

1. SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED-VIOLENCE IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

1.1 Understanding and addressing gender-based violence in intimate relationships

Intimate relationships in adolescence

Adolescence is a time to explore and develop emotional and social competence. Teens are learning to recognize and manage their own emotions and they are engaged in building their capacity to be sensitive and effective in relating to others: family, friends, girlfriends and boyfriends. In adolescence, romantic relationships have the capacity to be confidence-boosting and healthy experiences that teach young people about the give and take of intimacy. When relationships are characterized by mutual respect, intimacy, trust, commitment and good communication, teens are happier with themselves. Teenagers in healthy relationships feel valued and accepted for who they are. They can make their own choices and don't feel pressured to do things that make them feel uncomfortable, feel safe and comfortable with each other, support each other, treat each other equally and fairly, they are only intimate when they both want, they know it's OK to say 'no', communicate openly and sort out conflicts fairly. Young people entering their first romantic relationship usually have difficulties in recognizing what a quality relationship looks like and lack the skills and knowledge needed to establish a quality and fulfilling relationship with a partner.

However, for some young people romantic relationships may be associated with additional discord, and consequences such as intimate partner violence. Toxic and unhealthy behaviour can start from something seemingly "innocent" and result in violence and abuse. Adolescents might even misinterpret this as romantic. For example, something can start as jealousy about spending time with others but can result in people becoming isolated from friends and family as relationships progress.

Adolescents in order to develop positive and healthy relationships need to be able to recognize when a relationship is unhealthy and destructive. They need to understand and recognise how unequal power balances and gender stereotypes might affect their development and the relationships around them. Relationship power refers to one partner engaging in behaviours against the other partner's wishes, having greater control over decision making in the relationship, or having greater control over a partner's behaviour. For example, a woman might feel that she does not have the power/ right to say "no". Relationship abuse is an attempt by abusive partners to gain or maintain power and control, and it comes in many forms.

The role of gender stereotypes and gender norms in sustaining gender-based violence

From birth, society treats girls and boys differently based on their biological sex. We are surrounded by messages, instructions and rules about how we should act, speak, think, groom as a boy/girl/woman/man, what is feminine and what is masculine.

Gender stereotypes are widely accepted judgements and generalisations about a person of a gender or the whole gender that can be about one's personality traits, role in the relationship/family, occupation and physical appearance and they stem in traditional gender roles that have historically created a hierarchy in society between genders. Stereotypes exist in close connection with gender norms, an intricate system of expectations on what someone belonging to a certain sex should be like. Gender norms and stereotypes reinforce the hierarchy between genders because they form the socialisation of children into adults differently. They influence one's communication, behaviour, emotional intelligence and their perspectives on what they can become, what they are valued for.

Different display of behaviour is acceptable for women and men. Traditional gender norms often say that girls and women should be accommodating, timid, sensitive, caring and supporting towards their environment. Whereas boys and men should be unruly, confident, exploring, dominant and aggressive. Girls/women are often displayed as emotional, hypersensitive and irrational, while boys are taught that real men don't cry, they are tough and should be rational.

Occupations and functions in the family are also formed by gender stereotypes: women should be homemakers, mothers and be the caretaker of the kids and the jobs we associate with them are more likely to be in the social sector (teacher, nurse etc.) and lower paying jobs. Men are expected to take leadership positions, or work in sciences, engineering, politics, they should be the money-makers and the head of the family.

Gender norms and relationship

Traditional gender roles can cause the cooperation in couples to be faulty and the individual needs/choices to be repressed or oppressed. Our society reinforces heterosexual relationships as a norm, where the masculine and feminine traits complement each other according to traditional gender roles. The inequality in what society expects boys and girls, men and women to conduct themselves can lead to the boys/men dominating over the girls/women and the girl/women to be submissive and vulnerable, less independent and assertive. Should any deviate from the above mentioned, society is likely to penalise them for being non-normative (e.g. 'she's too masculine and will scare men off', 'he's such a "softy or mama's boy or he is not a real man" for letting her tell him what to do') which is likely to condition them further.

Socialisation around sexuality also shows disparity. Girls from an early age are taught that one of their main qualities is how attractive they are. They see female bodies in advertisements, films and other media through a male perspective, always according to the ruling beauty standards. They learn to observe their bodies from an outside perspective, hence they lose connection with it, which has consequences in their self-esteem, perceived physical boundaries and the way they relate to their own sexuality, which can easily become an object to someone else's needs.

The messages about sexuality towards boys also accelerated by porn are often about conquering, proving their masculinity by using someone's (or anyone's body) - about an undisputable, instinctual need that they have to get fulfilled. Girls however, with their physical boundaries blurred and their needs put in the background by socialisation are often unable to say or are not heard when they say no to sexual advances, based on cultural views focusing on male pleasure.

There is also a definite double standard in how society views girls/women and boys/men in the light of their sexual life and expression. If girls and women take more active roles in their sexual lives they are often stigmatized, while with boys and men it is something they get appreciation for (Kardos and Sudár, 2019)². Gender - based violence is deeply connected with gender norms and stereotypes, because it punishes the non-conforming gender expression on several areas of life. Individuals with rigid views on gender roles are likely to be ignorant to their own and their partner's true physical and psychological needs. Gender norms and stereotypes can lead to imbalance in task sharing and quality in the relationship and the family e.g. in the areas of emotional caretaking, decision making, child care, financial control, professional advancement, housework etc. All the above, point towards an inequality that leaves women with less power to practise their autonomy; to have control over their own bodies, needs and lives.

Healthy, unhealthy or abusive?

Every relationship is different and what works well in one may not work in another relationship works well and what doesn't. However, the standard that can be set in any relationship is the fact that the relationship is based on equality or not. Equality in a relationship could be used as a marker to define if it is healthy, unhealthy or even abusive.

Here is a short list with a few pointers helping to determine whether a relationship is healthy, unhealthy or abusive, taken from an information leaflet of NANE Association³

The relationship is most likely healthy if:

- The partners act with decency, respect and love towards each other. Problems can be discussed, and the discussions will result in change.
- The use of non-violent communication has positive results in the relationship.
- Both partners invest the same amount of energy to solve common problems.
- One can freely express their feelings.
- The partners are happy and supportive about each other's success and personal growth.
- Both partners have the possibility to change and improve.
- The partners encourage each other to improve and feel that their lives are more complete.
- Both feel stronger.
- They would let each other go if they wanted to break up.

The relationship is unhealthy if:

- The partners can't discuss their problems.
- The partners can talk about the problems, but nothing changes.
- The use of non-violent communication in the relationship has no results.

The relationship is abusive if, on top of the above-listed items, any one of the below is true as well:

- The partner responds to the successes of the other with blame, understatement or anger.
- The partner's behaviour is rude or harsh towards the other if they are alone or in public.
- The partner treats the other as if they are invisible, doesn't say a word to them, doesn't reply.
- Only one partner can change, develop and improve, the other can never do that.
- The partner's world gets smaller and smaller (friends and relatives, old hobbies, goals and desires are disappearing).
- One feels more and more weak and powerless.

² Kardos B. and Sudár O. (2019) Turn Me On. Patriarchátust Ellenzők Társasága. Available at: <http://turnmeon.hu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Kapcsolodj-be-Tordelt-WEB-FINAL-L-1.pdf>

³ Healthy relationship, NANE. Available at: https://nane.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/healthy_relationship_print.pdf

- The partner would not let the other go if they wanted to break up: blackmails the other with their feelings, illness, children, etc. or threatens with murder or suicide in case the other leaves.
- The partner threatened the other with physical violence.
- The partner (sometimes) hits the other or forces them to participate in sexual activities which the other does not like nor want.

What is healthy, unhealthy or abusive in a relationship depends on the set standards. Hence, an unhealthy or not functioning relationship may be acceptable for one or abusive for another.

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence can be defined as violence directed against a person because of that person's gender (including gender identity/expression) or as violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately.

According to the United Nations, gender-based violence is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality and continues to be one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies. It can affect boys and men, but it usually occurs when they display non-normative sexuality or gender expression.⁴

Women and girls, of all ages and backgrounds, are most affected by gender-based violence. It can be physical, sexual and/or psychological, and includes

- violence in close relationships
- sexual violence (including rape, sexual assault and harassment or stalking)
- slavery (sexual exploitation, trafficking, keeping women in captivity and exploit them physically)
- harmful cultural practices, such as forced marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM) and so-called 'honour' crimes
- cyber violence and harassment using new technologies

It is a violation of human dignity and, in its worst form, it violates the right to life. It is also an extreme expression of inequality on the ground of sex.

Examples of gender - based violence include sexual harassment, stalking, sexual exploitation, physical and sexual violence. About forms and examples of gender - based violence you can read in more details later in this chapter.

Forms of intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence is one type of gender-based violence, usually affecting women and girls as victims. According to the United Nations, gender-based violence affects women more because of the historically established power imbalance between men and women that lead to men dominating over women in society, and prevent women from living up to their full potential.⁵ There are many forms of intimate partner violence; they usually appear together, because they are all stemming from the same: the perpetrator's derogatory attitudes towards women/their partner.

In the following list we have collected the most typical examples:

⁴ General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating General Recommendation No. 19. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/CEDAW_C_GC_35_8267_E.pdf

⁵ United Nations, 1996, article/section 75

Emotional abuse: Underrating and insulting the partner, or the people and things the partner loves/likes, ridiculing her (her looks, religion, ethnic origins, etc.). Threats of harming her, or things and people precious to her, threats of committing suicide. Shutting her out from his thoughts or emotions yet keeping her under control; often by acting utterly jealous; ruining her self-confidence; and questioning or ignoring her independent decisions. Controlling what she wears, who she meets, what does she do in her free time (also using technology). Blaming the partner for everything, including his own emotional outbursts. Questioning the partner's emotions and/or experiences (including the severity of the abuse). Refusing to talk about the issues, or even denying their mere existence. Behaving threateningly: destroying things, damaging items, terrorizing her with weapons, using a threatening tone or look, offensively questioning her or dangerous driving. Stalking of former partners.

Physical abuse: Pushing, hitting, choking the partner, grabbing her by the arms, shoulders, squeezing her fingers, pulling her hair, slamming, kicking, biting, shaking, burning her, threatening or hurting her with weapons. Denying the partner's rights of freedom of movement and independence. Locking the other in, or out, tying her to something, preventing her to sleep, wash herself, eat, drink, or take care of her other physical needs.

Sexual abuse: Forcing or manipulating the other to partake in sexual activities that she doesn't want, ignoring if the other says no, ignoring the signs that the other is not enjoying the activity, begging for things she already said no to, hurting or humiliating her during sex, raping her, injuring her genitals or forcing her to have intercourse with others. Refusing to use condoms, preventing her from taking contraceptives, forcing her to have, or not have, an abortion. Sharing private nude or sexual images/videos online without consent, blackmailing to post private sexual images and demanding sexual favours in return.

Social and economic abuse: Isolating the other from social and financial resources; isolating her from family and friends, often in a manipulative, covert way, preventing her from studying, having a (summer) job, or making money (for example by telling her that being together is more important). Questioning her financial decisions, controlling what she can or can't do, whom she can meet, whom she can talk to, where she can go, what she can wear. Preventing her from making new friends, talking to her family. Looking into the other's phone, reading her emails, searching her pockets and bags, escorting her everywhere, and keeping her under full-time surveillance at work, or at school.

This list is not complete: there are many forms of violence and they usually occur together. The goal is the same: the emotional effect on the victim. The physical or sexual violence always has emotional consequences too, and the goal is usually to have that emotional effect on the victim (so that she feels less, she feels that she deserves it, that is her fault, that there is no point trying to change things, that she has no power at all), not the bruises or physical scars.

Myths vs. facts about gender-based violence

In our societies there are common misconceptions and myths about gender-based violence that carry a lot of potential to further traumatise, silence victims, to give permissions to the mindset of perpetrators and to prevent those who could help in supporting the victims.

Myths, which are present at both the individual and institutional/societal levels, are one way in which gender based-violence has been sustained and justified throughout history. Understanding the myths and realities of sexual and gender-based violence can help us focus on the responsibility of the perpetrator and that is a critical part of any effective effort for protecting victims and working towards more equal and just society.

Here are some examples:

- Myth: Domestic violence is an anger issue. Men can't control their anger.
Reality: Feeling angry does not automatically mean being violent. Violent behaviour is a choice. Men who are violent towards women choose violence as a way of exerting power and control over their partners. This is enabled by norms around masculinity, which permit and even encourage men to be aggressive. They believe that they have the right to control, dominate and hurt their partners. Most of the men who are violent towards their partners can perfectly control their anger towards other people, especially their boss or other figures of authority.
- Myth: Jealousy is a sign of love.
Reality: Jealousy has nothing to do with love; it's rather a sign of possessiveness, lack of trust and insecurity. It is also one of the most common early warning signs of abuse.
- Up to a certain point, jealousy could be considered as a valid and acceptable emotion, but when jealousy is invoked to restrain a partner's social contacts, to control her/his appearance or to exercise emotional blackmail then it is emotional abuse.
- Myth: Abused women must have done something to provoke the perpetrator. („she deserves it“; she was “asking for it“)
Reality: It is never the victim's fault. This kind of victim-blaming statement suggest that, in order for the abuse to stop, the victim should look for the reasons for being abused and that she has to do something to change her behaviour. But, responsibility for violence always belongs with the person who is behaving violently. Women do not deserve to be physically, emotionally or sexually abused in any circumstance. Everyone has basic human rights, like the right to safety, the right to be treated with respect. There can be no justification for violence against women!
- Myth: Sexual violence is more likely to be committed by a stranger.
Reality: Just the opposite. In fact, two thirds of the sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim. According to some studies, only 2% of the abusers are complete strangers.
- Myth: Online abuse is driven by passion, not violence.
Reality: Abuser might pretend that they just love a person so much they can't help themselves. But, these excessive actions don't come from a place of love. Abuse is an act of control and violence. Perpetrator create fear through intimidating or threatening messages, isolate victim by limiting their ability to communicate with friends and family or humiliate victim by posting intimate images online.

Cycle of violence

Violent relationships are usually not bad all the time. They have good parts; the victim usually shares some very good memories with the perpetrator.

The cycle of violence is a model developed to explain the complexity and co-existence of abuse with loving behaviours. It helps understand that breaking the cycle of violence is much more complicated than just leaving the perpetrator.

At the start of the relationship the abuser usually acts in a way that **makes the partner feel important:** with lots of attention, promises, bonding, mutual future planning, gifts. It is often perceived like a fairy tale. The abuser usually appears to be very fond of the other, even before he got the chance and the time to really get to know her. Some think it is because he is not really interested in her personality and preferences, he just wants somebody he can start to oppress gradually. The representations of society (literature, films, socialisation etc.) on romantic love provide us with unhealthy images of how relationships should work, how each person in relationship should behave and what it is like to be loved, e.g. jealousy is often thought to be an evidence of loving someone, whereas it is often the sign of the partner wanting to own and control the other; love includes suffering and sacrifice, but despite the hurts and conflicts, love will prevail, and you should do whatever it takes to make this work. These false ideals and beliefs can lead

to: unrealistic expectations of the other person and the relationship, high tolerance towards warning signs of unhealthy relationships, pressure not to leave the relationship etc.

After the romantic start, the **tension starts to build up**, and the relationship becomes full of little fights and conflicts. It is important to note that these conflicts form around cases when the perpetrator tries to control the victim and take away her freedom. By saying for example that she should not go to a party where her ex will be present. Or she should not wear a certain dress or wear make-up. The perpetrator may justify his actions by saying he cares and loves the partner, and these signs may sometimes be misread as care in a relationship, while there are in fact attempts of control.

After this there is usually a **violent outburst** which is from the victim point of view, something serious at that time. It can be verbal, or physical, or sexual, the important thing is that is something shocking or very hurtful for the victim. She usually thinks that if this kind of thing happens in their relationship is it probably better to leave.

The good times can come back when the perpetrator senses that the relationship is in danger and that the victim might want to break up. He usually starts to show his good face again, acts kindly, makes promises that he will never behave like that again, gives a lot of attention and love, in order to keep the other in the relationship. This phase is also known as the **„honeymoon “phase**. The changes are only temporary and the promises he makes won't last long: when he feels the relationship secure again, he stops being nice and tension starts to build up gradually. If he already managed to make the victim dependent on him, then he might not need to put any effort into preventing her from going away, because she could not go away easily.

It is also important to know that the violence and abuse in the relationship usually gets more severe with time.

Early warning signs include:

- Constant or irrational jealousy, or getting angry when the other wants to be with friends or family;
- Wanting to know where the other person is at all times;
- Unpredictable mood swings;
- Threatening to leave if the other doesn't do what they wish;
- Insistence on classic, traditional gender roles;
- Forcing of unwanted or non-consensual sexual acts;
- Trying to make the other feel guilty if they don't act the way they are expected or told;
- Threatening to hurt themselves or the other if their partner wants to leave the relationship;
- History of violence in previous relationship(s).

Later, we will discuss how to recognise the signs in the school as a teacher!

Violence in LGBTQ relationships

Sometimes we think that violence can only happen in heterosexual relationships, because it is the majority. There are many stereotypes surrounding the gender that makes violence in LGBT relationships very difficult to recognise, even for the victims themselves. These misconceptions include:

- sexual violence is not possible between two women
- if there is violence in a lesbian relationship, is certainly not physical (meaning not dangerous)
- men are strong (or have no emotions) so it is not possible to really harm them (emotionally)
- there is no power imbalance in same sex relationships

It is important to know that an LGBT relationship can be just as violent as a heterosexual one, but it is more difficult to ask for help, because of the homophobic attitudes and the lack of special services. So, it is even more important to support these students as teachers.

Special forms of LGBT intimate partner violence include controlling the coming out (threatening with outing the person) biphobic remarks, misgendering on purpose, and so on.⁶

Emotional effects of gender-based violence

The emotional effects of gender-based violence can be serious and long lasting. Sexual violence is one of the most emotionally traumatizing human rights violations.

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency survey⁷ on violence against women, the long-term consequences of experiencing physical or sexual violence are the following:

- loss of self-confidence 36%
- anxiety 35%
- feeling vulnerable 34%
- difficulties in relationships 29%
- difficulties in sleeping 28%
- depression 24%
- panic attack 14%
- concentration difficulties 14%
- other 3%

The recovery can only begin if the abuse stops. It is not possible to get better while being abused.

It is also important to bear in mind, that even though the physical scars and bruises heal with time, emotional recovery takes a lot more time. The social environment, where victim blaming, bagatelizing, relativizing happens hinders the healing process a lot, and a supportive environment where the victim is believed and protected can help the healing process.

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More information available at Bleeding Love: <https://www.bleedinglove.eu/project/>.

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European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights – FRA (2014): Violence against women: an EU - wide survey. Main results.

Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf

More information on the website: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/data-and-maps/violence-against-women-survey/survey-information>

Violence in teen relationships

According to a study⁸ carried out in the US, violence in teen relationships is different from violence between adults. The differences include:

- Violence is more mutual. According to observation of physically violent couples, the violence is mutual in 58% of the cases.
- The power imbalance between the couples is not as big, being financially dependent on the other is rare.
- Lack of experience and skills of managing relationships.
- The relationship happens more in front of others (in school) and not in private, which means that peers and peer pressure have a lot more influence on how the couple behaves with each other.

According to another survey⁹ both boys and girls are trying to control their partner, but boys are more "successful". *"Girls with violent experiences deal with strong feelings of fear, worthlessness, shame and guilt, while boys frequently dismiss their victim experiences as insignificant. [...] The use of violence by a girlfriend affects male adolescents less or is perceived as being more of a bothersome and annoying nuisance, which is usually ignored, but to which they sometimes respond with a much stronger act of violence."*

⁸ Mulford C.Ph.D., Giordano P.C. Ph.D. (2018) Teen Dating Violence: A Closer Look at Adolescent Romantic Relationships. National Institute of Justice Journal, 216. Available at: <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/teen-dating-violence-closer-look-adolescent-romantic-relationships>

⁹ Köberlein, I. et al. (2010) Heartbeat. Relationship without violence. PARITÄTISCHE Baden-Württemberg. Available at: http://nane.hu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Manual_heartbeat_relationships_without_violence.pdf

1.2 Cyber sexual and gender-based violence

The Council of Europe's Cybercrime Convention Committee created a working definition by integrating into the cyber context the definition on violence against women from the Istanbul Convention:

*"Cyber violence is the use of computer systems to cause, facilitate, or threaten violence against individuals that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering and may include the exploitation of the individual's circumstances, characteristics or vulnerabilities."*¹⁰

The reason we must talk about cyber violence as a separate category lies in the fact that cyberspace has many characteristics that can enhance, perpetuate and diversify violent acts against women and girls and vulnerable groups. The nature and the causes of violence are not different from offline gender - based violence, but the tools can be different, the visibility of violence can be different (the evidence more hidden or quickly spread on the internet) so as the laws regulating the online spaces. One statement must be clear, cyber violence committed through digital surfaces and in connection with personal data is equally harmful and with grave impact on the victim's life.

What are the characteristics of online spaces influencing the nature and impact of violence?

Anonymity can amplify violence. The lack of means of identification can encourage the perpetrator with the perception that they are not accountable, or they do not have to adhere to rules.

Widespread use of the internet and social media makes information sharing go faster and broader. Offensive, violent or exposing pictures, comments and data posted online can spread untraceably fast and far, leaving the victims vulnerable and with no control over their personal privacy.

Victim-blaming, re-victimisation & traumatising. These responses from peers and outsiders can be also experienced with offline sexual and gender-based violence stemming from the toxic norms and myths in society. The bigger publicity, the 'norms' of the online spaces can lead to lengthy comment threads and forming of public opinion that further traumatises the victims.

Cybersecurity is fragile. Passwords, access codes and full login information can be obtained with certain hacking software accessible on the internet. Sites and applications saving login information can also make personal accounts more accessible and their owners more vulnerable.

Moderation and reporting policies are still catching up. Much to the public uproar there have been more apparent functions on social media for reporting violent posts or harassment online, but it still does not seem that policies of social media can protect victims of violent acts online or put an end to a process once it happens.

The internet doesn't forget. Uploaded pictures, data, search results remain accessible in various ways. Even when the individuals to whom the information or pictures belong don't want them visible anymore.¹¹

This can contribute to the violent act to be more permanent and haunting their victims.

Technology giving news tools of intimate partner violence. Many online and technological features can be used in an abusive relationship to exert further control over the partner, like tracking, hacking software, online platforms, saved login information etc. Online harassment is many times the extension of real-life abuse.

¹⁰ Council of Europe (2017) Mapping study on cyber violence. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/t-cy-2017-10-cbg-study-provisional/16808c4914>

¹¹ GenPol (2019). When technology meets misogyny. Available at: <https://gen-pol.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/When-technology-meets-misogyny-1.pdf>

As the report published by GenPol (2019) concludes, the consequences of being a victim to cyber violence can be as severe as offline violence, but due to these factors above, cyber violence has the potential to have major consequences in social and professional life and the victim can withdraw from online spaces or abandon their public posts or desired career.

The COE Cybercrime Convention Committee (2018) recently published a report that further emphasises some of the distinguishing characteristics: “*cyber violence may comprise new forms of violence that do not have an equivalent in the physical world (...) There may be no physical-world crime that repeats or persists after its commission without any action by the criminal, yet this is the case with many forms of cyber violence*”¹²

Forms of cyber sexual and gender-based violence

The following categories are not the only classification of forms of online violence, categories can also overlap with each other, just like the forms of offline gender-based violence do. The listed forms are from the extensive resource pack about cyber violence titled #HerNetHerRights published by the European Women’s Lobby.¹³

Sexist hate speech is defined by the Council of Europe as “expressions which spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on sex”. Typically, these are the rape, death and torture threats women and girls can receive because they are (self-)identified as women and bear the stereotypes enforced by rape culture and patriarchy.

Cyberbullying consists of repeated behaviour such as sending mean text messages, starting rumours, or posting images with the objective of frightening and undermining someone’s self-esteem or reputation, which sometimes pushes vulnerable individuals to depression and suicide.

Cyber harassment is the use of digital means to communicate or interact with a non-consenting person. Cyberbullying occurs the most between minors. Online sexual harassment can take the form of conditions of humiliation and sexualisation, because they are women. Offensive, sexist and insulting words such as “slut”, “whore”, “cunt”, “bitch” can be used, as well as commentaries on women’s physical appearances.

Doxing refers to the online researching and publishing of private information on the internet to publicly expose and shame the person targeted.

Creepshots are also called digital voyeurism. Creepshots consist of perpetrators surreptitiously taking photos or videos of women’s private areas for sexual gratification. In some cases, the act of taking the image without the victim’s knowledge, and the subsequent violation of their privacy and agency, is what provides the sexual ‘gratification’.

Revenge porn, or “**image-based sexual abuse**” is the fact of using private pictures and videos of sexual character, given or exchanged, and posting them online to shame and humiliate the victim. It can be the extension of intimate partner violence to online spaces. Images can also be obtained by hacking into the victim’s computer, social media accounts or phone, and can aim to inflict real damage on the target’s ‘real-world’ life (such as getting them fired from their job).

Hacking, the act of intercepting private communications and data, can target women and girls, especially in the form of web-cam hacking.

¹² Council of Europe Cybercrime Convention Committee (2018). Mapping study on cyber violence. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/t-cy-2017-10-cbg-study-provisional/16808c4914>

¹³ European Women’s Lobby (EWL) (2017). #HerNetHerRights: Resource Pack on ending online violence against women & girls in Europe. Available at: https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/hernetherrights_resource_pack_2017_web_version.pdf

Online impersonation is the fact of using the name or identity of someone else with the intent to harm, defraud, intimidate, or threaten any person, online impersonation may be used to discredit targeted women with their social and professional peers or for criminal purposes similar to offline identity theft.

Malicious distribution is the use of tech tools to distribute defamatory material related to the victim and/ or organizations; e.g. by using new technologies as a propaganda tool to promote violence against women, call for violence against abortion providers, etc.

Mob attacks and cyber mobs: hostile mobs include hundreds, sometimes thousands of people, systematically harassing a target.

Abusive sexting: Sexting is the consensual electronic sharing of naked or sexual photographs. This is different, however, from the non-consensual sharing of the same images. While teenage boys and girls sext at the same rates, boys are between two and three times more likely to share images that they are sent.

Digitally facilitated trafficking: Trafficking of women using technological means such as recruitment, luring women into prostitution helped by the broad reach and the anonymity of the internet and often with the use of fake profiles. It's important to be aware of how the digital tools make it easier for sex traffickers to extend their reach to vulnerable women/girls.

Being a relatively fresh and quickly changing research area, more information is still being obtained on the impact of cyber gender-based violence. However, findings confirm that the listed forms of cyber violence affect the victims' sense of safety, their physical and psychological health, their dignity and rights. Online gender-based violence is more often targeted at women and girls and to individuals who display non-conforming gender or sexual expression; and similarly, to offline spaces other disadvantages such as ethnicity or disability make one more at risk of being a victim of online violence.

As we can observe many of the violent acts above have a sexual aspect, which contributed to current discussions that certain forms of cyber violence should be classified as forms of sexual violence.¹⁴ One final distinction between offline and online gender - based violence is that because of the above-mentioned characteristics of cyberspace more can be affected indirectly by the acts of violence.

Facts about cyber sexual and gender-based violence in intimate relationships

Cyber violence as a form of violence against women is the dark side of technological advancement. While technology plays a big part in the empowerment of girls and women, the previously listed features of online spaces result in the lack of safety as well for vulnerable groups.

Based on a 2013 World Health Organization report¹⁵ **1 in 3 women will have been a victim of physical or sexual abuse** in her lifetime. Looking at the internet and cyber violence, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2014¹⁶ found that **20% of young women aged 18-29 in the EU have experienced online sexual harassment**, and that at least 1 in 10, which means approximately **9 million European girls have been a victim of a form of digital gender-based violence by the time they were 15 years old.**

¹⁴ European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2017). Cyber violence against women and girls. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3f0u8af>

¹⁵ World Health Organization (2013). Global and regional estimates of violence against women. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564625>

¹⁶ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights – FRA (2014). Violence against women: an EU - wide survey. Main results. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf

According to a United Nations report from 2015¹⁷, **globally 73% of women and girls had encountered some form of online violence.**

A 2009 study in the UK¹⁸ gives an important picture on the prevalence of relationship violence in teenage relationships, but it also stresses the differences between boys and girls in the perception of violence and the impact perceived by the victims. The results were also published in the teacher's manual called Heartbeat on how to talk about and prevent relationship violence between teens. The survey included 1353 young people aged 13-17 and the findings were the following:

- almost **75% of girls and 50% of boys reported having experiences of emotional abuse. 33% of girls but only 6% of boys thought that this would have negative effects on their well-being.** The most frequently named forms of emotional violence were "being made fun of" and being "constantly controlled and checked."
- about **33 % of girls and 16 % of boys reported of some sort of sexual violence. 70% of the girls and 13% of the boys stated that it had negatively impacted on their welfare.**
- approximately **25% of girls and 18% of boys reported physical violence from their partner.** 11% of girls and 4% of boys reported severe violence. Here too, considerably **more girls (75%) than boys (14%) suffered a negative impact on their well-being.**

These findings reverberate in representative studies of the impact of cyber violence. The PEW Research Center's 2017 study¹⁹ focused specifically on online harassment in the American population found out the following:

- In the study 41% said that they experienced online harassment (offensive name-calling, purposeful harassment, physical threats, stalking, sexual harassment, or harassment) over a sustained period.
- The emotional impact of online harassment however is felt more severely by women. For example, **35% of women** who have experienced any form of online harassment **say they found their most recent incident to be "extremely" or "very" upsetting**, more than twice the share among men who have been targeted online (16%).
- The gender differences also show in views of online harassment as a public issue. **70% of women say they see online harassment as a major problem**, compared with 54% of men. Younger women (aged 18-29) are especially likely to say this: 83% say it is a major problem, compared with 55% of men in the same age group.

As mentioned earlier, cyber violence does not stand alone as a new form of violence, but it is **connected to intimate partner violence.** The Women's Aid survey from 2017²⁰ states that:

- 45% of domestic violence victims reported experiencing some form of abuse online during their relationship;
- 48% reported experiencing harassment or abuse online from their ex-partner once they'd left the relationship;
- 38% reported online stalking once they'd left the relationship;
- 75% reported concerns that the police did not know how best to respond to online abuse or harassment. This includes 12% who had reported abuse to the police and had not been helped.

¹⁷ UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development (2015) Cyber violence against women and girls: A world-wide wake-up call. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber_violence_gender%20report.pdf?v=1&d=20150924T154259

¹⁸ Barter C., McCarry M., Berridge D., Evans K. (2009). Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships. Available at: http://www.womenssupportproject.co.uk/userfiles/file/partner_exploitation_and_violence_report_wdf70129.pdf

¹⁹ Pew Center Research (2017) Online Harassment. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2017/07/11/online-harassment-2017/>

²⁰ Women's Aid Federation of England (2014) Virtual World, Real Fear. Available at: https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Women_s_Aid_Virtual_World_Real_Fear_Feb_2014-3.pdf

Regarding the platform on which online harassment specifically occurs, the 2014 Pew Research Center report²¹ on the American population gave us information:

- 66% of internet users said their most recent incident occurred on a social networking site or app,
- 22% in the comments section of a website, 16% through online gaming,
- 16% in a personal email account,
- 10% on discussion sites (such as Reddit),
- 6% on an online dating website or app.
- Women were more likely than other to be harassed on social media sites, while men, especially younger were more likely to be harassed on online gaming sites according to the research

Regarding the **perpetrators identity** the PEW research found that 38% of the respondents were harassed online by a stranger and 29% could not determine the identity of their harasser.

There is growing research in the field of what causes the online space to be such risk for girls and women. Experts say that with the access of the internet it is very important to educate children in media literacy. Being present in online spaces without understanding the risks that come with it makes vulnerable groups even more exposed to violence.

Legislations are still catching up with this vast and fast-growing area and critics emphasise that policy change in the tech sector is necessarily. The IT sector being led and dominated by man creates policies and tools which are not considered from an aspect of risks to the safety of girls, women and other vulnerable groups.²²

²¹ Pew Center Research (2014) Online Harassment. Available at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/>
²² UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development (2015) Cyber violence against women and girls: A world-wide wake-up call. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber_violence_gender%20report.pdf?v=1&d=20150924T154259

1.3 Overview of the research results on awareness and attitudes of teachers and students on cyber sexual and gender-based violence in youth partner relationships²³

During this project we carried out a study among teachers and students about the prevalence and the attitudes and knowledge of gender based online sexual violence.

The goal of the survey research was to collect data on awareness of teachers as well as secondary school girls and boys and their attitudes/strategies to address cyber sexual and gender-based violence in youth intimate partner relationships. An additional goal of this survey was to inform future actions aimed at the prevention of digital intimate partner violence, both within the current project, as well as for other stakeholders dealing with this problem in the future.

Introduction of the research

In this quantitative research, we used a short questionnaire to collect information on young people (between the age of 14 and 19) and secondary school teacher's awareness, attitudes and strategies about cyber SGBV in youth partner relationships.

The **teacher's questionnaire** covered the following topics: recognition and awareness of gender stereotypes in school setting, recognition and attitudes to cyber sexual and gender-based violence, awareness of the scope of problem, addressing violence in youth partner relationships and teachers' perception of their role in addressing (cyber) violence in youth partner relationships.

In the **student's questionnaire** partner organisations used two types of questions: one addressing awareness on gender stereotypes, digital violence and gender-based violence, the other addressing specific situations and their reactions to digital violence.

According to the project document, the envisaged sample was 200 young people and 200 teachers in each partner country. Nevertheless, the interest for this questionnaire was higher in most countries, so the total number of youth who completed the questionnaire was 1139 and the total number of teachers who participated in the study was 1028.

Demographic characteristics of the sample

Both in the teacher's and in the student's sample, most of the participants were female (78.7 % among teachers and 64% among students.) Most of the student respondents are living in the city - 69%, while in a smaller town/village lives 31% of youth. The majority of the participating students were 16 and 17 years old. When it comes to age, the majority of responding teachers were in the age group 41-50 years (34%). Most participating teachers have considerable teaching experience in schools: 34.5% have over 20 years of experience.

²³ The research was implemented within the project "I can choose to say no."

Main findings of the research „Awareness and attitudes of secondary school students towards youth intimate partner violence“

We measured the **attitudes** of the students by presenting them with homophobic and sexist statement and behaviours. Most youth in all four countries see all these as unacceptable, girls having slightly stronger attitudes concerning specific violent behaviours, thinking that they are unacceptable.

The level of complete awareness of violent behaviours is the highest among youth in Spain, and the students have the least homophobic attitudes there.

The greatest differences in answers between boys and girls are regarding the question of boys entering girls' changing rooms in schools and taking photos of them as a way of having fun (98-100% of the girls see this unacceptable, while 1-17% of boys think that it is okay).

When it comes to **actual behaviours** (online harassment, threats, hurtful comments, pressuring someone into something sexual they don't want), in all countries a high number (70-91%) of young people never experienced these examples of digital violence. Also, there is a clear difference between forms of violence that girls are more exposed to compared to boys: there is a high number of girls receiving sexualized comments online (57-72% experienced it). When it comes to boys, they seem to be at higher risk of being threatened by physical violence (33-55% experienced it).

35-53% of youth experienced sexual harassment in a form of receiving an unsolicited photo of someone's intimate body parts. 12-20% of young people sent those pictures themselves.

In all countries girls were exposed to a greater extent to sexualized comments online, to blackmail that their private information/photos/video will be published if they do not do something sexual in return, as well as non-consensual publishing of photos/videos they sent privately to someone (except in Croatia where is the opposite situation for this last form of digital violence).

The questionnaire was used to investigate reactions and strategies youth think they could use if found in some situation of violence. Regarding *sexspreading*, and *sexual harassment*, the most common response of youth in all countries was that they would end the relationship (girls especially).

When it comes to *control in intimate partner relationships*, the students are less aware, especially when it comes to pressuring the other to answer by sending multiple messages. (24-46% thought it was violent, 22-39 was unsure, 30-40 thought it was not violent) The exchange of the passwords is problematic according to most young people.

It's also important to emphasize that in all countries, the level of trust in teachers is very low. The highest is in Spain where 14% of youth would turn to a teacher they have trust in, but in the remaining three countries these percentages are lower: 9% of youth in Croatia, 6% in Hungary and 5% in Serbia. These numbers are indicating a deep gap between youth and teachers and the feeling of distrust expressed by youth.

When measuring **bystander behaviour and attitudes** the two most common attitudes among youth in all countries is rejecting the violent behaviour (24% in Hungary, 60% in Spain, 59% in Serbia and 36% in Croatia) and some form of tolerance (e.g. attitude „just boys being boys“) (39% in Hungary, 38% in Serbia and 37% in Croatia).

Something similar applies to "revenge porn": 32-62% would stand up against this behaviour; while 9-35% has a victim blaming attitude ("the girl should have known better").

When giving advice to a friend, most of the youth see sexual blackmailing, or control in the relationship as something problematic and dangerous.

Answers to this question show that the increase of the severity of the violence is proportionate with the increase of the need of youth to respond.

Main findings of the research „Secondary school teachers’ awareness of cyber sexual and gender-based violence in youth partner relationships “

Teachers’ reported **gender stereotypical expectations**, roles and behaviours are very similar across countries and include:

- Expectations of girls to be quieter in the classroom, to perform cleaning tasks and to be better in languages;
- Expectations of boys to execute tasks that require physical strength, to help with the computers and be better in maths.

When it comes to **gender-based violence**, teachers are aware that their students experience different forms of gender-based violence. Across countries, teachers mostly don’t hold victim blaming attitudes and display some awareness of the dynamic of abusive relationships, but they have some misconceptions too, like it is easy to leave a violent relationship (32% of Serbian respondents) or girls are just as violent as boys (approximately 60% of Hungarian and Croatian respondents). It also proved difficult for teachers to assess whether students have enough trust in them to seek help in cases of teen-dating violence (27-51% choose undecided).

Awareness of the problem

In all the countries, most of the teachers (or at least half of them) think that gender - based violence is not a serious issue among students (only 16-26% thinks that it is serious), or they are unable to assess if it is or not. Teachers do encounter cases of teen-dating violence in their work. Teen-dating violence is more present as a topic of informal than professional conversations among teachers. It is also a topic of conversations with students, but very rarely a topic of conversations with parents. Across countries, teachers were more often informed about female students being victims of violence in their intimate relationships compared to male students. Interestingly when it comes to specific forms of cyber gender - based violence, the teachers seemed to be more aware that their students are affected. Although cyber gender-based violence negatively affected those exposed to it, teachers’ perception is that it was more serious and disturbing for girls. In Croatia and Serbia, they reported that the boys affected by cyber gender-based violence did not take it very seriously and sometimes perceived it as funny.

Helping the students

The majority of teachers (two thirds) think that their role includes working with pupils and respond to the problem of cyber violence in youth partner relationships. Some mention that they would need the support of the school staff to be able to do that. Teachers generally think they don't have enough knowledge: over half of the respondents assessed their own knowledge as average, a quarter assesses their knowledge on the topic as fairly good, and a significant number of respondents said their knowledge on the topic is poor. The share of teachers actively involved in activities concerning prevention of violence in youth partner relationships, varies across countries. Most of them don't participate in violence prevention programs, but they expressed their readiness to help, so there is a great need for additional knowledge and skills regarding the issue of (cyber) teen-dating violence. A significant number of teachers (two thirds or more) didn't experience that students would turn to them for help, regarding any form of violence that occurred in their partner relationships, especially digital violence. But when students do turn to teachers for help, more teachers reported being asked for help by a female student than by a male student. Parents also very rarely contact teachers in connection to their child experiencing violence. The majority of those who were contacted for help (two thirds of them) knew how to provide it.

Teachers need additional support to effectively address the problem of violence in youth partner relationships. Most teachers expressed the need for additional knowledge, skills, professional training and useful education materials, as well as the need for contact points/services where they can refer students.

Recommendations

Having in mind all the results from this survey, it is visible that there are common things that should be done in all four countries when it comes to the issue of cyber sexual and gender-based violence in youth intimate relationships.

- Education and awareness raising of youth - educational prevention programs should be put in place through informal and formal education; gender and age-sensitive mechanisms of protection and support to youth and awareness raising campaigns.
- Education of teachers - Ensure a programme of formal and nonformal education for the teachers and school staff.
- Awareness raising among parents and teachers - systemic approach to educational programs for teachers and different possibilities for parents to get involved and learn.
- Work on establishing and implementation of procedures, protocols, clear guidelines in schools how to deal with cases of teen-dating violence.