some beating in the schools. They are not brought up well, and therefore these stupid things are happening, they are searched by the Internet, lost cases

Jas 37god,rodena vo Skopje nemam pominato vo tie ulicki kade 90% se stari luge vo kukjite oni od Bosilovo trgnale.Posleden povik i ke gi najdat ama denesnava mladina e poveketo lesnoumna kojznae koj se gi podlazal,se se dolzi na internetot tie tik - tok s*anja i sl.U nase vreme kjutekot od rajot ni vikaa pa ne smeevme da mdneme sega od 10 god Skopje napreko i popreko go setaat.Nikomu ne posakuvam vakvo nesto skraja bilo i lesno e da solime pamet tesko na roditellite ama treba mnoguuu zborenje so decata pogotovo so pubertetlii.
Like   Reply   5w   Edited   70

Translation: I am 37 years old, born in Skopje, I haven't crossed those streets where 90% are old people in the houses, they came from Bosilovo. Last call and they will find them, but youth these days are mostly shallow, who knows who could have fooled them. It is all because of the Internet, that TikTok sh*t and all. In my time they said beating came from heaven and we didn't dare to move, now from 10 years old they go up and down throughout Skopje. I don't wish something like this to anyone and it is easy to give parenting lessons, but there needs to be a lot of talking to children, especially when they are in puberty.

What is worrying is that these comments enjoyed support from a wider audience, expressed through the number of likes and comments of approval. By supporting the use of violence as a disciplinary tool, gender-based violence is justified in certain cases, that is, *when the end justifies the means*. In this way, these narratives contribute to the normalisation of gender-based violence in society and its repetition, as well as inadequate recognition, both by the victims themselves and by the institutions in that society.

Regardless of whether any of the assumptions about the girls' disappearance are true, this content can have a serious negative effect on the girls' development, given that they are minor girls, who are publicly insulted, judged and sexualised.

Concluding Discussion

In order to analyse the content of the comments, the publication of news reports on social media served as a basis, from which we can see **use of sensationalist language in the headlines of the news reports.** If we keep in mind that the audience on social media very often bases their comments precisely on the headlines, and some of them do not read the news report at all, the sensationalism in the headlines can influence readers to make superficial conclusions. In addition, since it is a matter of missing persons, for whom help is sought, the names, ages and photos of the minor girls are published in the news reports.

Most of the analysed comments on the news reports are in the direction of expressing support for quicker finding of the girls, sympathy with the parents of the girls and sharing information in order to help in the search. However, in a significant part of the comments, **focus is placed on the responsibility for the situation, that is, the 'culprits' for the disappearances are sought.** The demand for responsibility is directed at three main instances: the teachers who were responsible for the students on the school trip, the parents of the girls and the girls themselves. Besides, responsibility is demanded also from the police for a more effective search. The wave of insults and hate speech starts from these posts and they are the basis for developing further discussions to support this negative narrative.

There is a fairly clear pattern how the narrative is created in the content of the comments, in both cases developing discussions that analyse the girls' actions and **formulate assumptions about the reasons for their disappearance**. Moreover, these **comments are based solely on personal assumptions and speculations**, which are enough to encourage the imagination of the audience and launch various misogynistic narratives. Through this trend, we can clearly see **the inclination of a large part of the audience towards narratives that are based on gender stereotypes and perpetuate them**, especially through the wide support of this type of content.

In one of the cases, there were **assumptions about the sexual orientation of the girls, which were sufficient incentive for a series of homophobic comments and condemnations.** In these comments, the violent tone did not go unnoticed, which experience shows that, **especially when it comes to hatred due to sexual orientation, tends to encourage and result in violence.** These speculations can seriously harm two such young girls, and in particular, the intersection with their ethnicity and the environment they live in should not be disregarded, which indicates the high level of intolerance towards diversity in society.

In some content, there can be noted a tendency for maturation of the girls by the commentators, i.e. complete neglect of the fact that they are minors, particularly in the case of the missing girls in Centre, **who are attributed full responsibility for the disappearance, which it then serves as a basis for insulting and sexualising them.** In this manner, certain gender stereotypes are perpetuated through which women, of any age, are sexualised for the sake of insulting their personality and actions, as well as prejudices that women's actions are directly related to the need for attention, especially on social networks.

In addition, in order to correct the inappropriate behaviour of girls, the comments share **numerous parenting lessons and forms of punishment, mostly by inciting violence.** The blame in this case is attributed *to insufficient control* over female children, which is a product of deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes, which make it acceptable to control women and girls, mostly by men, in families. At the same time, **the support of the wider audience for the use of violence, especially physical, as a disciplinary measure, which is expressed through the number of likes and comments of approval, is particularly worrying.**

In this way, through explicit support for the use of violence, **the maintenance of the culture of gender-based violence in society is influenced**, in which violence serves as a tool to maintain the traditional gender order. In this context, **content indicates low social awareness of the wider population and the still present traditional, misogynistic attitudes towards women, which can only lead to further marginalisation of women and girls.** Moreover, these narratives **contribute to the normalisation of gender-based violence in society and its repetition,** as well as inadequate recognition, both by the victims themselves and by the institutions in that society.

Considering that this analysis was prepared several months after the events under study, and more than 1,500 comments on news reports were analysed, we can see that a large part of **media outlets do not have a policy of regulating the content of comments on their posts, through hiding or deleting content with hate speech, insults and other harmful content.** In this manner, media contribute to the spread of such content and enable the mobilisation of support for disturbing content and the additional creation of new.

Considering all the possible negative consequences of this type of content not only on the missing girls, but also on all girls and women in society, **it is necessary that these acts are recognised by the relevant institutions and that the creators of such content are sanctioned accordingly.**

In both cases that were analysed, regardless of whether any of the mentioned speculation about the reasons for the disappearances was true, **this content can have a serious negative effect on the development and life of the girls in future, considering that they are minor girls who are publicly insulted, condemned and sexualised.**

Concluding Remarks

Taking into account the content analysis of the two case studies and the arguments presented in the concluding discussion, we can derive several key findings regarding malicious content and misogynistic narratives:

- Bearing in mind that media use sensationalist language in the headlines of news reports, journalists must be careful in formulating headlines, particularly when it comes to sensitive cases, as this may influence readers to make superficial conclusions;

- The contents of the comments focus primarily on seeking responsibility, i.e. 'culprit' for the situation, which is the basis for developing further discussions and developing a negative narrative;

- Through discussions of the girls' actions, assumptions about the reasons for their disappearance are formulated, which are based solely on personal opinions and speculations, enough to encourage the imagination of the audience and launch various misogynistic narratives. In order to transform these patterns of thinking, which are the basis for creating and spreading disinformation, it is necessary to continuously inform the general public, particularly the young population, to recognise them and prevent their negative influence and further spread;

- There is a tendency among audiences towards narratives that are based on and perpetuate gender stereotypes, especially through the widespread support for this type of content. This is followed by the tendency for maturation of girls, i.e. complete neglect of the fact that they are minors, to whom full responsibility for the disappearance is attributed, which serves as an incentive for offending through their sexualisation, based on gender prejudices. This indicates the still strong influence of gender stereotypes in everyday life, which should be addressed by placing content that will promote the principle of gender equality and the benefits of developing a gender-equal society;

- Assumptions about sexual orientation encourage homophobic comments and condemnations, which have a violent tone and tend to incite and result in violence, indicating a high degree of intolerance towards diversity in society. Hence, it is necessary to encourage public awareness of identity differences and the need for inclusion in society;

- The comments support the use of violence, especially physical, as a disciplinary measure, which enhances the maintenance of the culture of gender-based violence in society. Therefore, it is necessary to work intensively on raising awareness of the general population about the negative effects of gender-based violence and its prevention, where the role of the media is of particular importance;

- These misogynistic narratives, expressed primarily through malicious content and gender-based hate speech, can have a serious negative effect on the development and further life of girls, but also on all women and girls in society. In order to inform about the negative effects, but also about the way to tackle this type of negative content, it is necessary to work on raising the awareness of women and girls about this phenomenon;

- Media do not have a policy of regulating negative content of comments on their posts, thus contributing to the spread of misogynistic narratives and mobilising support for disturbing content and further creating new. Hence, it is necessary to establish internal policies and designat persons responsible for regulating comments with negative content, in order to prevent their further spread;

- Considering that these works are neither properly recognised by the relevant institutions, nor are the creators of these contents sanctioned, it is necessary to enhance the capacities of the institutions for proper recognition and action in these cases.

Institute of communication studies

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