11TH EUROPEAN COMMUNICATION CONFERENCE
8–11 SEPTEMBER 2026
BRNO, CZECH REPUBLIC

ECC
SHIFTING GROUNDS
2026

PATHS, CONNECTIONS, AND FUTURES

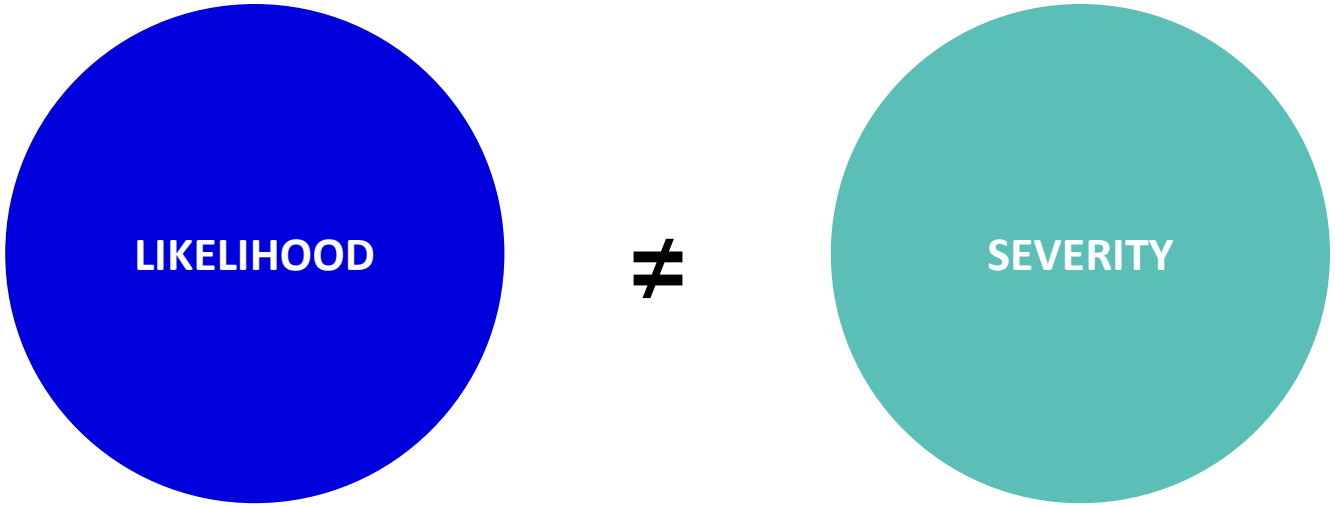
Understanding Adolescents' Online Risk Perception

The Role of Parenting and Experience

Ainize Martínez-Soto · Vojtěch Mýlek · Lenka Dedková

Masaryk University · IRTIS Research Group

Risk Perception Is Not One Judgment



Estimated probability that a negative outcome will occur

Anticipated seriousness of the consequences, if it occurs

Related, but conceptually distinct — and may not develop in parallel.

An adolescent may judge a harmful outcome improbable, yet potentially very serious.

Likelihood and severity may be shaped by different information and may contribute differently to behavioural decisions.

STUDY CONTEXT

Meeting an Online Contact Offline Makes the Tension Visible

32%

have met an online contact

69%

described it as pleasant

8%

described it as unpleasant

Czech adolescents — not a marginal behaviour, and predominantly positive when it happens.

+ Potential Benefits

Friendship, romantic exploration, and contact with people who share similar interests.

! Less Frequent, but Real, Harms

Deception, unwanted sexual contact, physical assault, or other victimization.

The question is not whether these meetings are simply safe or dangerous, but how adolescents judge likelihood and severity within a common, mostly positive practice.

Four Contexts May Shape Risk Perception

1

Parental Mediation

Active mediation (discussion, explanation) or restrictive mediation (rules, prohibitions)

2

Psychological Characteristics

Social self-efficacy, self-esteem, and sensation seeking shape interpretation of uncertainty

3

Peer Norms

Information about what is common or acceptable in the immediate social environment

4

Direct Experience

Personal evidence that may confirm or contradict general warnings

These influences may operate simultaneously — and their relative importance may differ for likelihood versus severity.

PRESENT STUDY

Three Research Questions

RQ1

Are active and restrictive parental mediation differently associated with likelihood and severity?

RQ2

What do adolescents' psychological characteristics and perceived peer norms contribute?

RQ3

Does previous meeting experience explain additional variance beyond these social and individual factors?

SAMPLE & ANALYSIS

A Large Adolescent Survey Tested the Predictors Jointly

2,500	13.44	50%	31.7%
Czech adolescents	mean age	female	prior experience

Hierarchical regression — entered in three blocks (separately for likelihood and severity):

Block 1
Age, Gender

→

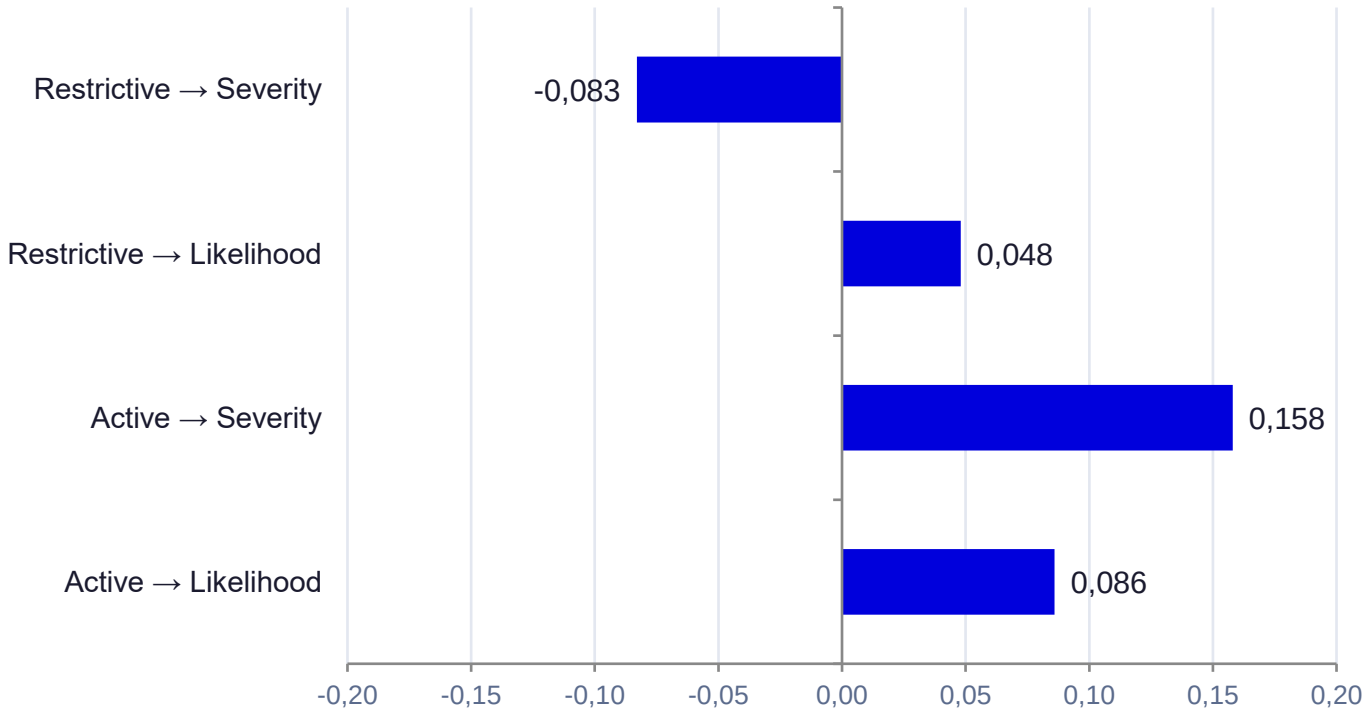
Block 2
Mediation, Psych. factors, Peer norms

→

Block 3
Prior meeting experience

Complete-case N = 2,312 (likelihood) / 2,332 (severity) · Total variance explained: R^2 = 4.9% (likelihood), 8.5% (severity) — modest explanatory power; interpret coefficients accordingly.

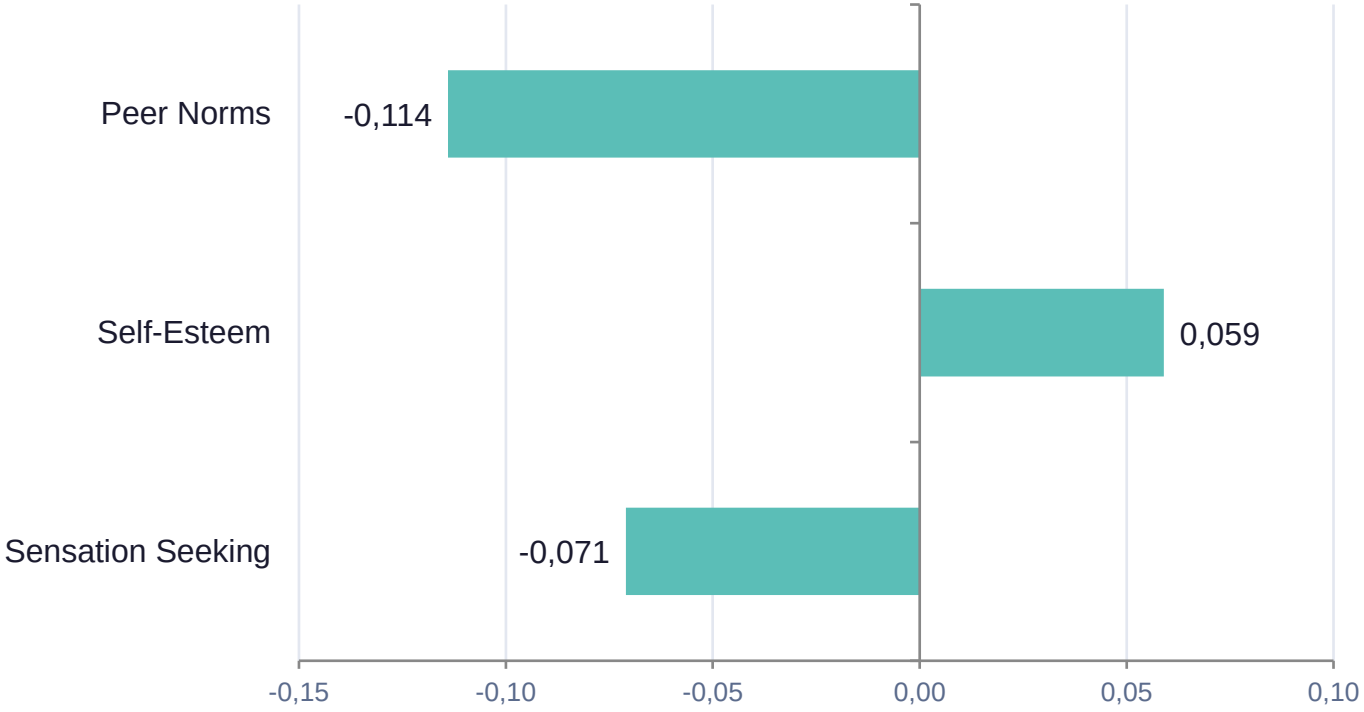
Parenting Mattered — But Not in One Uniform Direction



Active mediation's stronger link to severity suggests it may shape how serious consequences feel, more than whether they seem possible.

Restrictive mediation (β = .048, p = .050) may coexist with greater awareness that harm is possible, without a stronger sense of its seriousness.

Severity Was Especially Sensitive to Self and Peer Context

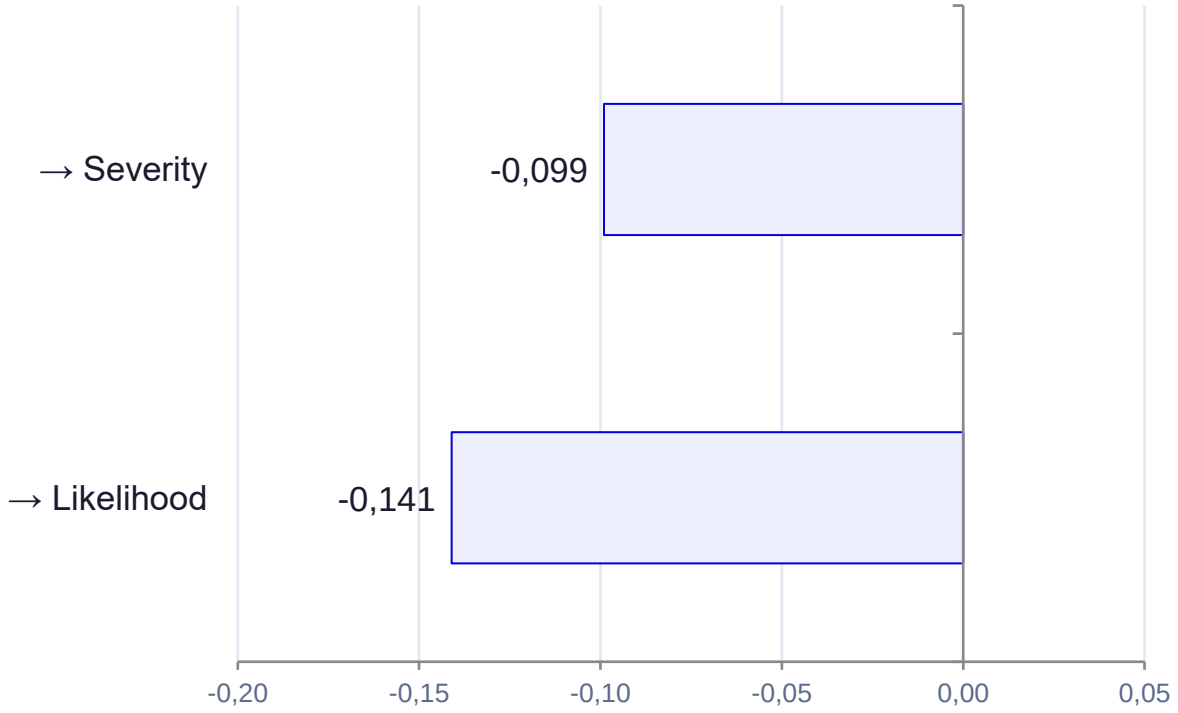


Peer norms may work through normalization; a common behaviour's consequences can seem less alarming. Not independently associated with likelihood.

Gender: boys reported lower perceived likelihood and lower perceived severity than girls.

Severity was the dimension most closely tied to personal traits and immediate social context.

Experience Most Strongly Recalibrated Perceived Likelihood



+1.5%

variance added
(likelihood)

+0.7%

variance added
(severity)

Strongest predictor of likelihood overall. Active mediation, however, had the largest coefficient in the severity model.

SYNTHESIS

Risk Perception Appears Communicative — and Experiential

Active mediation	→	Positively related to both dimensions — stronger for severity
Peer norms	→	Associated with lower perceived severity only
Prior experience	→	Most strongly associated with lower perceived likelihood

Risk perception is not a single judgment — parental communication is one part of a broader context that also includes individual traits, peer perceptions, and direct experience.

CONCLUSION

Prevention Should Work With Experience, Not Against It

1. Active parent–adolescent discussion is supported by its positive associations with both risk dimensions.

2. Likelihood and severity should be addressed separately, as adolescents may evaluate them differently.

3. Preventive communication should account for peer norms and previous experience; general warnings may be less persuasive when they conflict with adolescents' own observations.

Concrete safety guidance: identity verification, meeting in public, informing a trusted person, staying in contact, an exit plan

11TH EUROPEAN COMMUNICATION CONFERENCE

8–11 SEPTEMBER 2026
BRNO, CZECH REPUBLIC

ECC
SHIFTING GROUNDS
2026

PATHS, CONNECTIONS, AND FUTURES

Thank You for your Attention

Any Questions?

Ainize Martínez-Soto

amartinez.soto@mail.muni.cz

Masaryk University · IRTIS Research Group