4. GOOD PRACTICES OF CYBER SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN SCHOOL SETTING

4.1 Introduction

Effective and systematic prevention of intimate partner violence among adolescents represents the key strategy for reducing rates of gender-based violence. We must work to initiate change on an individual level, on the level of relationships, community, and society as a whole. Given the fact that almost all children and adolescents attend school, the education system serves as the ideal setting for the implementation of gender-based violence prevention programs, including those addressing cyber violence in intimate partner relationships.

The programs have to focus on changing the cultural and social norms surrounding gender, while bringing such efforts into the digital age – there is a need to educate the next generation of ICT users on information and media literacy as well as their perception of security. At the same time, prevention initiatives addressing healthy relationships could play a fundamental role in changing the stereotypical attitudes that fuel and reinforce gender inequality, but also in raising adolescents' awareness about issues concerning their own safety in their relationships and/or in other contexts. Creating expectations for healthy, non-violent relationships and developing skills that are important parts in this respect (e.g. empathy, respect, and healthy communication and conflict resolution skills) can help reduce risks of experiencing and perpetrating intimate partner violence.

If prevention is to be effective, it has to be accompanied by appropriate legislation and public policies. The inclusion of (cyber) sexual and gender-based violence in the youth-oriented strategies, the provision of funds, the monitoring and evaluation of programs, the identification as well as dissemination of good practice, can all have positive long-term results.

A systematic approach to gender-based violence prevention in schools needs to combine workshops and other educational activities with broader school-level prevention strategies.

 "Besides educational preventive programs, it is necessary to create and provide gender and age-sensitive mechanisms of protection and support to youth who have experienced any form of gender-based violence, including in the cyber sphere. Adequate legal sanctions for perpetrators are also necessary both from the perspective of a victim and from the perspective of preventing further crimes from happening."[51]

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[51]   Awareness and attitudes of secondary school students towards youth intimate partner violence – Joint report for Hungary, Spain, Serbia and Croatia, 2020

The purpose of this chapter is not to give teachers a comprehensive overview of everything schools can do to prevent violence, but rather **to cover certain practical interventions schools can initiate to address violence at a school level or to strengthen existing interventions**. In addition to these, we provide a set of recommended actions that go beyond the school level, usually involving additional stakeholders, like parents, CSOs, institutions, local governments etc.

4.2 Principles of effective (cyber) sexual and gender - based violence prevention programs in school settings

Creating culture of non-violence and safe environment

A climate that feels both safe and non-violent at school is crucial for the prevention and intervention in violence, particularly cyber sexual and gender-based violence in intimate partner relationships. To create a safe school environment, the focus must be on the values and principles upheld at school, and **the ways in which they are put into practice**. Schools need to actively promote gender equality, and a culture of respect and non-violence amongst students, teachers and other staff members. This requires the efforts of everyone involved in the school environment.

"Work on establishing a positive school climate and culture that supports gender equality and has zero tolerance to gender-based violence and build trust of students in teachers and school staff"; it is one of the recommendations based on the results of the research on secondary school teachers across countries. Any improvement of school policies and procedures, especially meaning new policies and practices that promote gender equality, would help foster protective environments. Implementation would advance democratic processes, establish respect for diversity, make the school a safe and discrimination-free space, and make it easier to report incidents by giving support to students experiencing dating violence. School policies should address the safety and wellbeing of survivors of dating abuse and clarify procedures for students to ask for help and report violence or any inappropriate use of technology to control, intimidate or harass others, which they witness or know about. It is important to share the policy widely and display it publicly to make sure the entire school community is aware of it and to consistently implement measures and actions in schools.

In some countries, broad policies that address violence in schools and the education sector are developed at a national level or in the context of national action plans to address peer violence or violence against children. These can guide the program development and describe in more detail how to address violence, including cyber sexual and gender-based violence in schools.

KiVa is a research- and evidence-based antibullying program that has been developed at the University of Turku, Finland. KiVa program takes a whole-school approach and is based on three main elements: prevention, intervention and monitoring. KiVa aims to improve social and emotional skills, influence group norms and bystander behaviour, and create a climate of non-violence in classrooms and the rest of the school by incorporating curricula, online games, work with bullies and victims, materials for teachers, and a guide for parents.

www.kivaprogram.net

Incorporating cyber dating abuse into the existing curriculum

A central part of school-based (cyber) sexual and gender-based violence prevention involves working directly with students to look at some of the root causes of violent behaviour and help them to be less vulnerable to violence. Educational measures aimed at promoting gender equality, tackling discrimination and preventing violence should be considered as part of an ongoing process that cannot be limited to a one-off educational activity in a single class.

If a school has the capacity **to review the existing curricula** and routines, it can identify where possible activities can be integrated rather than having to create them as stand-alone programs. For example, they could be incorporated in health and sexuality education, life-skills education, ICT education and civic education, where teachers may already be dealing with issues such as developing healthy relationships and/or communication skills, resisting peer pressure, managing emotions, online safety, promotion of gender equality and human rights. By relying on key groups such as teachers, students and other staff who are already involved in delivering lessons, it will help to make sure that the most appropriate and acceptable entry points are selected for lessons on sexual and gender-based violence prevention.

How to recognize and appropriately respond to sexual and gender-based violence – intimate partner violence in particular – is the cornerstone of **comprehensive sexuality education curricula**, too. When possible, teaching this curriculum should be organised as part of a comprehensive sexuality education, so that students are clear about safe and healthy dating behaviours. Sexual education should encourage respect for others, regardless of their gender or sexuality, and help unlock the potential of schools as sites of empowerment for both girls and boys, as well as for the prevention of gender-based violence. The *International technical guidance on sexuality education*[52] was developed to help educational bodies and other relevant authorities to develop and implement school-based and out-of-school comprehensive sexuality education programs and materials.

One way of empowering young people to stay safe online is in class, **boosting their digital media literacy skills**. Raising awareness and addressing underlying structures of gender disparity and the culture of sexism that facilitates the perpetuation of online SGBV can play a role in creating a safer environment online. Schools need to raise gender awareness and provide education on safe use **of technology and digital citizenship** as part of **civic education**. Alongside the issues of privacy and digital citizenship, students should learn about creating gender-sensitive content and having a meaningful impact on the Internet.

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[52]   International technical guidance on sexuality education. An evidence-informed approach. (2018) UNFPA Available at:
         www.unfpa.org/publications/international-technical-guidance-sexuality-education

➤ **Educational programs aimed at preventing violence** against women vary from country to country. In Spain, teachers are obliged to attend a permanent training in equality-related matters, although schools themselves can choose whether they follow it or not. In Hungary, the National Core Curriculum states that students have to be educated about sexuality and intimate relationships, but the document mainly highlights the biological aspects of traditional gender roles in the family This document does not mention the importance of gender equality and offers no guidance to teachers regarding the deconstruction of restrictive gender roles and stereotypes. In Croatia, all schools are required to implement prevention programs. Prevention of gender-based violence in a school environment is based on a sporadic implementation of programs in (some) schools. A newly introduced national curriculum of Health Education makes no mention of gender-based violence nor any other issue that is related to gender. In Serbia, there is no systematic education on topics related to gender equality and gender-based violence, including cyber violence, neither as part of formal education, nor through professional development programs. One thing that all countries have in common, though, is that most educational prevention tasks and programs, including their creation, for both youth and teachers, is carried out by NGOs.[53]

Safe Dates, USA

Safe Dates (Foshee et al, 2005) is a school-based prevention program which includes several different school-based activities: a 10-week curriculum looking at behaviour and attitudes associated with dating abuse, a play about dating abuse and violence, a poster contest, and materials for parents such as newsletters. Alongside this, community activities such as support services and training for service providers are provided. In the USA, the curriculum has been successful in reducing sexual, physical and emotional abuse due to changes in dating-violence norms, gender role norms and knowledge of support services.

https://rb.gy/npwwzb

Integrating the gender perspective in the education and prevention

A systematic approach to (cyber) gender-based violence prevention needs to acknowledge the role of patriarchal and hegemonic social norms and the gender imbalance of power and include interventions that call for change in attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate sexual and gender-based violence. Gender-sensitive education improves the quality of teaching and facilitates a deeper understanding of the needs, behaviour and attitudes of the population, enhancing students' critical thinking skills by providing them with new tools to identify social stereotypes, norms and roles related to gender.

The ways in which inequality and sexism in offline environments are reflected and amplified in online spaces are also important enabling factors for online violence. Cyber sexual and gender-based violence can also limit women's ability to take advantage of the opportunities that ICTs provide, act as a barrier to their access, thus possibly exacerbating the gender digital gap and contributing to gender stereotypes being reaffirmed and reproduced. Effective action has to be taken to include a gender-informed perspective and counter cyber gender-based violence, which in turn serves as a positive driver for change and development. This also helps in building a safe and secure environment for women and girls in every sphere of life.

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[53]   Awareness and attitudes of secondary school students towards youth intimate partner violence – Joint report for Hungary, Spain, Serbia and Croatia, 2020

Through their project "No Tolerance for Gender-Based Violence", **the Autonomous Women's Center (**AWC) explored possibilities for integrating the topics of gender equality and gender-based violence into the curricula of Serbian secondary schools.

One initiative was to analyse the curricula of secondary schools (grammar and vocational), whether and to what extent they deal with topics of gender equality, gender-based discrimination and violence, and to identify entry points for these topics. The result of their work is a detailed overview of parts of the secondary school curricula where gender-related topics and the issue concerning gender-based violence could be integrated, along with concrete suggestions on how it could be done: https://www.womenngo.org.rs/publikacije/razvoj-dobrih-praksi/1352-zasto-i-kako-o-temi-rodno-zasnovanog-nasilja-u-skolskom-programu-u-srednjim-skolama-2018 .

An additional benefit of the said activity is that the analysis was conducted by the students of the Women's Studies alternative program in Belgrade; this gave them the opportunity to learn more about this topic as well as work on their analytical and research skills.

Another initiative was to give concrete examples of how the topics of gender equality and gender-based violence could be integrated into lessons of various subjects within the existing school curriculum and offer teachers guidelines on how to include these topics in their regular work. A set of lesson plans was developed in cooperation with motivated secondary school teachers and support staff who participated in the AWC's training for teachers, demonstrating the wide range of possibilities of informing students and encouraging them to discuss the mentioned topics. This included both curricular work (as part of subjects such as literature, language, sociology, but also mathematics, computer science, etc.) and extracurricular activities: https://www.womenngo.org.rs/publikacije/razvoj-dobrih-praksi/1399-nulta-tolerancija-na-rodno-zasnovano-nasilje-2018

In **Croatia, the Forum for Freedom in Education** started a project[54] with the objective of initiating systemic and comprehensive change in elementary and secondary schools through the creation of a Gender Equality Charter Mark (GECM) quality standard and accreditation tool. This is expected to have an impact on young people's expectations of gender roles by challenging their gender stereotyping. The questions cover the areas of School Leadership, Curriculum, Environment, Attitudes and Community. This tool will enable a school to measure progress in their handling of the effects any gender stereotyping still has on pupils with regard to subject (and career) choices and which stans as the root cause of sexual harassment and gender-based violence in schools and the wider society; thereby, it will promote gender mainstreaming.

Training for teachers

Teachers are crucial for the implementation of violence prevention programs. Well-trained, supported and motivated teachers are key to delivering high-quality prevention programs, including those aimed at tackling cyber sexual and gender-based violence in intimate partner relationships. Our data[55] shows that the majority of teachers believe that their role should entail addressing the problem of cyber sexual teen-dating violence in their work with students. They emphasise the need for professional training and useful educational materials, as well as the need to improve multi sectoral cooperation.

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[54] The innovative rationale for this project has been built on the experience and results of a three-year Gender Respect Project run by DECSY. For more information on: www.decsy.org.uk/project/gender-equality-charter-mark/
[55]

Not only do teachers follow the **formal curriculum** in schools, but they also **contribute to the 'hidden curriculum'**. Teachers' behaviour and practices, often carried out unconsciously, convey powerful messages to students, which can and do indeed contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotyping and gendered self-perception.

A training organized specifically for teachers could help them get a better understanding of the nature of gender-based violece and its effects, how to respond if they observe violence, and how to work with others at the school to help prevent gender-based violence. To implement the curriculum effectively, teachers need to feel confident, be committed and have enough resources at their disposal; they have to feel supported by the legal framework, the school management and all relevant institutions and authorities; they also need to have access to training and resources. The head of school should provide encouragement, guidance and support to teachers involved in the training.

> In Croatia, CESI – Center for Education, Counselling and Research provides training for teachers (and peer educators).
>
> The main aim of the educational program is to promote gender equality, healthy and equitable relationships and institute zero tolerance towards gender-based violence in intimate partner relationships. Theoretical and practical trainings can motivate and give teachers the skills and the "know how" necessary for the implementation of primary prevention programs and interventions, help to raise their awareness of gender stereotypes in the education system and contribute to the development of skills related to identifying, handling and reporting acts of sexual and gender-based violence. In order to be able to educate students and improve their knowledge about the topic, the program is directed towards changing the existing attitudes and raising teens' awareness on the following: the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships; the influence that gender-stereotypical attitudes and socially imposed gender roles have on their relationships; how power inequality is related to psychological, physical and/or sexual abuse against women/girls, and how adolescents can contribute to the prevention of all forms of gender-based violence, including cyber intimate partner relationships violence.
> www.cesi.hr

4.3 Promising practices in the prevention of intimate partner violence among adolescents

Article 14 of the Council of Europe (2011) Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence clearly states that such type of "teaching material on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, gender-based violence against women and the right to personal integrity, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners" should be included not only "in formal curricula and at all levels of education", but also "in informal educational facilities, as well as in sports, cultural and leisure facilities and the media"[56].

Learning through experience and usage of creative methods and art forms

Educational prevention programs should be put in place through formal primary and secondary education and should be adapted to the communication needs of young people and apply an interactive, gender- and age-sensitive approach. By hosting prevention workshops on sexual and gender-based violence in adolescent relationships **in schools**, it conveys the message that violence is not acceptable. Working directly with young people in the form of **extracurricular activities using creative methods** and art forms can be a helpful tool in changing individual attitudes and behaviours, helping people learn about healthier ways to relate to one another, and encouraging them to speak out against violence and provide support to any victims. Continuous and long-term work in a school setting will help change the existing social norms in a given school, making it less tolerant of abuse and more invested in establishing healthy norms.

In a school setting, **teachers with proper training** can be instrumental not just in providing educational activities for youth, but also in designing different extracurricular activities, organizing campaigns and facilitating the process of creating artistic products. Teachers have to be trained and have support to use participatory methods and creative techniques to raise awareness, stimulate creativity, innovation and engagement of students. Teachers as facilitators should focus on **building a partnership with all participants**, fostering their enthusiasm and motivation, and helping them develop the additional skills and confidence they might need to design and implement other activities and raise awareness. After the workshops, the participants could create content of their own choice, with the support and guidance from their teachers, and use them in awareness-raising activities and campaigns, aiming to sensitize their peers. The types of artwork that students can create include: short animations or films, comics, photographic exhibitions, slogans, posters, drawings; lyrics or songs; short stories or website articles, social media campaigns; plays; information leaflets and brochures; concerts and interviews for the media. Young people feel empowered when they can take the initiative on this issue, implement activities, start campaigns offline and online, design art products and make their online and offline activities and art public. They are given space and their voices are supported, and their visual images contribute to the sustainable impact of such educational activities. Through their exploration of these issues, young people begin to realize that they hold the power – both as individuals and collectively – to prevent violence and abuse from affecting their lives.

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[56]   Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, (2011) – Council of Europe, www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/text-of-the-convention

However, one of the greatest challenges in organizing gender-based violence prevention activities concerns **how to engage boys**. As per lessons learned from the different projects implemented in a school setting, when young people are given a chance to be creative, boys and young men engage in the fight against gender-based violence more.

The research conducted in different countries clearly indicates that youth very rarely turn to their teachers or other members of the school staff in situations when they are exposed to sexual and gender-based violence. Their close collaboration on designing and implementing this type of activities could improve the confidence and trust young people might have in teachers, particularly when it comes to disclosing and seeking help in concrete cases of abuse.

The collaboration of teachers and students, combined with their involvement in the educational and creative activities, improves student-teacher rapport, increases confidence levels and provides insights into the way young people think. This, in turn, leads to a much better mutual understanding. Our experience shows that the students express a high level of satisfaction with this type of work, they are eager to participate in further activities that deal with the prevention of gender-based violence in adolescent relationships, and some of them even consider volunteering and working with their peers on the issue of teen-dating violence.

> Play it for Change project
> Teachers and education professionals specialized in different subjects were involved in the project. Through the Capacity Building Program, they were provided knowledge and practical tools to address gender stereotypes more effectively and prevent gender-based violence when working with adolescent girls and boys. Theoretical input and practical activities were combined to meet different training needs. Music and audio-visual media were used as a sensitization tool on gender issues throughout the training sessions. Professionals were encouraged to challenge sexism in music contents and learned how to promote reflection and critical thinking on this issue among students. As a result, they acquired competences to promote gender equality and healthy relationships among adolescents through innovative and creative methods.
> These competences were demonstrated when they designed and implemented educational and awareness-raising activities for the empowerment of students. Teachers also played a crucial role in providing support to their students during the creation of songs and music videos for the promotion of gender equality.
> Adolescent girls and boys felt empowered when they assumed a leading role in the development of songs and videos, along with the support and monitoring of the teachers. As they were creating songs and music that reinforced gender equality and healthy relationships, they became active agents of change in preventing gender-based violence among their peers. Their work was presented and promoted on national and EU levels.
>
> Furthermore, students used the process to develop their creativity and the project contributed to building group cohesion. Taking part in the same activities and sharing a common objective resulted in a stronger bond between classmates and fostered an atmosphere of support and cooperation between students and teachers.
> www.playitforchange.org

Would you like a cup of tea?!   - theatre play about sexual consent followed by an interactive discussion with the audience. The theatre play was developed by NANE (Hungary) involving actors and experts on the topic of domestic violence. It uses the tea metaphor for sexual consent: we see different scenarios when one person wants to have sex but the other does not, and then we see the exact same scenario but with tea: one wants to have tea, and the other does not. It is a very easy tool to show how simple the concept of consent can be: if someone doesn't want tea, don't pour it in their mouth - if someone doesn't want to have sex, don't pressure them into having sex. We also see cases of sexual harassment and "grey zones" of sexual abuse.

After watching the play, the spectators have the chance to talk about the different scenarios and their feelings and thoughts about them with each other and the experts. The play was developed in response to emerging cases of sexual abuse among university students and was played many times for a young audience. The play is also suitable for a theatre performance (not in the school context) with paying audience.

Youth workshops implemented by **the Autonomous Women's Center (Serbia),** aimed at preventing gender-based violence in partner relationships, involved encouraging secondary school youth engagement in the topic. This included planning youth actions to be implemented at school or in the local community, disseminating information on the unacceptability of control and violence in partner relationships and increasing youth engagement as part of the awareness-raising efforts about this topic. One of the participating schools was a music school, so it comes as no surprise that the students decided to send the message against violence by doing what they do best, music and song. With the support of their teachers, they prepared and recorded the song titled 'I Can Choose to Say No'. The song garnered a significant amount of public attention and was promoted through various media.
The song's video is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkNrBHTHpr0 .
In several other schools, youth engagement was achieved through graffiti. With the approval of secondary schools, graffiti messages against gender-based violence were painted on the school building walls or fences. These outdoor events proved popular with the students and were an opportunity for youth workshop participants to share their knowledge on gender-based violence with their peers.
More information available at the organization's website dedicated to violence prevention: www.mogudanecu.rs

Engaging boys and young men to prevent gender-based violence

Given that many of the forms of violence are perpetrated primarily by men and boys, it is important to emphasize their **role in the prevention** of such violence. They have to be told and shown that the **normalization of violence is damaging and dangerous** and that it has negative impacts on everybody. Teaching teen boys about positive expressions of masculinity could be a way of combating violence against women and girls. With critical and analytical conversations about gender norms, young men will learn how they can base their concept of masculinity around respect, care, generosity, and rejection of violence. Violence prevention programs need to make boys see that their contribution in this fight can take on many forms, e.g. as role models, agents of change and advocates for equality and mutual respect between women and men.

However, a major challenge here can be convincing men and boys to understand they need to take part in gender-based violence prevention sessions. Within educational programs, boys should be provided

with information and strategies on how to deconstruct their gender stereotyping and attitudes related to gender-based violence, resist the patriarchal norms and peer pressure, as well as how to react in situations of cyber sexual and gender-based violence.[57] As the evaluation conducted by the WHO shows, **gender-transformative approaches** that seek to transform gender roles and promote more gender-equitable relationships between men and women were discovered to have a higher rate of effectiveness.[58]

In Croatia, the Status M association deals with questioning and deconstructing harmful gender norms and stereotypes, particularly the ubiquitous determinants of masculinity. Through youth work, non-formal education and activism, Status M encourages and empowers young people, primarily boys and young men, to actively contribute to the creation of a non-violent, inclusive and gender-equal world.

Gender inequalities and gender-based violence are all-present and harm billions of girls and women worldwide. They have adverse effects on boys and men, too. Status M addresses these issues through direct work with vulnerable groups of young people, such as young offenders, members of Roma communities, students facing economic hardships or displaying anti-social behaviours, using a robust methodology with a strong gender-transformative approach (Program Y). Their work with the youth is experiential and interactive and addresses a wide spectrum of topics, such as gender, violence, emotions, relationships, sexuality, conflict resolution, reproductive and mental health, addiction and parenthood.

Our work is carried out in numerous primary and secondary schools, juvenile detention centres, correctional facilities and local communities in Zagreb and neighbouring regions. Status M also empowers youth workers, teachers and other professionals to implement the Program Y independently across the country.
In addition to the Program Y workshops, they also support young people in the so-called *Be A Man* clubs which operate in schools according to the principles of self-organization and peer education. Young people use this platform to raise awareness about gender equality and gender-based violence in their local communities and among their peers.

The involvement of youth: Peer education and peer support groups

Peer-education approaches are effective because they make use of peer influence in a positive way. In contrast to adult facilitators, peer educators can earn more trust and credibility as they are less likely to be seen as authority figures teaching about how young people should behave. Peer educators can therefore create an environment where young participants feel comfortable to explore sensitive issues such as gender inequality or (cyber) sexual and gender-based violence. A young person gets a great deal of information from their peers, especially on issues that are sensitive or are not usually explored within the mainstream education system, i.e. the school curriculum. Teens that experience dating abuse are more likely to tell their friends than anyone else. Therefore, peer education groups can be a great source of support, while also creating a positive, powerful influence.

By training as **peer educators**, young people are empowered because they can see in themselves the potential to become role models; they are more confident when they feel that their needs, views and opinions are being listened to and that they are a part of something. This could inspire a great sense of achievement in them, encouraging them to develop valuable life skills, including presentation, facilitation, communication and empathy.

57   Ibid
58   World Health Organization (2007). Engaging men and boys in changing gender-based inequity in health: Evidence from programme interventions. Geneva

To ensure that potential peer educators feel comfortable and confident enough to conduct peer-education programmes, it would be preferable that teachers devote as much time as necessary to train the students that have expressed the desire to be peer educators. By participating in the training for peer educators, students will gain skills and insight into the theoretical background, and they will learn how to address sensitive topics. Students need to participate and be actively encouraged to provide input on the planning, monitoring and evaluation of activities and programs and to implement activities or initiate dialogues with parents and other students. Providing peer educators with personal feedback and acknowledgement will help them improve their skills, make them more motivated and enthusiastic, as well as support them to continue their work and participation.

By fostering a culture of openness in peer groups, adolescents are likely to feel safe to disclose personal experiences of abuse. Peer educators might not be aware whether the young people they are working with have personal experience of gender-based violence, but any disclosure should be taken very seriously. However, it is not the peer educators' role to provide counselling or advice or to try to 'rescue' survivors from abuse. Instead, they can listen to them and encourage survivors to talk to people who can provide help and guidance. The general idea of these activities is to support students' involvement and voice in fighting inequality, (cyber) sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination, while promoting gender equality among their peers.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES AND YOUTH INITIATIVES

- In one school in Croatia, the students were trained by their teachers to become peer educators. They held presentations and workshops with peers in their school but also in other secondary schools located nearby. Their aim was to educate their peers and to motivate them to join in organizing awareness-raising activities for all students at school. They would organize a group on a regular basis and offer individual support in school premises for their peers who encounter some difficulties in romantic relationships. The role of the teacher was to provide them with feedback, support and acknowledgement for their work and help them organize sessions. In another school, students were trained on how to become peer educators, and beside educational activities, they took an active part in a social media campaign against violence in relationships. They created and filmed a video about gender-based violence and organized actions on the main town square and in front of schools, wanting to encourage their peers to question the widespread stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, all the while promoting equality and human rights.
- Együtt egyenlően (meaning "together, we are equal") is a new project of NANE (Hungary). NANE has conducted school workshops on intimate partner violence for many years now (Heartbeat workshops) and have an accredited training program developed for teachers who want to organize workshops with their students on the topic. NANE holds 3 school sessions per month on average. NANE's new development (Együtt egyenlően project) is aimed at getting young people involved into the prevention work: we created new training materials based on our years of experience and recruited individuals between the ages of 18 and 30 to be part of the peer educators team for young people.
- As part of the Autonomous Women's Center's (Serbia) gender-based violence prevention activities, a number of youth workshops were organized with students from 30 secondary schools. At the same time, teachers and other members of the school staff were attending training and follow-up meetings. Following these, several schools decided on their own to work towards systematizing peer prevention work, including all students in their broad informing efforts, and allowing students and teachers to be proactive in applying the acquired knowledge. These steps involved organizing groups of students who participated in workshops (by the teachers involved in the prevention activities) and having them present topics related to gender-based violence. This way, students of all grades had access to this important information throughout the school year. In some cases, students were invited to hold presentations for higher grades of elementary schools in the local community.

Activities aimed at empowering girls and supporting them to stand up to violence

Groups and workshops for girls can be a great way for teens **to get support for dealing with the challenges surrounding self-esteem and body image issues, to work on their assertiveness, to know they are not alone and learn skills that help them build confidence**. Sometimes they can feel more comfortable in a women-only environment.

While the digital world can provide positive opportunities for girls, it also presents new dangers; particularly in adolescence, when girls are coming of age and becoming sexually active, without necessarily having developed the skills or the knowledge to protect themselves.

As a result of online abuse and/or gender-based violence, women commonly experience fear and suffer from anxiety and depression, which can lead to their reduced online presence and complete withdrawal from online spaces. Online violence is, then, translated into offline environments, as women experience their mobility being limited because of online abuse, including the disclosure of personal information online, which carries the real threat of physical violence.

Working in groups or workshops with girls can **encourage participants to share their experiences, express feelings, ideas, and work through the emerging issues, such as those related to self-esteem, assertiveness and boundaries**. Facilitators should always guarantee a safe, secure and supportive environment, while stimulating a constructive and interactive debate between the participants, always ensuring the secrecy of the group by explaining and respecting the participants' rights to privacy. If any boys are present in the group, it could inhibit disclosure and affect women's sense of safety to talk honestly and freely about their experiences.

Through social interaction and involvement in the group process itself, the group members have a chance to work on their independence, self-esteem, self-confidence; they also become stronger and empowered. We want girls to learn their rights and be able to identify a potentially abusive or violent situation; to understand and communicate their own needs and desires, practice assertiveness and nurture healthy and positive relationships. They need to know where they can report violence and seek help and support when they need it. Girls have to learn as part of their group work that they should not be blamed or stigmatized for the violence they might experience, and that they feel trusted when talking about violence and supported when making their own choices.

> Take Back the Tech! is a collaborative global web-based campaign that calls on everyone – especially women and girls – to take control of technology and strategically use any ICT platform at hand for activism against gender-based violence. It's a global project that highlights the problem of tech-related violence against women, incorporating research and solutions from different parts of the world. The campaign offers safety roadmaps and information and provides an avenue for taking action. Take Back the Tech! leads several campaigns at various points in the year, but our biggest annual campaign takes place during *16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence* (25 November - 10 December). www.takebackthetech.net

Working with bystanders

Violence often takes place in the presence of other people. Cyber sexual and gender-based violence often happens in online spaces as well, with — besides the perpetrator and the survivors — numerous other people present, as bystanders. However, most of them are very unlikely to intervene. The explanation of why people tend to refrain from helping is because they believe another person will eventually step in and do something. Sometimes they fail to notice the assault, they do not believe it is their responsibility or they do not have the skills to intervene.

As the research mentioned before indicates, though, young people would first turn to their peers if they found themselves in a situation of digital violence. Bearing this in mind, it is clear that young people are, in fact, of great help to each other and present a significant link in the response to violence behaviour in the digital sphere. If given the skills to act against violence, it could help them to prevent dating violence and make sure that the victim gets help and support.

The innovative approach used in many countries **involves teaching bystanders how to intervene in situations that involve sexual and gender-based violence**. The role of a bystander includes interrupting situations that could lead to assault before it happens or during an incident, speaking out against the social norms that support (cyber) sexual and gender-based violence, and having skills to be an effective and supportive ally to survivors. Effective actions for bystanders include: giving the perpetrator less attention; redirecting the perpetrator to a different activity; showing support for the victim, even in a safe situation after the incident; helping the victim to get away; reporting the incident and getting support from a trusted person; and setting a good example.

Schools can offer educational programs for bystanders which would provide the participants with the skills helping them to act when they see behaviour that puts others at risk for violence, victimization, or perpetration. These include speaking out against rape myths and sexist language, supporting victim/survivors, and intervening in potentially violent situations.

Hollaback! have worked with partners to develop tools and training aimed at helping bystanders intervene when they see harassment happen. The Five D's — Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay, and Direct. — present different methods people can use to support someone who is being harassed, emphasize that abuse is not okay, and demonstrate to other people that they too have the power to make our communities and workplaces safer.
More information on: www.ihollaback.org/bystander-resources/

Engaging parents in the prevention, and why it matters

Parents have an unquestionably significant role in the development of their child's understanding of gender, gender roles, gender equality, as well as their learning about responsible behaviour in partner relationships, including responsible online behaviour. Therefore, cooperation between school representatives and parents is essential for the violence prevention, as highlighted in the legal-strategic framework addressing the protection of children from abuse and violence. While parents are already involved in school matters in different ways and there is a clear understanding that teacher-parent cooperation is necessary for the benefit of educating and upbringing students, if they are to tackle cyber violence, gender-based violence, in the context of youth partner relationships, this requires additional competences and knowledge from both sides.

An EU-wide research[59] has shown that in most countries, most of the children say that their parents engage in active mediation at least occasionally (talk to them, encourage them, help them and suggest ways to use the internet safely). According to the same research, parents are the main source of help when something upsetting happens to their children online.

Talking regularly and openly with the child about their relationships and what they are doing online will help build trust and may decrease the parents' desire to check up on their children without them knowing. The youth can benefit from the opportunity to talk to trusted adults, like their parents, about sexual health and healthy relationships.

Insufficient parental involvement and focus, lack of clear boundaries and information regarding possible dangers present on the Internet, violent behaviour of parents – they all contribute to young people's violent behaviour[60]. Furthermore, an unfavourable school climate – including poor communication and negative relations among the participants of school life (teachers, other professionals and parents) – leads to a rise in all forms of violence, digital sphere included.

Besides working on their own level of digital competence, teachers also have an important role in the empowerment of parents, especially in terms of a better understanding of their children and their development and their role as parents, encouraging them to work on their parental capacities and competencies within the family upbringing.

By involving parents in the discussion on (cyber) sexual and gender-based violence, there will be more opportunities to directly address sensitive topics, such as sexual harassment, adolescent sexuality and relationships, intimate partner violence etc. These conversations might be challenging, but by giving a chance to parents to speak on such issues can lead to greater awareness and mutual understanding between parents, students and teachers. Having representatives from women's groups present may enrich these discussions and enhance collaboration with formal or informal referral sources in the community.

> **What can you do as a teacher to encourage parent involvement[61]?**
> - Inform parents about your activities: Involve parents in creating a safe environment for students and building good relations with everyone. This can be achieved at parent-teacher meetings, or through messages or telephone conversations with parents.
> - Encourage good relations: Cooperate with other teachers in organizing plays and meetings with students and parents, bring guest speakers to talk about topics of interest to parents, ask students to attend parent-teacher meetings, write or talk to parents on a regular basis, give homework that requires communication with parents, involve parents in class activities.
> - Ask for information and establish contact with the parent. If a student exhibits warning signs of being exposed to violence or being violent to others, contact their parents. Make sure the meeting is held at school and ask the school pedagogue or psychologist to attend.
> - Document and monitor: Make reports from meetings, write down all the important data, conclusions, agreements made. It is important to stay in contact with parents to monitor whether an agreement stands, i.e. to monitor the student's behaviour and keep records of any changes. It is good to have more positive than negative comments regarding the child's behaviour, because they will have an opportunity to view a positive side of their child.

[59]   Smahel, D., Machackova, H., Mascheroni, G., Dedkova, L., Staksrud, E., Ólafsson, K., Livingstone, S., and Hasebrink, U. (2020). EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries. EU Kids Online. Doi: 10.21953/lse.47fdeqj01ofo, pps. 8 and 125.
[60]   D.Kuzmanović, et al.(2016)., Digitalno nasilje-prevencija i reagovanje, Ministarstvo prosvete, nauke i tehnološkog razvoja Republike Srbije i Pedagoško društvo Srbije, Beograd, p 26.
[61]   Ibid. pg.98-99.

Here are some ideas for **activities** (based on school practices[62]) **that can be initiated by teachers to improve cooperation with parents** and engage them in school activities, including violence prevention programs:

- Organize parent-teacher meetings where parents can say how they envisage their cooperation with the school, and what they can offer in that sense.
- Teams can be formed, comprising two teachers-coordinators and a group of parents. This can be done based on personal preferences and interests of the parents: e.g. a team for setting up visits, a team for organizing workshops…
- Provide parents with appropriate materials and resources to learn more about online safety, so that they can discuss topics such as pressures on social media, the question of consent and sharing photos, using a partner's password without their permission; being emotionally aggressive and expressing verbal threats through digital means, keeping online accounts secure.
- Initiate different activities which were planned and implemented with the help of parents: Organize meetings where students present specific topics to parents, mark significant dates, make visits to relevant institutions, initiate educational discussions on safety and protection from violence (with the participation of school representatives and external experts – including parents-experts); organize focus groups on different topics, promotional events, presentations of school or class rules for parents; organize a day of switched roles (parents and students take the role of teachers) or a parent-teacher club; inform on and engage in local activities, e.g. in municipality-level parent councils or national associations of parents and teachers; organize interactive workshops for students on relevant topics.
- Organize pedagogical-psychological counselling for parents or workshops aimed at strengthening parental competencies. These can focus on current topics and can involve discussions with experts in relevant fields.

Guidelines for adults on safe internet use[63]
- https://www.childnet.com/resources/a-parents-guide-to-technology
- https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers/parents-guidetechnology
- https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/blog/key-things-remember-when-helping-yourchild-set-new-profile
- https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/iparent/online-safeguards/parental-controls
- https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/parental-controls
- https://rm.coe.int/digital-parenting-/16807670e8
- https://www.breakthecycle.org/sites/default/files/LINA%20Parent%20Handbook.pdf

Collaborating with the local community and other stakeholders

Given the seriousness of dating and intimate partner violence – as well as the complexity of this issue – an effective response requires an ongoing commitment and collaboration of schools, families and communities, as well as policy makers. Many local communities are involved in **coordinated efforts to prevent violence against women**, bringing together key sectors such as health, police, education and psychosocial support services. School representatives can take part in existing community-based coordination committees that address violence prevention.

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62 Ibid, pg.101.
63 Kuzmanović, D. et al. (2019), Deca u digitalnom dobu – Vodič za bezbedno konstruktivno korišćenje ditialne tehnologije i interneta. Užički centar za prava deteta, Užice. pg. 57.

Specific legal frameworks and action protocols currently in place already define what the communication with schools should be like, as well as what steps should be taken, by schools when it comes to reporting and addressing cases in cooperation with other institutions. However, as survey results show, teaching professionals in most countries encompassed within this project would benefit from better communication channels with professionals and specific contact persons from other institutions.

When it comes to interventions, be it at school or in other institutions, **schools can profit from consultations with professionals from other institutions** and **a stronger cooperation with persons on specialized positions.** It would help them ensure a timely and coordinated response on the part of the school, one that is in the student's best interest, adapted to their specific needs. In case the school reports or initiates procedures with other institutions, the **school has the right to be informed and request information on the outcomes of the steps taken by other institutions that affect their students**. The school can then act accordingly and is able to document developments and results of actions taken. In addition to this, school may refer students for support and information to specialized non-governmental organizations providing direct work or prevention work with youth on sexual and gender-based violence and cyber violence.

- When it comes to cooperating with other institutions and specialized organizations, representatives of these institutions can also get involved in prevention activities as well, through, for example: involvement in project-type school work as experts in the field; speaking at meetings with pupils, parents, teachers and other school staff; implementing interactive workshops with youth; speaking at municipality-level events initiated by the school with the aim of awareness-raising (including its form in the cyberspace); distribution of materials and providing contact information of these institutions/specialized organizations in the school (putting up educational/informative posters, making helpline numbers visible at school premises, alongside links to useful websites and specific pages on the school website); consulting/advising in the preparation of school plans for the prevention of violence, abuse and neglect.
- For instance, in Croatia, police officers have been trained to hold workshops with high school students, titled 'Living life without violence', aimed at preventing violence against women. This also allows the youth to develop positive relationships with the police.
- Civil society organizations are key players in the prevention of (cyber) sexual and gender-based violence in adolescent relationships. They have been recognized as partners/collaborators by other institutions, including schools which largely rely on CSOs, implementing their programs, using their manuals and other educational materials, participating in trainings or projects led by civil society organizations. Community organizations could offer space to display messages against gender-based violence through exhibitions of students' works, for example in local libraries, art galleries or community centres. Also, schools could host or take part in community events, such as organizing student theatre productions or holding workshops or information booths.