

Youth in the Digital Environment: Threats of Delinquency and Their Prevention

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Abstract

This article examines the work in the field of crime prevention among the youth of Uzbekistan. Analyzing the legislation and studying statistical data on the growth of crime in the youth environment, the author formulates recommendations and proposals for the prevention of antisocial behavior among young people. The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly transformed the lives of young people. Social media platforms, online gaming, instant messaging, and digital communities have become central to communication, education, and entertainment. While the digital space offers enormous opportunities for learning and self-expression, it also presents serious risks, including various forms of delinquency and cybercrime. Understanding these threats and developing effective prevention strategies is essential for protecting youth in the modern digital environment. In Uzbekistan, society is at a modern stage of development, and a person, his dignity, rights and freedoms are recognized as the highest values. The priority of human rights necessitates the establishment of benevolent relations between citizens while observing the rules of life in society, caring behavior in the upbringing of the younger generation, and the creation of conditions ensuring public health. This, in turn, requires citizens to comply with the rules of conduct and safety in society and with rules aimed at protecting public health.

Keywords: Cybercrime, prevention, minors, social networks, human rights, education.

Introduction

In Uzbekistan, which has its own path of independence and development, many regulatory documents guaranteeing human rights have been adopted and are being implemented in practice. One of the main criteria for assessing the effectiveness of the activities of internal affairs bodies is public opinion and the level of citizens' satisfaction with the law enforcement services provided. At the same time, it is necessary to emphasize that much work still lies ahead in this regard when we speak about the completeness, viability, and mechanisms of direct implementation of laws. At present, it can be said that judicial reform, in turn, requires the implementation of a number of

tasks aimed at improving and liberalizing criminal legislation. These tasks include clarifying the grounds for liability and the investigation of crimes against public order and their features defined in criminal law. At the present stage of development in Uzbekistan, human dignity, rights, and freedoms are evaluated as the highest social values. This principle determines the state's policy in ensuring public order and protecting the younger generation from involvement in unlawful activities. However, juvenile delinquency, including crimes against public order such as hooliganism, remains a pressing issue. It is very difficult to find a person who has not heard of email, electronic money transfers, web pages on the Internet, SMS messages, SIM cards, electronic digital signatures, as well as digital photography and video and audio recording. The development of information and telecommunication technologies and their active use in everyday life have opened up new opportunities for the exchange of information resources among users. Today, the importance of such concepts as cybersecurity (protection against attacks in the online space) and information security (protection of data from all forms of threats, whether analog or digital) has significantly increased. Keeping pace with modern developments, the state recognizes the value of its citizens' personal information and seeks to protect data from falling into the hands of criminals. The most common types of such crimes include fraud, cyberbullying, trolling, blackmail, extortion, and aggressive marketing. Negative consequences also include the unlawful appropriation of personal property through deception, coercion to act in the interests of third parties, harm to mental, moral, and spiritual well-being, monetization of Internet users, violation of the right to privacy, and manipulation of personal data subjects. Another way of obtaining user data is through social networks. Most often, each person has a personal profile where they post information about themselves — from their first and last name to personal photographs. Many users do not realize that the information they publish can be found and used by anyone, including individuals with malicious intent.

I. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design based on doctrinal legal analysis combined with elements of socio-legal research. The research is exploratory and analytical in nature, aiming to examine the effectiveness of preventive mechanisms addressing youth delinquency in the context of digital transformation in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The norms of national legislation regulating the prevention of juvenile delinquency, cybersecurity, youth policy, and social partnership were systematically analyzed. Particular attention was paid to: The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the Prevention of Neglect and Offenses among Minors” (2010); The Law “On Social Partnership” (2014);

Legal mechanisms were examined in the broader context of international standards in crime prevention and cybersecurity to assess alignment with global legal approaches. Official crime statistics provided by the State Statistics Agency of Uzbekistan were analyzed to identify trends in youth crime, particularly hooliganism and offenses committed by individuals aged 16–25. Statistical data covering the period 2018–2022 were used to determine patterns and growth dynamics. Media reports, analytical publications, and academic sources addressing cybercrime, youth radicalization, and digital risks were examined to identify emerging threats in online environments. Youth delinquency prevention was considered as a multidimensional system including legal, social, educational, economic, and institutional components. The interconnection

between digital space development and criminogenic risks was analyzed within this systemic framework.

II. Results

There is a latent nature of such crimes as hooliganism among minors. Among crimes against public order in the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the crime of “hooliganism” is classified as a socially dangerous crime and, although measures have been developed to increase the effectiveness of preventing and investigating this crime, an improved method of investigating the crime has not yet been developed. Therefore, the crime of “hooliganism” is one of the most frequently committed crimes in judicial practice. According to official statistics, in 2018, 1007 hooliganism crimes were committed, in 2019 — 1073, in 2020 — 1565, in 2021 — 3024, in the first quarter of 2022 — 987, with the majority committed by persons aged 1 Cybercrime and Online Fraud. Young people are both victims and participants in cybercrime. Common forms include:

- Online fraud and scams
- Identity theft
- Hacking and illegal access to accounts
- Participation in financial fraud schemes

Cybercrime has become a global threat facilitated by the rapid development of information technologies and the accessibility of digital platforms (UNODC, 2013; Holt et al., 2018). Due to limited digital literacy and lack of life experience, adolescents may easily fall victim to cybercriminals or become involved in illegal online activities without fully understanding the consequences (Leukfeldt & Holt, 2019).

Cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is one of the most widespread digital threats. Through social media platforms, messaging apps, and online games, young people may:

- Spread rumors
- Share humiliating photos or videos
- Send threats or offensive messages

Research demonstrates that cyberbullying is strongly associated with psychological distress among adolescents (Kowalski et al., 2014; Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). Such actions can cause serious psychological harm, including depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts (UNICEF, 2019).

Exposure to extremist and harmful content. The internet can expose youth to extremist ideologies, radical propaganda, violence, and immoral content. In some cases, online platforms are used to recruit young people into extremist or criminal groups (UNODC, 2018; Conway, 2017). Many Internet users believe that fake social media accounts will help them avoid responsibility for spreading unlawful information. However, in reality, social networks track individual IP addresses, so attempts to hide from law enforcement agencies will be unsuccessful. In Uzbekistan, where maintaining social stability and interethnic harmony is a priority, preventing online radicalization among youth is especially important. Preventive strategies in educational institutions play a crucial role in countering radicalization (Council of Europe, 2016).

Internet addiction and social isolation. Excessive use of social networks and online games can lead to:

- Internet addiction
- Decline in academic performance
- Reduced real-life communication
- Aggressive or antisocial behavior

Problematic Internet use has been recognized as a growing behavioral disorder affecting adolescents (Young, 1998; Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016). Longitudinal studies indicate that excessive online engagement may negatively influence psychosocial development and academic outcomes (Anderson et al., 2017). Over time, this may contribute to delinquent behavior and social maladjustment. Juvenile delinquency in Uzbekistan, particularly crimes against public order, demonstrates certain levels of latency. Hooliganism among minors is classified as a socially dangerous offense. Despite improvements in legislation and preventive measures, challenges remain in early detection, effective intervention, and the development of comprehensive investigative methodologies. Uzbekistan's legal framework establishes liability for crimes against public order while simultaneously providing safeguards for minors in accordance with international juvenile justice standards (United Nations, 1985, 1990). In accordance with international standards:

- the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration (United Nations, 1989);
- deprivation of liberty should be applied only as a last resort (United Nations, 1985);
- rehabilitation and reintegration should prevail over punitive measures (United Nations, 1990);
- national reforms reflect a trend toward liberalization of criminal legislation and clarification of legal grounds for responsibility in cases involving minors.

Youth crime prevention in Uzbekistan is implemented through several institutional mechanisms consistent with international crime prevention principles (UNODC, 2010; Welsh & Farrington, 2012):

- interagency cooperation between internal affairs bodies, schools, social services, and mahalla committees;
- early prevention programs identifying at-risk minors;
- legal education initiatives in educational institutions;
- community-based supervision through the mahalla system;
- psychological and social support programs aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration.

These mechanisms align with international preventive standards, emphasizing social support, education, and family involvement (Welsh & Farrington, 2012). In practice, preventive measures increasingly prioritize educational and corrective approaches over strict punishment. Diversion practices, warnings, mediation procedures, and social supervision are used in appropriate cases, reflecting modern trends in juvenile justice reform (United Nations, 1990). Judicial reforms also aim to strengthen procedural guarantees for minors, including access to legal representation and protection of dignity during criminal proceedings (United Nations, 1985). However, further development is needed to reduce latent crime rates and improve investigative methodologies for offenses such as hooliganism.

IV. Discussions

In order to increase the effectiveness of reforms implemented in the field of cybersecurity, it is necessary to improve mechanisms for detecting and preventing crimes. Research equips investigative activities with scientifically grounded methodology (Khamidov, 2020). The above-mentioned tasks are addressed by means of international law and are implemented through national legal instruments (Baratov, 2023). There could be a question: What are the main causes of youth delinquency in the digital environment? We found the several factors contribute to digital delinquency among youth in Uzbekistan:

- lack of digital literacy
- insufficient parental supervision
- weak moral and legal awareness
- peer pressure in online communities
- easy and anonymous access to harmful content

And, as a result rapid digitalization without corresponding educational and preventive measures increases these risks.

Strengthening Legal Frameworks. Uzbekistan has adopted laws and regulations aimed at combating cybercrime and protecting minors online. Law enforcement agencies are increasingly monitoring online activities and investigating digital offenses. Clear legal consequences for online crimes serve as a deterrent and help protect young users.

Digital Literacy Education. Introducing digital literacy programs in schools and universities is essential. These programs should teach students:

- safe internet practices
- recognition of online scams
- responsible behavior on social media
- understanding of legal consequences of online actions

Educational institutions in Uzbekistan are gradually integrating information technology and cybersecurity awareness into curricula.

Role of Family and Community. Parents play a key role in prevention by:

- monitoring children's online activities
- setting time limits for device use
- discussing online risks openly
- Building trust and emotional support

Mahalla (local community) institutions in Uzbekistan also contribute by organizing youth activities, educational meetings, and awareness campaigns.

Youth Engagement in Positive Activities. Providing young people with access to sports, arts, science clubs, and volunteering opportunities reduces the risk of delinquency. When youth are

engaged in meaningful offline activities, they are less likely to spend excessive time in risky online environments.

Conclusion

We are currently facing important tasks to increase the effectiveness of preventive work:

1. Systematic work on the social adaptation of children from disadvantaged families and prevention of early marriages.
2. Implementation of legal and educational work aimed at preventing offenses among youth.
3. Promotion of reading culture among youth.
4. Formation of ideological immunity against destructive influences.
5. Development of youth tourism and cultural engagement.
6. Promotion of sports, especially among girls, and support for participation in competitions.

The digital space offers enormous opportunities for the development of youth in Uzbekistan, but it also creates new forms of delinquency and risk. Cybercrime, cyberbullying, radicalization, and internet addiction are significant challenges that require coordinated efforts. Effective prevention depends on strong legislation, digital education, parental involvement, and community support. By combining these measures, Uzbekistan can ensure that digital technologies serve as a tool for progress rather than a source of danger for its young generation.

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