

Digitalization of Social Contacts – Risks for Women Seeking a Spouse through Dating Sites and Apps

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The article presents the results of an empirical study related to the problem of the risks of digitalization of social contacts when searching for marriage partners through dating sites. The research hypothesis suggests that these risks are fraud; sexual harassment; stalking; abuse of received information of an intimate nature; distortion of perception of the communicative situation, reality, communication partner; the occurrence of negative psychological consequences. It is assumed that the risks will increase due to the characteristics of the personality of women. The respondents were 197 women who used dating sites to find a marriage partner. A specially developed author's questionnaire was used, as well as standardized methods. It was revealed that such types of risks as fraud, sexual harassment occur regardless of the personal characteristics of the respondents. Risk of facing fraud increases among successful women. Risk of the distortion of the perception of the communicative situation, reality, communication partner and risk of the occurrence of negative psychological consequences directly depend on the personal characteristics of women.

Key words: risks of digitalization of social contacts, psychological characteristics of women, personal characteristics, dating sites.

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Цифровизация социальных контактов – риски для женщин, использующих приложения и сайты знакомств для поиска брачного партнера

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В статье представлены результаты эмпирического исследования, связанного с проблемой рисков цифровизации социальных контактов при поиске брачных партнеров через сайты знакомств. В гипотезе исследования предполагается, что эти риски связаны с мошенничеством; сексуальными домогательствами; сталкингом; злоупотреблением полученной информацией интимного характера; искажением восприятия коммуникативной ситуации, реальности, партнера по общению; возникновением негативных психологических последствий. Предполагается, что риски будут возрастать в связи с характеристиками личности женщин. В качестве респондентов выступили 197 женщин, использовавших сайты знакомств для поиска брачного партнера. Применялись специально разработанная авторская анкета, а также стандартизированные методики. Выявлено, что сексуальное домогательство случаются вне зависимости от личностных характеристик опрошенных. Риск столкновения с мошенничеством возрастает у социально успешных женщин. Риск искажения восприятия коммуникативной ситуации и риск возникновения негативных психологических последствий зависят от ряда личностных характеристик женщин.

Ключевые слова: риски цифровизации социальных контактов, психологические особенности женщин, личностные характеристики, сайты знакомств.

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Introduction

The problem of digitalization of social contacts has especially become critical for the scientific community after the unique situation of self-isolation measures developed in 2020 to counter the spread of the new coronavirus infection (COVID – 19). Digitalization of contacts is not only technical but also a socio - cultural process that includes transfer of oral, written and visual information through intermediate channels – devices or digital systems (smartphones, electronic messaging systems, video communication systems, social networks) [10]. New methods of communication affect the socio – psychological state of people, their vision about inclusion in the social space, the density and variety of social connections and networks where a person is situated [3]. A.V. Andreenkova notes that the impact of digitalization has an ambivalent character: on one hand, it brings an increase of opportunities for social contacts with close people in crisis situations or in the conditions of distance barriers but in the case of intensive immersion into the world of digital social networks it has negative socio – psychological effect [1].

The development of digital technologies and availability of portable devices for internet access have greatly influenced the ways of meeting potential spouses. In modern Russia ideas on family values are undergoing significant changes but no one questions the importance and value of family relationships. Searching for a marriage partner for a woman is less and less for physical surviving or social belonging but is becoming more and more the result of her individual, personal and social preferences [21].

The modern market offers a variety of variants for digitalization of communication. The dating industry is not the exception. According to a major study (N=5421 couples) of Stanford University, starting from 2013 online – dating has left behind all other traditional ways of searching for partners for romantic relationships [18]. And since March 2020 during the global lockdown, internet sites and applications have become the main tools for searching for partners [9].

The phenomenon of online dating has become interesting for sociologists, psychologists, lawyers, criminologists and physicians. But as ideas about the specifics of internet communication are only in the process of being formed, at this moment the study of this problem cannot be called systemic. There is no generally accepted terminology, theoretical and methodological aspects of the digitalization of dating are not defined. At this moment there are several directions for development of knowledge in the online dating field.

First, the scientists describe a social portrait of those who prefer websites and apps for searching for marriage partners over traditional forms of dating. The main focus of this group of studies is lies on the characteristics of the personality of dating sites and applications users.

Chin, K., Edelstein R.S. and Vernon P.A. discover that people with attachment anxiety choose digital ways of dating while respondents with attachment avoidance hide the fact of using dating sites and applications [4].

Fontalova N.S., Artamonova V.V. and Turganova G.E. come to similar conclusions – there are more people with low self-esteem level among people preferring digital communication that negatively affect communicative qualities and motivation of an individual [7].

Among other negative factors influencing the choice of online dating apps as a way of dating Veel K. and Thylstrup N.B. emphasize irrational attitudes regarding the image of one's body, aggression and risky sexual behaviour [22].

In their study Barrada J.R. and Castro Á. show correlation between the use of popular dating applications and psychosocial parameters (positive and negative affect, body satisfaction,

sociosexuality and attitude to consensual non – monogamy) as well as psychosexual well - being (self-esteem, satisfaction with sexual life, sexual preoccupation) [2].

In their work Procentese F. and Gatti F. analyse correlation between people’s loneliness and relational motivation to use dating apps. People’s loneliness is considerably associated with searching for love and the desire to meet new people bypassing restrictions imposed by offline communication [17].

To the social features of internet communication we can relate the idea of dating sites as a public place where a person (especially a man) can express his intent in the beginning of a dialogue bypassing the courtship rituals [11].

Secondly, researchers have considerable interest in the study of the negative consequences of online dating practices. Phana A., Seigfried-Spellar K. and Choo K. R. formulate two groups of complexities arising in online communications: the ease of access to potential victims for people prone to sexual compulsion and the fact that people who are too trusting, can share confidential information (including photo and video content, conversations of sexual nature, personal data) [16].

Shetty R., Grispos G., Choo K. R. [20] wrote about the risks associated with the misuse of received confidential information and in her dissertation Cobb C. [6] studied problems of confidentiality breaches related to interpersonal relations as well as the reasons why users of popular dating apps distort their behavior to meet applications requirements.

Chugh R., Guggisberg M. [5] highlighted such possible negative consequences of internet dating as stalking, involuntary coercion, violence and questionable masculine behavior.

Mayshak R., King R.M., Chandler B. and Hannah M. studied risks of victimization as a result of experiencing sadism, asocial and controlling behaviour during communication through dating sites and apps [12]. Gillett R. concludes that modern dating applications normalize sexual harassment as well as psychological consequences of abuse have a cumulative character and need further study along with sexual crimes [8]. Rowse J., Bolt C. and Gaya S. cite data on the increase of sexual crimes committed after meeting people through dating sites and apps [19]. Myrphy A. notes that as a result of experiencing a false feeling of intimacy that arose during internet communication on dating sites and apps, gullible users can become victims of scammers, be harassed, be involved in illegal acts [15].

No studies about the effect of job satisfaction on women's social media behavior were found. Professional implementation has a huge impact to women’s social and psychological well-being [13, 14], so it can be interesting to highlight this factor.

The conducted theoretical analysis of sources shows that at the moment there are local researches of social and psychological portrait of dating sites and apps users, the level of life satisfaction, loneliness, gender and age characteristics, sexual orientation, self-esteem, level of life motivation of these groups are being studied. However, the problems of the risks of digitalization of social contacts among women using dating sites and apps for a marriage partner searching have not been studied enough at present.

The aim of the research is to identify the risks of digitalization of social contacts among women using dating sites and apps for finding a marriage partner as well as to analyze social and psychological conditions under which these risks increase.

Hypothesis of this research is the assumption that

1. The risks of digitalization of contacts among women who use dating sites and apps for a marriage partner searching are associated with fraud; sexual harassment; stalking, abuse of received

information of intimate nature; distortion of the perception of communicative situation, reality, communication partner (the subject of interaction embellishes himself, sends photoshopped photos – creates images that do not correspond to reality); the occurrence of negative psychological consequences (negative conditions, psychotraumas, decreased self-esteem).

2. The risks will increase in the younger age group (inexperience, gullibility) and older age group («last hope»); their growth is associated with pronounced irrational attachments among women; a negative example of family relations; living in provincial towns; victim behaviour; dissatisfaction with the quality of life, acute experience of their own loneliness; an increased level of aspirations (subject to dissatisfaction with professional activities).

Methodology

The study was carried out in two stages. At *the first stage* the survey of women, active participants of dating sites and apps for finding a marriage partner, was organized. The research was conducted by collecting data using «Google Forms» tools. 197 women, participants of women's group in social networks and training sessions for searching for a marriage partner including orthodox women, took part in the survey. The survey was conducted anonymously on a voluntary basis.

A special author's questionnaire «Risks of social contact for dating sites and apps users» was developed, which helped to reveal direct experience of the interviewed women. The questionnaire offered 12 statements (identified as the result of the theoretical analysis) and also 4 open and 2 half – open questions. In addition, the women were asked to answer questions from the sociological block.

The second phase of the study, with the help of the standardized methods, defined social and psychological conditions that increased risks for the women using dating sites and apps for searching for a marriage partner. With this purpose all women were divided into two groups: those who constantly faced risks and those who never faced them.

The following methods were used: the method of irrational beliefs diagnostic by A. Ellis, the methodology of studying the propensity for victim behaviour by O.O. Andronnikova, the questionnaire for defining the type of loneliness by S.G. Korchagina, the methodology «Assessment of aspiration level» by V.K. Gerbachevskogo, the questionnaire «Assessment of satisfaction with the quality of life» by N.Ye. Vodopyanova, the methodology for studying the factors of a profession's attractiveness by V.A. Yadov (modification by N.V. Kuzmina, A.A, Rean).

Research results and their discussion

The study involved women from 25 to 60 years old. At the time of the survey 51% of the interviewed women are actively looking for a marriage partner, 33% are currently planning to start active searching again, 16% have found a spouse through online dating sites and apps.

It was offered to women to choose a statement that most fully characterises the example of the relations that they got from the adults who brought them up. 48% cannot name the relations between parents or foster parents as a role model, 29% note that they cannot say that relations between adults were the example for imitation but in general they lived well, 16% had been brought up in a warm and loving relation between parents and another 7% indicated they were raised by the mother and they would prefer she had gotten married.

The most popular service for dating among the interviewed women was the Tinder app. It is

chosen by 39% of the respondents. The second place is taken by the Mamba service – it is regularly used by 28% of the respondents.

It is interesting to note that only 13% (25 women) of the respondents hide their telephone number for communication at the dating sites and apps and buy a special sim-card for virtual communication. The remaining 87% (172 women) use their regular telephone number for virtual communication.

At the same time 39% fear that the information the respondents shared when communicating with men from dating sites and apps may be used to their detriment. 5% of them personally encountered such situations and 34% are aware it happens. 25% of the respondents think that they are not in danger of facing such situations as they are not used to tell much about themselves.

As for the sexual behaviour of the respondents more than half (54%) have the opinion that it is necessary to get to know each other better before entering into intimate relations; 29% of the women consider non – binding sexual relations possible at the condition of mutual consent. 11% of the interviewed women admit intimate relations only with their husband; 7% of women have positive attitude to signs of attention of a sexual nature from men.

Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 show the results of *the first stage* of the study:

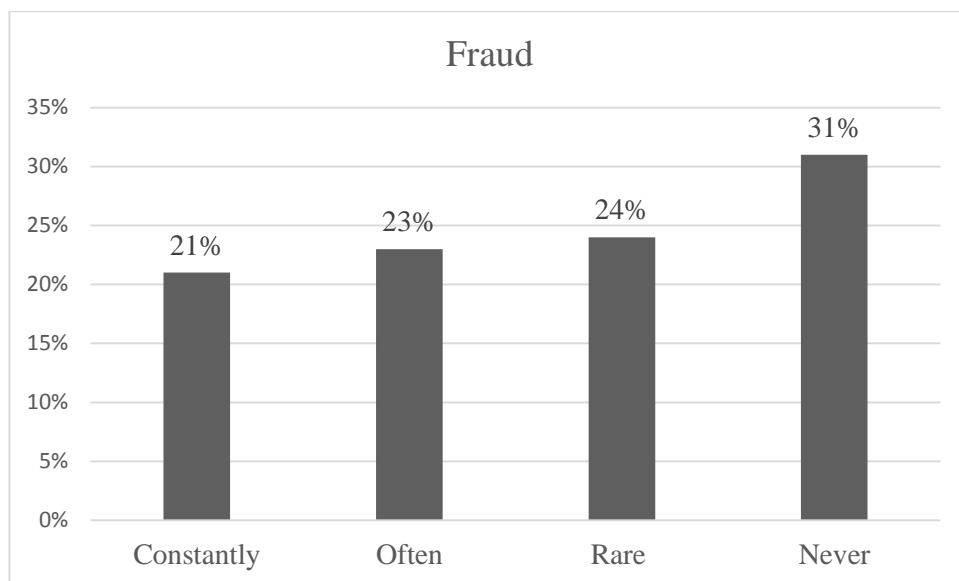


Figure 1. Frequency of experiences with scams when using dating sites and apps for finding a marriage partner

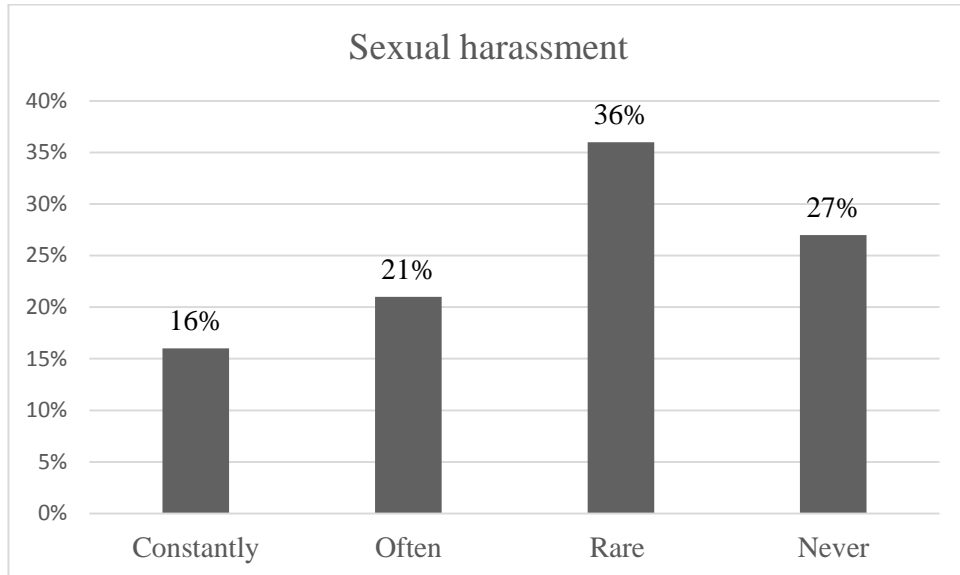


Figure 2. Frequency of experiences with sexual harassment when using dating sites and apps for finding a marriage partner

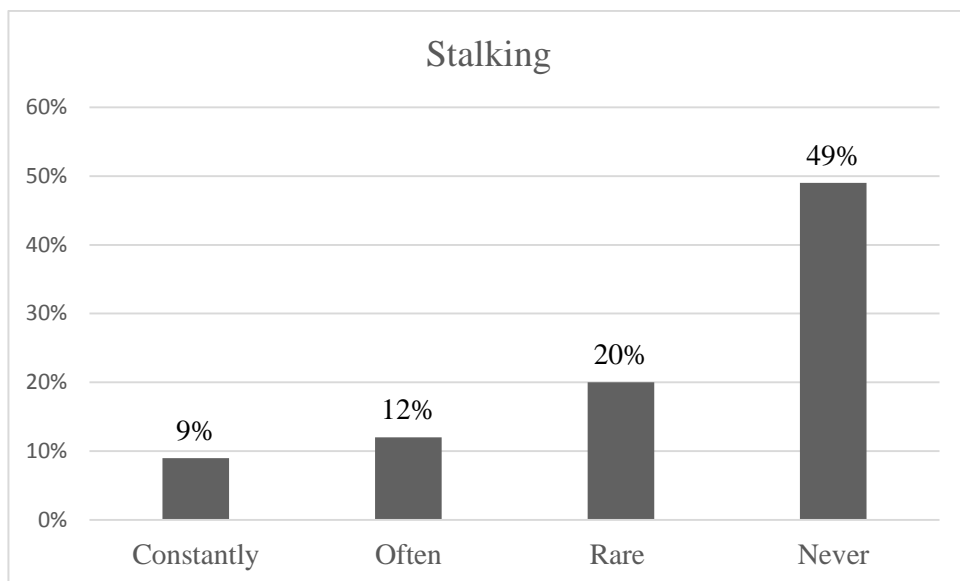


Figure 3. Frequency of experiences with stalking when using dating sites and apps for finding a marriage partner

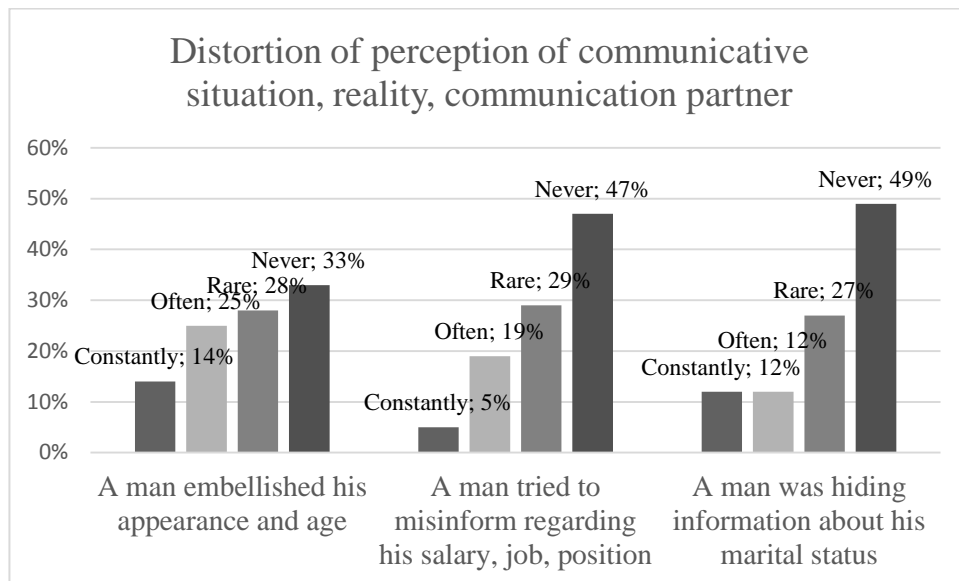


Figure 4. Distortion of perception of communicative situation, reality, communication partner when using dating sites and apps for finding a marriage partner

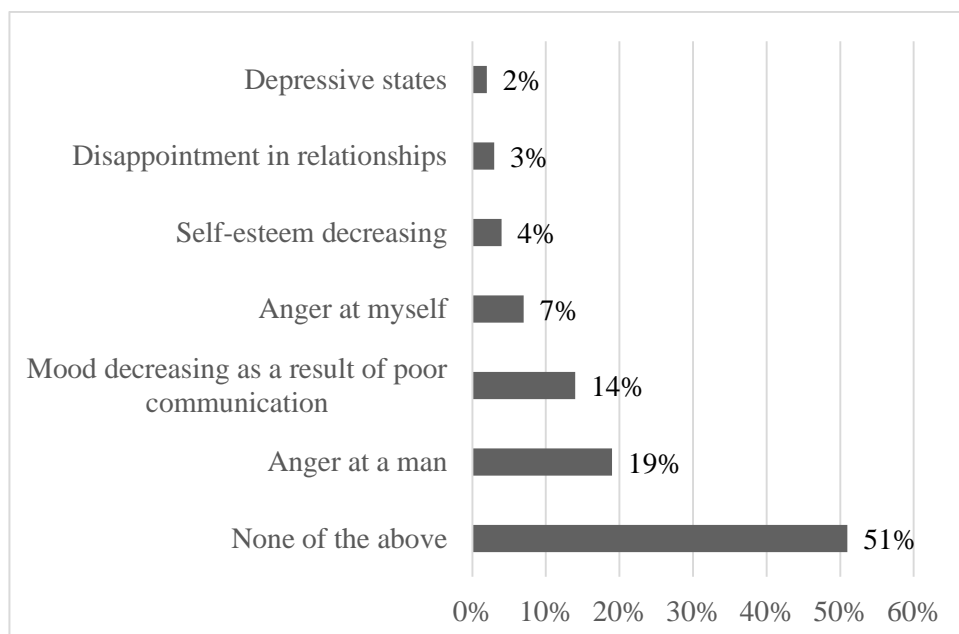


Figure 5. Negative mental states when using dating sites and apps for finding a marriage partner

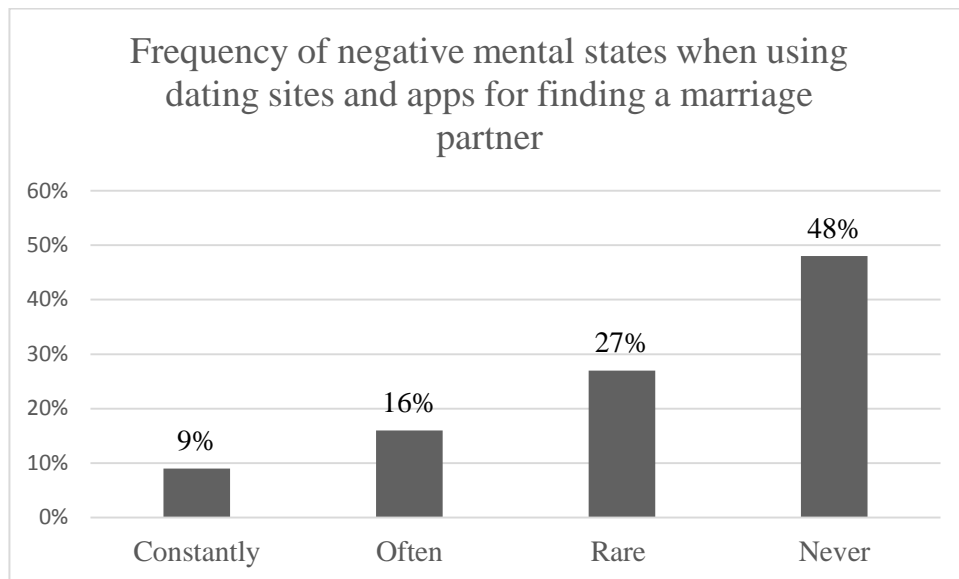


Figure 6. Frequency of negative mental states when using dating sites and apps for finding a marriage partner

Thus, 73% of the respondents at least once have experienced sexual harassment; 68% of women have experienced fraud at least once; 67% of the interviewed women had the experience when at the stage of online – communication a man embellished his appearance and age; 53% of the respondents were faced with the fact that a man tried to misinform them regarding his salary, job, position; 52% of the women had negative mental states after using dating online – services; 51% at least once became victims of stalking; another 51% at least once discovered that a man was hiding information about his marital status.

We will take a closer look at each of the identified risks of digitalization of social contacts. The analysis shows the results only for the methods where differences were found between the compared groups of women.

Fraud

Two groups of women were interviewed: those who constantly faced fraud when using dating site (42 women) and those who never faced scams (61 women).

The average age of the women from the first group is 42 years, while the average age of the women from the second group is 31 years old. All respondents from the first group live in million – plus cities and have children with whom they live together. All interviewed women from the first group indicated that they couldn't call relations between their parents as an example to follow. In the second group the statistics are not so homogeneous.

Let us consider in more detail the results of those methods where differences between the groups are observed. On figure 7 and 8 there are answers given to the methods 'Diagnostics of the loneliness type' and 'Satisfaction with the quality of life'

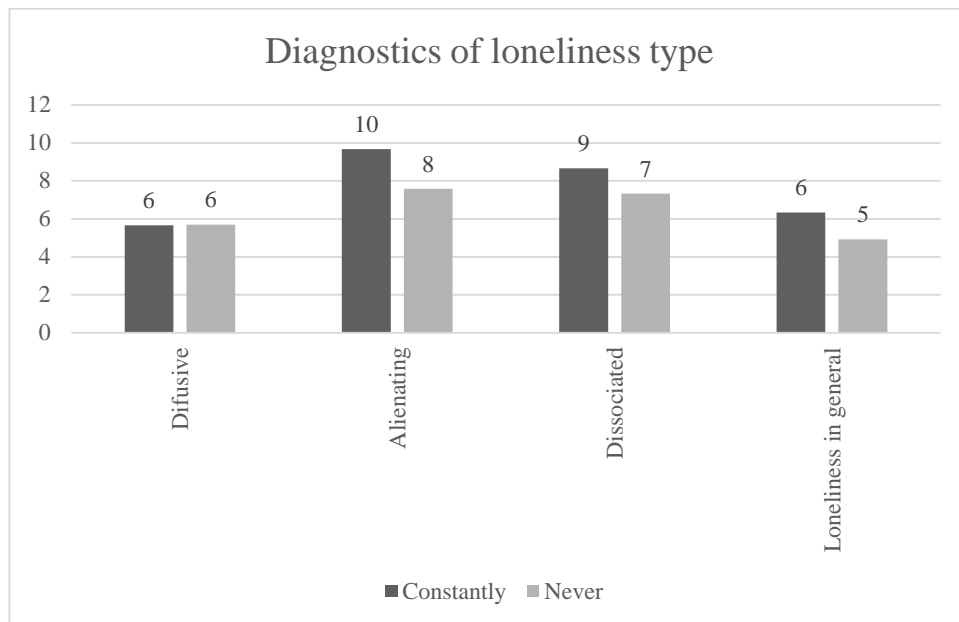


Figure 7. Distribution of the results of diagnostics of loneliness type in the interviewed groups



Figure 8. Distribution of the results of diagnostics of the quality of life in the interviewed groups

As we can see from the survey results, women who constantly faced fraud, have more pronounced alienating and dissociated loneliness as well as a level of stress. At the same time they are more satisfied with their job and personal achievements.

The alienating loneliness is associated with isolation from other people and social values. There

is a loss of meaningful connections and contacts. A person doesn't have the opportunity to share her condition and get help and support. Dissociated loneliness is associated with an ambivalent attitude towards oneself and switching between idealization and devaluation. Such an attitude is carried over to other people: from unconditional acceptance to alienation. In relations with others the person can be selfish and submissive alternately.

Women who have never faced scams, are more optimistic and more satisfied with communication with close people, friends and relatives.

It can be assumed that, on one hand, more successful women who live in large cities and are satisfied with their achievements are more attractive to scammers. On the other hand, women who are more optimistic and satisfied with communication with close people can differently build communication with men: for example, they can quickly translate communication into real life, respond to a smaller quantity of men (as there is no need to fill loneliness). These assumptions need additional testing in further research of the risks of digitalization of contacts among women using online dating services.

Sexual harassment

Two groups of women were formed: those who constantly faced sexual harassment when using dating sites (32 people) and those who have never encountered them. (53 women).

Figure 9 shows the results of the methodology «Diagnostics of irrational attitudes»

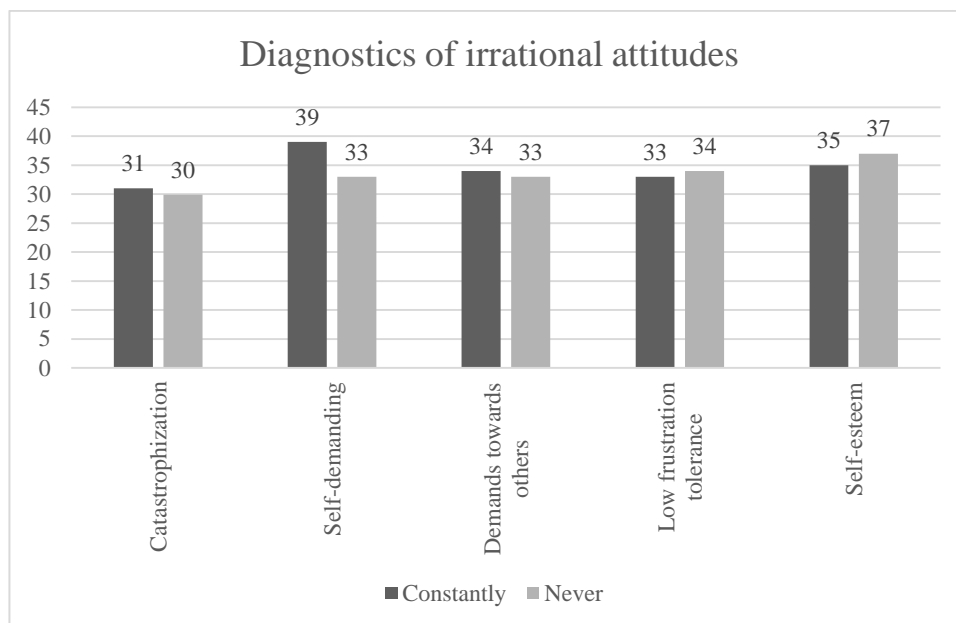


Figure 9. Distribution of the diagnostics results of irrational attitudes in the interviewed groups

In both groups of women irrational attitudes have been found, while the women who constantly faced sexual harassment had fewer attitudes that they owed something to someone.

It is important to note that sexual behaviour of women does not affect whether a woman is sexually harassed while communicating on dating sites or not.

Stalking

Two groups of women were interviewed; those who constantly faced stalking at meetings through dating sites (18 women) and those who have never encountered it (97 women).

The differences in the answers of the methodology «Diagnostics of irrational attitudes» are shown in figure 10.

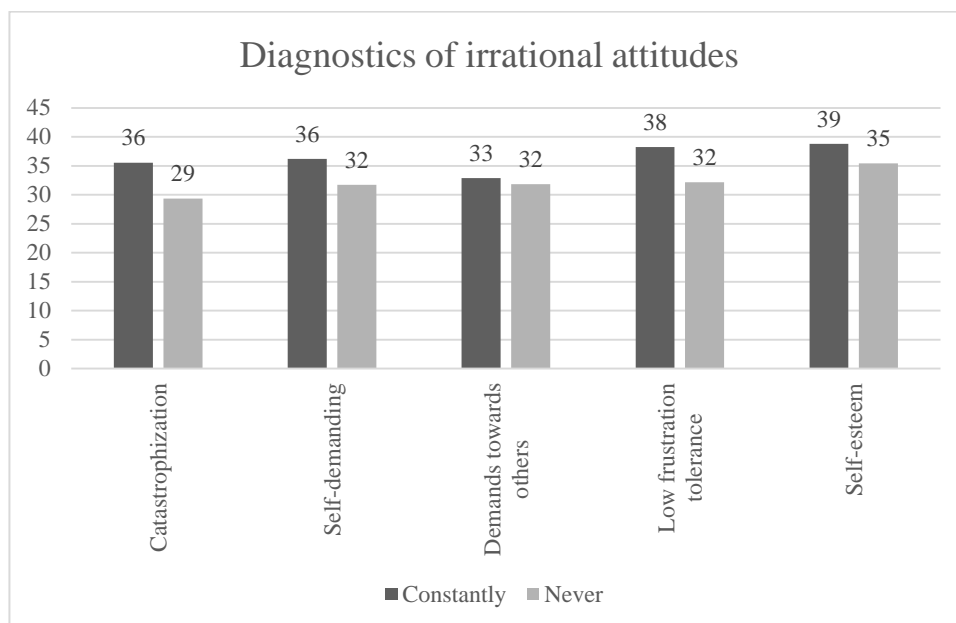


Figure 10. Results of diagnostics of irrational attitudes in the interviewed groups

If the index on this scale in this methodology is below 30 points, then the attitude is very pronounced. As it can be seen from the presented results of comparison in the groups of those who have never encountered stalking, the irrational attitude «Catastrophization» is more pronounced. It can be assumed that a negative attitude towards communicative situation can contribute to the fact that women will hide real data about themselves more and complicate the situation with stalking.

Misuse of received information of an intimate nature

Two groups of women were interviewed: those who faced the misuse of information received as a result of communication (10 women) and those who believe they are not in danger (49 women).

The analysis did not show any significant differences between the diagnostic indexes in the analysed groups.

Distortion of perception of a communicative situation, reality, communication partner

For the analysis of this risk two pairs of groups were formed: women who by themselves contributed to the distortion of perception of communicative situation, reality and communication partner and women who faced the fact that a man acted as the agent of these distortions.

The first selection consists of women who digitally enhance their photos (13 women) and women who never use photoshop, masks etc (91 women).

Let us look at this pair of groups in detail. The analysis showed differences in the answers according to the methods «Diagnostics of irrational attitudes», «Diagnostics of the type of loneliness», «Diagnostics of aspiration level», «Diagnostics of satisfaction with the quality of life». The results of the survey are shown in figures 11, 12, 13, 14.

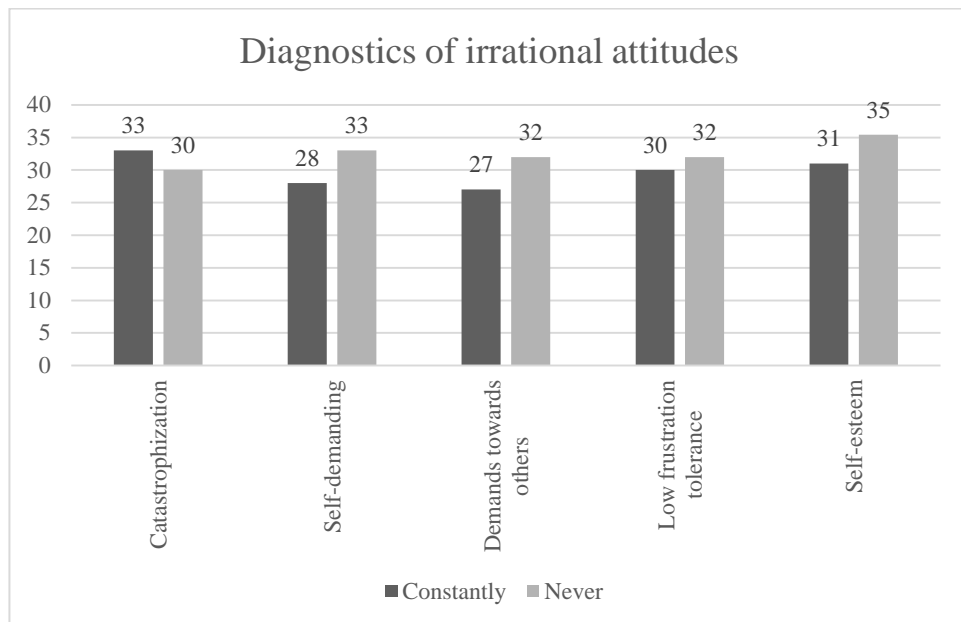


Figure 11. The results of diagnostics of irrational attitudes in the interviewed groups

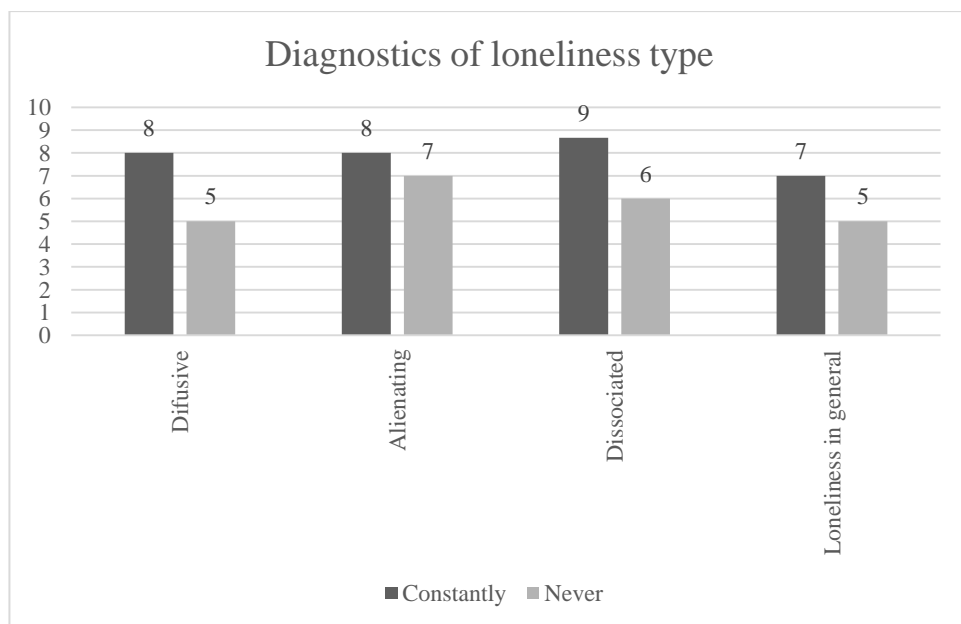


Figure 12. Distribution of results of the diagnostics of the type of loneliness in the interviewed groups

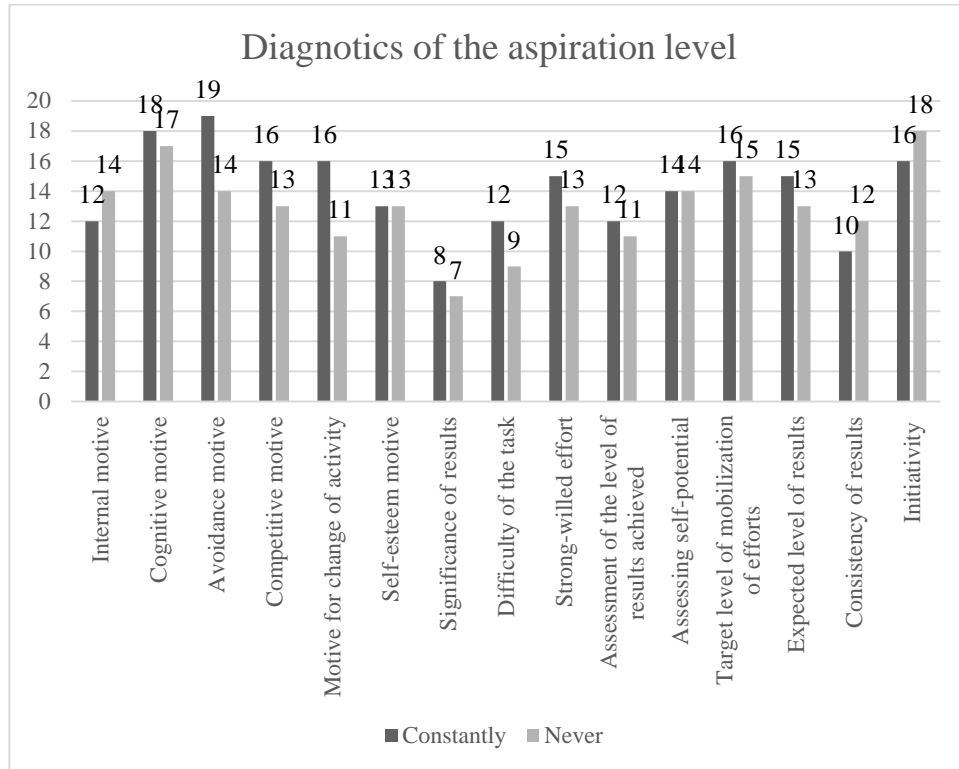


Figure 13. Distribution of the results of the diagnostics of the aspiration level in the groups of respondents

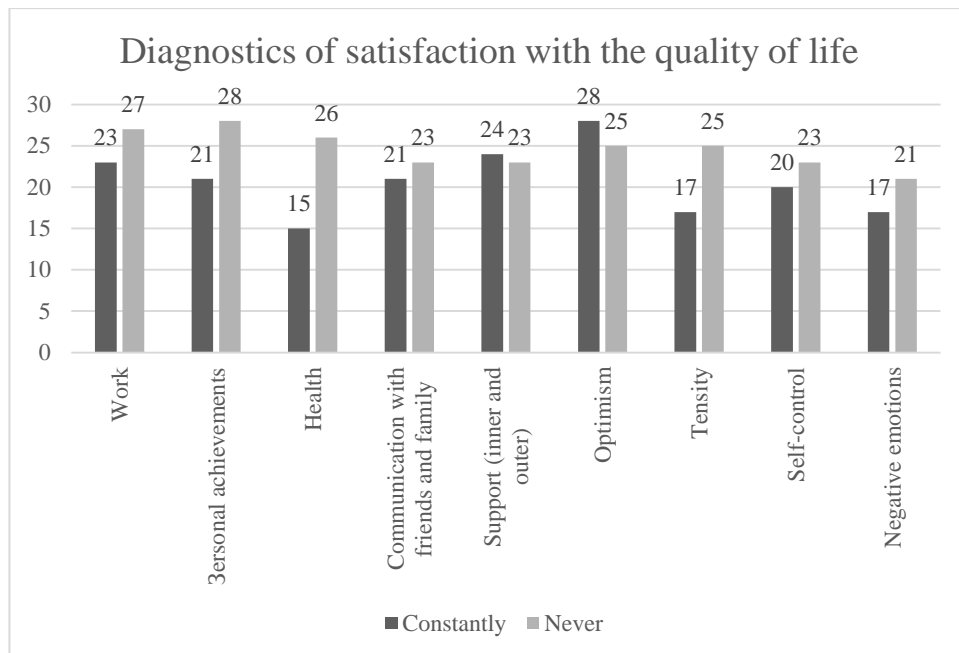


Figure 14. Distribution of the results of the diagnostics of the satisfaction with the quality of life in the groups of respondents

Thus, women who use digital methods for enhancing their photos have pronounced irrational attitudes of obligations both towards themselves and others. They are also lonelier, they have a tendency to avoid and reduce reliance on intrinsic motives. At the same time they have a higher aspiration level and lower satisfaction with their job and personal achievements. It is possible to assume that such women are more accustomed to focus on external ideals of success which they can see in social networks, mass media and literature and natural inability to correspond to them realizes the motives of avoidance and brings to the experience of loneliness.

The women who never use services for improving their photos are significantly more satisfied with their work, achievements, health and communication with close people, they are less demanding of themselves and their level of achievements.

Two other groups were also compared, one of which included women who constantly faced deception from men regarding their appearance and age (27 women) and another group which never faced such situations (65 women).

The answers to the methods «Diagnostics of irrational attitudes» and «Diagnostics of types of loneliness» are shown in figures 15 and 16.

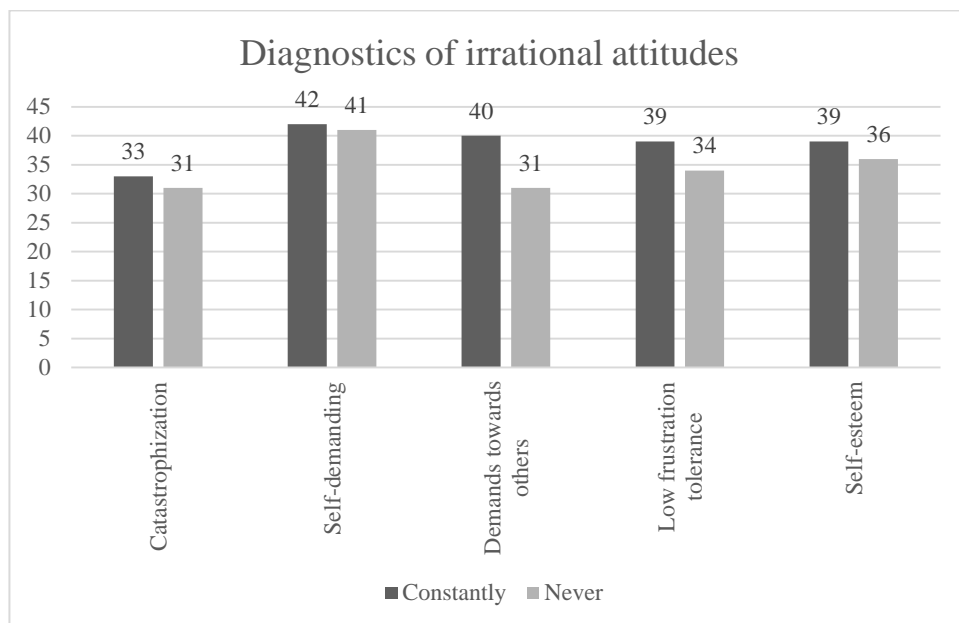


Figure 15. Distribution of the results of the diagnostics of irrational attitudes in the groups of respondents

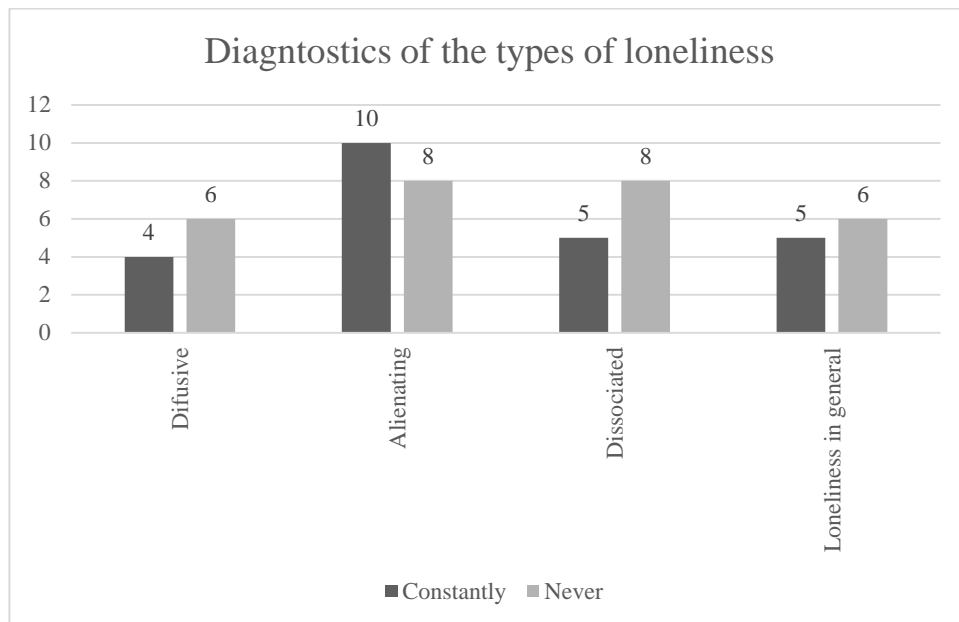


Figure 16. Distribution of the results of the diagnostics of the types of loneliness in the groups of respondents

In accordance with the obtained data, the women from the group of those who constantly face deception by men regarding their appearance and age have fewer irrational attitudes regarding obligations towards themselves and others.

They are also more prone to alienation and do not seek help from others in periods of loneliness.

Women who never faced such situations are more likely to suffer from loneliness associated to idealization and devaluation of themselves and others.

The emergence of negative psychological consequences

Two groups of women were interviewed: those who constantly face negative psychological consequences after using dating sites (18 women) and those who have never experienced negative psychological consequences at online meetings (95 women).

The results of the survey are shown in figures 17, 18, 19.

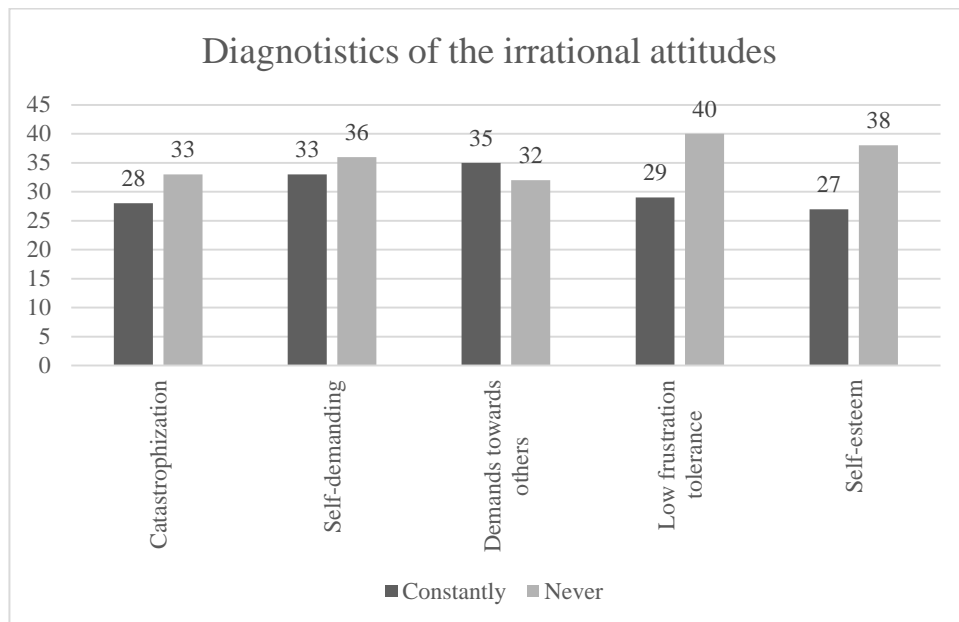


Figure 17. Distribution of the results of the diagnostics of the irrational attitudes in the groups of respondents

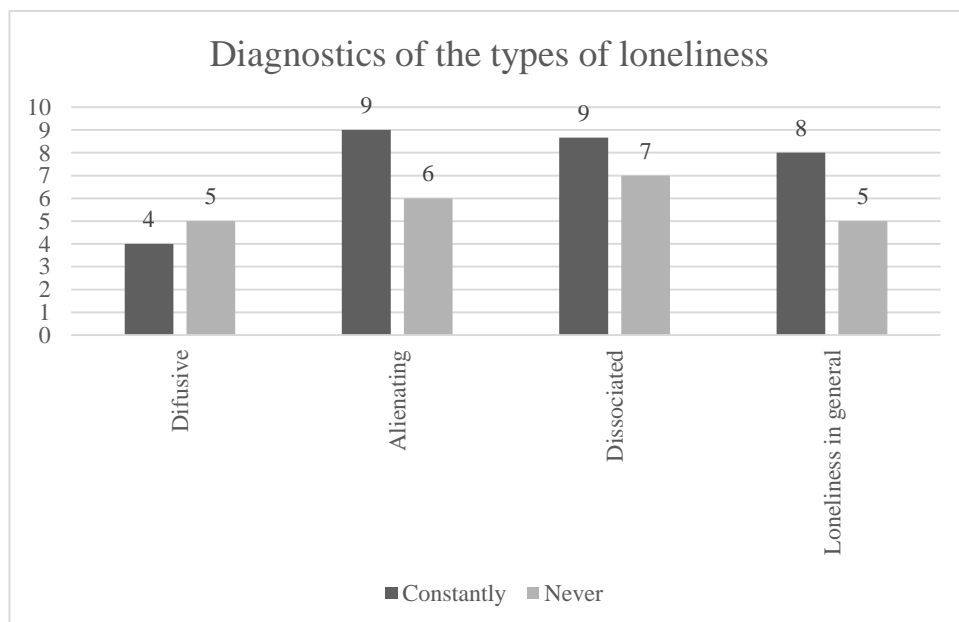


Figure 18. Distribution of the results of the diagnostics of the types of loneliness in the groups of respondents

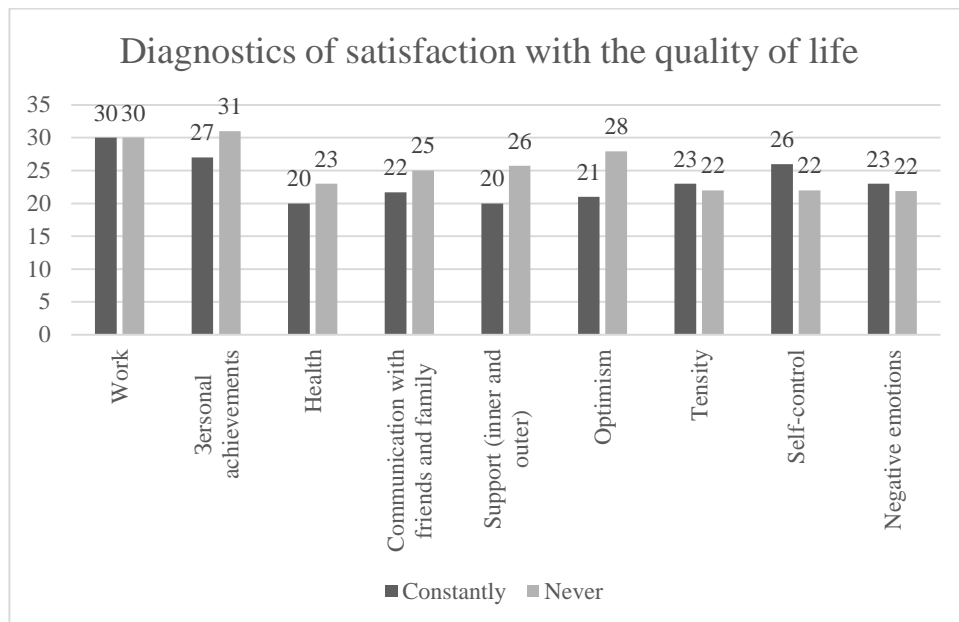


Figure 19. The results of the diagnostics of satisfaction with the quality of life in the groups of respondents

The women experiencing negative psychological consequences of dating digitalization tend to assess negative situations in their lives as terrible and unbearable. They have a low level of stress resistance, they evaluate not single actions and characteristics of people but the person in general. These women cannot ask for help from other people. Their general state of loneliness is also more pronounced. In general, they are less satisfied with their health, communication and support, they are less optimistic. It can be assumed that failures during internet communications can exacerbate already existing mental conditions including depression, PTSD and others.

To identify differences between groups of women who constantly encountered the risks of digitalization of social contacts and of those who have never had such experience at all, the nonparametric Mann – Whitney U test was used to compare independent groups. Table 1 below shows indexes of significant differences.

Table 1
Statistically significant differences between groups of the interviewed women who constantly face the risks of digitalization of contacts and those who have never had such experiences

Scales	U-test	Level of statistical significance
Fraud		
Age of respondents	653,000	0,005**
Living in million – plus cities	555,000	0,000**

Scales	U-test	Level of statistical significance
Alienating loneliness	738,500	0,034*
Dissociated loneliness	681,000	0,010**
Optimism	606,000	0,002**
Distortion of women’s perception of communicative situation		
Self-demanding	544,500	0,000**
Demands towards others	515,000	0,000**
Self-esteem	283,000	0,022*
Diffuse loneliness	280,000	0,017*
Dissociated loneliness	291,000	0,041*
Avoidance motive	292,000	0,046*
Personal achievements	528,000	0,018*
Health	381,000	0,019*
Emergence of negative psychological consequences		
Low frustration tolerance	287,000	0,000**
Self-esteem	295,000	0,000**
Alienating loneliness	639,000	0,022*
Loneliness in general	578,000	0,014*
Personal achievements	385,000	0,046*
Optimism	-438,000	0,041*

On the basis of the obtained data we can make the conclusion that the risk of facing fraud increases among older women who live in large cities, experience loneliness but at the same time they are very optimistic about life.

The risks of distortion of the perception of communicative situation are directly related to the personal characteristics of women: the type of loneliness, obligation towards oneself and others, self – esteem, an increased level of aspiration being unsatisfied with job and personal success.

The risk of emergence of the negative mental states increases among women who are initially prone to a depressive, pessimistic experience of life and their own achievements, low stress resistance, low self – esteem, alienating loneliness.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the conducted empiric research, the following conclusions were made:

1) There are a number of risks that are not related to the personal characteristics of women. They are sexual harassment, stalking. To prevent such risks it is necessary to increase cyber security comprehension of dating sites users. In turn, dating sites and apps themselves should pay attention to the ways to prevent such risks.

2) Risk of fraud increases with a woman’s social success.

3) There are a number of risks that directly related to the personal characteristics of women, namely, tendency to distort the perception of the communicative situation, reality, communication partner and the occurrence of negative psychological consequences.

It is interesting to note that the propensity to victimize and sexual behaviour of women do not increase risks of digitalization of social contacts.

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