



ENDING SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE IN THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION (ESHTE)

National Report – Cyprus

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Key definitions in Cypriot legislation

Sexual harassment & harassment

The legal definition of 'sexual harassment' and 'harassment' can be found in the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Act of 2002¹ which states that,

- '**sexual harassment** is unwanted, by the recipient, sex-related behaviour which is expressed verbally or through actions that aims or results in the violation of a person's dignity, especially when it creates a hostile, degrading, demeaning or offensive environment at the workplace or vocational education or during access to employment or vocational education or training.'
- '**harassment** is the unwanted, by the recipient, behaviour that is related to the sex of a person which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.'

Violence

Violence is defined in the Family Violence (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Acts of 2000 and 2004 which says that,

- 'Violence, for the purposes of this Act, means any act, omission or conduct which causes physical, sexual or mental harm to any family member by another family member which also includes the violence inflicted in order to achieve sexual intercourse without the consent of the victim, as well as the restriction of liberty'.

¹ Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Act of 2002, 205(I) last modified 150(I)/2014

Introduction

This report will provide an overview of the available research data on sexual violence, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Dating Violence (DV) in young adults. There is lack of data on the prevalence of Sexual Violence and Harassment (SVH) focusing exclusively on female students in universities and third level institution (UTLIs), but there are two national studies on IPV and date rape for that specific age group. Even though this report is focusing mostly on IPV, the existing research reflects the current situation concerning SVH in UTLIs since already-entrenched stereotypes, gender roles and social constructs in young people's lives are most likely be also manifested outside their relationships in different forms.

Numerous studies indicate the persistence of patriarchal values in Cypriot society, which result in the subordination of Cypriot and migrant women. This, in turn, enables the prevalence of rigid gender roles that women and men hold, which is manifested in political and public life, through the working conditions and pay gap and lastly and most importantly in the persistence of all forms of violence against women, such as domestic violence, sexual assault and rape.

Over the last few years, although many obstacles that inhibit the progress of gender equality and the prevalence of violence against women remain, there have, however, been a number of positive developments regarding awareness-raising and commitment towards prevention and combating of violence against women, especially domestic violence. Such developments are seen with the improvement of the legislative framework dealing with family violence, through the adoption of the **National Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in the Family**, but also gender-based violence through the signing of the **Istanbul Convention** (in 2015) which the cabinet ratified in March 2017 and was transposed into domestic law on 14 of July 2017. Recently, harassment and stalking have been criminalized as foreseen by the Istanbul Convention, stated in Article 3 (d).

The establishment of actors such as the **Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence (1996)**², the **Observatory on Violence in Schools (Ministry of Education and Culture)** and the continuous work of **NGOs** (such as the **Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies**³, the **Family Planning Association** and the **Association for the Prevention and Handling of**

² Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence:
<http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/cgibin/hweb?-A=1&-V=profile>

³ For more information visit: www.medinstgenderstudies.org

Violence in the Family⁴) who deal with such issues have greatly contributed to positive developments.

However, Cyprus still lacks a unified database comprising systematic data collection on all forms of violence against women - provided by frontline services - and a comprehensive analysis of said data. This data gap is problematic, as it impedes true understanding of the root causes but also the extent of these issues in Cyprus. Available statistics in Cyprus provide information solely on incidents of rape and sexual assault that have been reported to the police. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive data and research constitutes a significant barrier to the development of policy that would create much needed services and mechanisms to help victims. The lack of data and research also impedes effective criminal investigations, which would bring perpetrators to justice. Additionally, the sentences imposed cannot be considered adequate. Finally, research on all forms of violence on minority populations such as migrant and refugee women, as well as women with disabilities should be undertaken in order to gain a comprehensive picture of the situation.

Available national studies

A. First Pancyprian Survey: *Violent Behaviour in Interpersonal Relationships of Young Adults in Cyprus aged 18 – 25*

This study was undertaken in 2012 and used qualitative research as a method to explore IPV with a sample of 1000 Cypriot young adults between the ages of **18** and **25**. Most of the participants were female (66.4%) middle-class university students⁵. One of the most alarming results was that **70%** of the participants (667 female and 333 male in total) had opinions and attitudes that are conducive to violence, such as 'victim blaming' or the belief that intimate partner violence is a 'private' matter. Also, many female participants held the belief that perpetrators who have acted violently towards one partner, are likely to exhibit patterns of such behaviour across all their relationships. On the one hand, this indicates a level of awareness by the participants of the fact that such violence occurs on a continuum, but at the same it can create misconceptions around the perpetrators behaviour outside their relationship. In most cases, perpetrators are very careful of the way they act outside their relationship, among friends, colleagues and so forth⁶ since they do not want to draw any attention to them or draw any suspicion.

⁴ For more information visit www.domviolence.org.cy

⁵ Andronikou, A., Erotokritou, K., & Hadjiharalambous, D., (2012). *First Pancyprian Survey: Violent Behaviour in Interpersonal Relationships of Young Adults in Cyprus aged 18 – 25*. National Machinery for the Rights of Women: Ministry of Justice, Republic of Cyprus.

⁶ Ibid, p. 183

Alarmingly, **50%**⁷ of participants agreed with statements that excused the use of violence under certain circumstances, such as to ‘correct’ certain behaviour. For instance, if the woman was dressed in a ‘certain’ way that was deemed provocative for her partner or her behaviour was ‘out of place’. Most participants also tried to rationalise violence as a momentary burst of anger which could be avoided if the victim changed in a certain way. These perceptions enforce and perpetuate the concept of victim-blaming and show that young women are prone to accept such myths as reality, which may increase the likelihood of choosing an abusive partner and/or being abused in a relationship. Meanwhile, young men with similar views are more likely to be abusive towards their partners.

Another interesting finding was the way in which the young adults rated the quality of their intimate relationship focusing expressly on the area of communication, which encompasses the predisposition to compromise, emotional support, trust, understanding, respect, honesty, responsibility and the equal participation in decision-making but also each partner’s willingness to resolve disputes that might come up in the relationship. **2 out of 10** participants answered that they were **partly satisfied or dissatisfied** with the level of communication they had with their partner while **3 out of 10** participants said they were **partly satisfied or dissatisfied** with the level of willingness shown by their partners to resolve disputes.⁸ These results provide an insight on the quality of young people’s relationships.

Taken together, these findings indicate that attitudes conducive to gender-based violence are normalised amongst young adults. Women bear the brunt of gender-discriminatory attitudes within their intimate relationships and violent behaviour is often considered acceptable.

B. Date Rape Cases among Young Women: Strategies for Support and Intervention

‘Date Rape Cases Among Young Women’ was a cross-national survey that took place in Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Lithuania and Latvia and aimed to investigate date rape incidents among young women, exploring their attitudes, dating experiences and level of awareness.⁹ The Cyprus report (2008), which resulted from this project, was based on a quantitative and qualitative study that involved **476** participants responding to an anonymous questionnaire, **2** focus groups and **5** constructive interviews of relevant institutional representatives (the Cyprus Family Planning

⁷ Ibid., p. 195

⁸ Andronikou, A., Erotokritou, K., & Hadjiharalambous, D., (2012). *First Pancyprian Survey: Violent Behaviour in Interpersonal Relationships of Young Adults in Cyprus aged 18 – 25*. National Machinery for the Rights of Women: Ministry of Justice, Republic of Cyprus. p.182

⁹ Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies, (2008) *Date Rape Cases among Young Women: Strategies for Support and Intervention*, University of Nicosia Press: Nicosia

Association, the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Family Violence, the Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Office of the Cyprus Police, welfare services, and the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family). The **476** participants were all female college students, **aged 18 to 24**, selected from the capital city, Nicosia, since most of the major tertiary education institutions (university, colleges) are located there.

The findings revealed that, "**1.3%** (n=5) of the participants reported an attempted date rape by their date, **1.9%** (n=7) reported being forced to have oral sex and **1.9%** (n=7) reported have been date raped." **12.2%** (n=42) who answered the questionnaire reported having an "unwanted sexual experience", often by a person that they considered to be their "*boyfriend, friend or sexual partner* (54.2%)."¹⁰ More importantly, the majority of this number who claimed to have been pressured into sexual acts by their partners also feared their partners might leave them if they did not consent.¹¹

Interestingly, the number of the reported **attempted rapes** compared to '**unwanted sexual experiences**' were quite inconsistent which leads to the conclusion that this could have been due to the young women **not recognizing rape as such**. This was ultimately proven by the focus groups discussions where traditional beliefs about women and sexuality surfaced reinforcing patriarchal attitudes around the subject. The gender roles and stereotypes were confirmed by majority of the participants by which "*societal expectations with regard to women and men's behaviour (gender roles) can contribute to an atmosphere where date rape is possible and indeed acceptable.*"¹²

Additionally, the study demonstrated that young women seem to have some understanding and recognition of other forms of gender-based violence in intimate relationship apart from physical violence (such as coercive control). However, there are still **conflicted opinions around women's sexuality**, as on the one hand the majority of the participants stated that there are no conditions excusing date rape, on the other, they made a clear distinction between women that are seen as 'easy' (a woman that has many sexual partners and that consents easily to sexual activity) and those that are not.

In conclusion, what emerges is a picture of extensive abuse that affects the lives of many girls and boys, which more often than not, go unreported to the authorities¹³ and the prevalence of a **culture of victim-blaming in Cyprus** as the study pinpointed. Even though the female students stated that a

¹⁰ Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies, (2008) *Date Rape Cases among Young Women: Strategies for Support and Intervention*, University of Nicosia Press: Nicosia. p.23

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. p.24

¹³ Anastasiou – Hadjicharalambous & Essau, C.A. (2012). The phenomena of violence and abuse in Cyprus. In Browne, M. A. (Ed). *Violence and abuse in society: Understanding a global crisis*. Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger.

woman can be dressed the way she feels comfortable, they reported that sometimes women ‘confuse’ men with provocative dressing. This maintains one of the most powerful myths associated with sexual violence that looks to find the cause of assault in the victim’s behaviour or choices. This attitude reinforces the traditional belief that men’s sexual desires cannot be controlled and thus one must take appropriate measures to avoid ‘provoking’ such uncontrollable desire.¹⁴

C. FRA survey data

In 2013, an EU-wide survey on violence against women, with a total of 42.000 interviews, was undertaken with women across the 28 member states of the European Union, including Cyprus. In 2014 a report analysing the data was published, with the main findings showing that an estimated 83 million to 102 million women¹⁵ (**45% to 55% of women**) in the EU-28 have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15, depending on the number of different forms of SVH. Meanwhile, an estimated 24 million to 39 million women (**13% to 21%**) in the EU-28 have experienced sexual harassment in the 12 months leading up to the survey interview alone.

According to the report, “One woman in three in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15.” While, in Cyprus, **6%** of the women interviewed answered that they have experience physical and/or sexual violence by their current partner¹⁶ since the age of 15, **38%** by previous partner, **23%** by any partner (current and/or previous), **14%** by a non-partner and **28%** by any partner and/or non-partner. Compared to the EU-28 average, physical and or/sexual violence from a previous partner (38%) and by any partner (23%) is significantly higher in Cyprus.

In the report, sexual harassment was multidimensional and the data examining the prevalence and nature of these acts was analysed in four general groups, those being,

- 1. Physical forms of harassment:** unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing;
29% of women in the EU have experienced unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing since they were 15 years old;
- 2. Verbal forms of harassment:** sexually suggestive or offensive comments or jokes; inappropriate invitations to go out on dates; intrusive, offensive questions about private life; intrusive, offensive comments about a woman’s physical appearance;

¹⁴ Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies (2008). *Date Rape Cases Among Young Women and the Development of Good Practices for Support and Prevention*. University of Nicosia Press: Nicosia

¹⁵ FRA, European Union Agency for fundamental Rights (2014). *Violence Against Women: an EU-wide survey: Belgium*, p.95

¹⁶ married, or living with their partner without being married, or involved in a relationship without living together at the time of the interview

24% of women have been subjected to sexually suggestive comments or jokes that offended them since the age of 15;

3. Non-verbal forms of harassment: inappropriate, intimidating staring or leering; receiving or being shown offensive, sexually explicit pictures, photos or gifts; somebody indecently exposing themselves; being made to watch or look at pornographic material against one's wishes;

4. Cyber-harassment: receiving unwanted, offensive, sexually explicit emails or SMS messages; inappropriate, offensive advances on social networking websites or in internet chat rooms.

11%¹⁷ of women have received unwanted, offensive sexually explicit emails or SMS messages, or offensive, inappropriate advances on social networking sites (referring to experiences since the age of 15).

In Cyprus, **28%** of the women interviewed stated they have experienced the most intense form of harassment, as highlighted from above, since the age of 15, as grouped in this report, namely,

- *'Unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing';*
- *'Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended';*
- *'Somebody sending or showing you sexually explicit pictures, photos or gifts that made you feel offended';*
- *'Somebody indecently exposing themselves to you';*
- *'Somebody made you watch or look at pornographic material against your wishes'; and*
- *'Unwanted sexually explicit emails or SMS messages that offended you'*¹⁸.

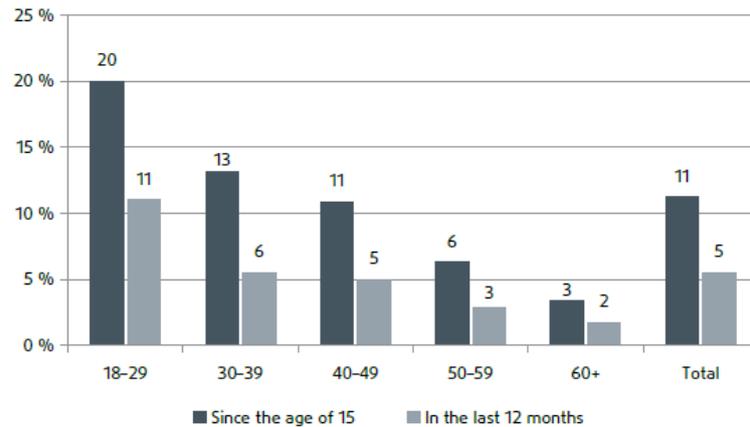
An interesting finding of the survey was that one of the most prevailing forms of sexual harassment for women aged between **18 and 29** is cyber-harassment (as seen in the figure 6.8¹⁹ below) with an overall of **20%** of women being harassed since the age of 15 and **11%** in the past 12 months.

¹⁷ This percentage refers to non-verbal harassment too.

¹⁸ FRA, European Union Agency for fundamental Rights (2014). Violence Against Women: an EU-wide survey: Belgium, p.98

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 98

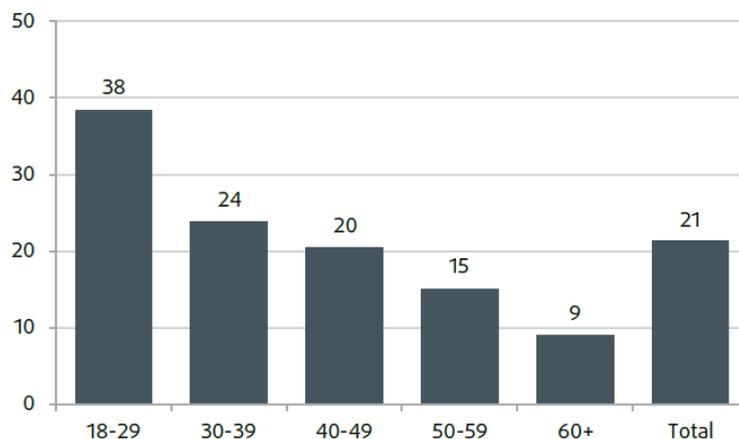
Figure 6.8: Forms of sexual cyberharassment since the age of 15 and in the 12 months before the interview, by age group (%)^a



Notes: ^a Out of all women excluding cases where the answer to the questions on cyberharassment was not applicable ($n = 35,820$); 6,084 respondents answered "not applicable" on both items; information on age was missing for 98 cases.
Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey dataset, 2012

These results show that **1 in 10 women** has experienced inappropriate advances on social media or has been subject to sexually explicit emails or text messages. These modes of SVH affect younger women disproportionately. General conclusions drawn by the study is that women aged between **18 and 29** (see figure 6.11) are usually the most vulnerable and at the highest risk of exposure to SVH, especially women with university degrees and in the highest occupational groups. In most cases, the perpetrator (**68%**) was somebody they did not know. The most frequent form of sexual harassment according to the women interviewed was, *'inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated'*, (**10%** said they've experienced this 6 or more times) *'sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended'* (**8%**), *'intrusive comments about your physical appearance that made you feel offended'* (**7%**) and *'unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing'* (**6%**) (See figure 6.3).

Figure 6.11: Sexual harassment in the 12 months before the interview, by age group (%)^a



Note: ^a Out of all women whose age was recorded ($n = 41,895$; information on age was missing for 107 cases).
Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey dataset, 2012

Unfortunately, such incidents are underreported as out of all women who described the most serious incident of sexual harassment that has happened to them, **only 4 %** of women reported to the police, **4 %** talked to an employer or boss at their workplace and **less than 1 %** consulted a lawyer, a victim support organization or a trade union representative.²⁰

Table 6.3: Sexual harassment in the 12 months before the interview, by age group (%) ^{a,b,c}

Form of sexual harassment	Respondent's age group				
	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Unwelcome, touching, hugging or kissing	43	18	18	13	8
Inappropriate staring or leering	47	23	16	9	6
Sexually suggestive comments or jokes	39	24	18	13	6
Sending sexually explicit pictures, photos or gifts	27	26	22	15	11
Inappropriate invitations to go out on dates	38	23	22	9	7
Intrusive questions about private life	37	24	20	13	7
Intrusive comments about physical appearance	43	21	18	11	7
Sexually explicit emails or SMS messages	34	24	22	12	8
Inappropriate advances on social networking sites	53	19	17	7	5
Indecent exposure	28	20	20	14	17
Forced to watch pornographic material	(13)	27	30	(17)	(13)

Notes: a Out of all women who have been sexually harassed at least once in the 12 months before the interview (n = 7,724).

b Respondents were able to give more than one answer, so categories may total to more than 100 %.

c Results based on a small number of responses are statistically less reliable, so observations based on fewer than 30 responses are put in brackets and observations based on fewer than 5 responses are suppressed (denoted with '-').

Source: FRA gender-based violence against women survey dataset, 2012

D. Gender Equality Awareness Raising (GEAR) against Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) II

In 2014, research carried out by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS), focused on the manifestation of IPV among teenagers **14 to 17 years old** and revealed that, **“79% (505 out of the 642) of the youth sample are currently or have been in a relationship (rises to 86% among 16-17 year olds)”²¹**. Alarmingly, almost **1 in 5 (18%)** have experienced some form of sexual partner violence. There was higher incidence among 16 year olds, domestic violence victims, and young people with negative gender attitudes. **13% of the youth sample has experienced domestic violence (3% physical)**

²⁰ FRA, European Union Agency for fundamental Rights (2014). Violence Against Women: an EU-wide survey: Belgium, p.96

²¹ Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies (2013). Country Report. *Gender Equality Awareness Raising against Intimate Partner Violence II*.

and **21%** have been victims of bullying. **17%** of the sample has been perpetrators of bullying and **40%** with negative gender attitudes (gender stereotypes)”.

The report also showed that there is a **high use of new technologies among young adults** as, “**99%** receive texts/emails/instant messages; **86%** send or receive videos/pictures, **94%** use social networking sites. Regarding sexual messages, **5.6% of girls and 15% of boys** have sent them to their partner- during or after the relationship had ended. While, **13% of girls and 29% of boys** have shared sexual messages received from partners with almost half of them (49%) claiming that they did it as a ‘joke’. With regards to the impact of experiences of online violence on young girls and boys, **59% of girls record an overall negative impact vs. 39% of boys**, describing their feelings as - annoyed, embarrassed, angry and upset. **19% of girls, record an overall positive impact vs. 34% of boys**, describing their feelings as - loved, wanted and protected²².

The above mentioned results are further complemented by the results from the qualitative research (*Connecting Offline and Online Risks (unpublished country report)*) among young people concerning ‘offline and online risks’²³. Young people report **offline and online control** as 'normal', 'acceptable', 'justifiable', 'reasonable'. Jealousy is also perceived as a sign of ‘love and caring’, ‘as a phase and it will pass’, ‘as just a part of being in a relationship’. It was also considered ‘justifiable’ because they do the same thing back too ‘it evens the score’. **‘Victim-blaming’** was also observed in offline and online violence: ‘If you give him a reason, for example if you wear something short’. Young girls also expressed that ‘It’s ok to give your Facebook password or let him check your phone to show that you have nothing to hide’.²⁴

Not surprisingly, the incidents of **cyber-harassment** risen greatly over the last few years. Since 2009 the helpline of the Safer Internet Centre ‘CyberEthics’²⁵ in Cyprus has responded to a total of **3,474** calls. It started with just **one call** involving a cyber-harassment incident in 2009, slowly increasing to **6 calls** in 2011, **19** in 2012, **21** in 2013 seeing a sharp increase to **1,064** calls in 2014, **1134** in 2015 and **1241 calls** in 2016²⁶. Unfortunately, they only started categorising calls into specific groups such as SVH, grooming and sexting in 2013 so the data for SVH is understandably low. SVH is defined by CyberEthics as, ‘*Unwanted sexual contact/content/comments – including unsolicited contact*’ and

²² Ibid.

²³ Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, (2014). *STIR: Safeguarding Teenage Relationships: Connecting Offline and Online Risks* (unpublished country report) [http://goo.gl/qEJeyk].

²⁴ Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, (2014). *STIR: Safeguarding Teenage Relationships: Connecting Offline and Online Risks* (unpublished country report) [http://goo.gl/qEJeyk].

²⁵ Safer Internet: CyberEthics: <http://www.cyberethics.info/>

²⁶ Data was provided by CyberEthics upon request from MIGS

has received a total of **20 calls** since 2014 (16 calls in 2014 and 4 calls in 2016)²⁷. This gap in reporting probably stems from the still existing reluctance to report SVH harassment incidents due to the fear of victim-blaming but also fear of revenge and possibly lack of awareness of cyber-harassment being a mean of SVH by young teens and young adults.

Posting degrading photos on the internet and disseminating them via mobile phone, creating blogs or profiles on social networking websites with deliberately incorrect content, sending threats/obscene and offensive content, and the publication of photographs or videos without the consent of the individual, are just a few of the usual internet bullying incidents reported. This poses a new set of challenges for the multiple stakeholders working to make the internet safer for children in Cyprus²⁸.

It was also shown that, men are more likely to engage in risky behaviours on the internet while **women are more commonly invited to go out by strangers. 27.1%** of Cypriot youth have been victims of cyber violence, whilst, **women and students aged 23-25 were more likely to experience cyber violence.**²⁹ The main form of cyber-harassment was *'annoying and constant phone callings'* or *'being humiliated, gossiped or offended via text messages, social media and chatting sites'*. The impact of cyber-harassment has been completely different for young women and men, **as young women** experience **concerns about their safety**, whereas **men** experienced **concerns related to online activities which harm their "social status" and reputation.** *'Young women's feelings of worry, fear, anger, and vulnerability following cyber violence, are associated with their perceived safety, integrity and dignity, whereas young men's feelings of disgust, nervousness, and shame, are associated with the impact of online activities of violence on their "social status" and reputation.'*³⁰

More importantly, aggressors are more likely to be males and older students (21-25 years old); from the survey population as **42.9%** admitted that they had engaged in some kind of cyber violence at least once. The main form of cyber violence performed was to, *'humiliate or offend somebody, and to assume a fake identity, mainly via text messages and social media networks.'* Recent surveys conducted by internet safety organizations³¹ show that more than **50% of adolescents experience some form of cyber bullying** usually accompanied by some form of sexual harassment.

²⁷ Data was provided by CyberEthics upon request from MIGS

²⁸ Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, (2014). *STIR: Safeguarding Teenage Relationships: Connecting Offline and Online Risks* (unpublished country report) [<http://goo.gl/qEJeyk>].

²⁹ Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2014), *Staying Safe Online: Gender and Safety on the Internet.*

³⁰ Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2014), *Staying Safe Online: Gender and Safety on the Internet.*

³¹ Safer Internet: CyberEthics: <http://www.cyberethics.info/>.

Available national data

As previously mentioned, data concerning incidents of sexual violence and harassment are scarce due to the lack of a unified database comprising systematic data collection of such incidents, which would allow a comprehensive analysis. Even so, the available data are divided into **national data** collected by the **Police** and the **Association for the Prevention of Violence in the Family**, which is the only NGO that provides services such as a 24-hour hotline and a shelter for victims of domestic violence and **administrative data** which is provided by the **police/criminal statistics**.

The national data provides an overview of the prevalence of IPV, dating and sexual violence (DV&SV) in adolescents but is quite limited. Administrative data collects information in relation to domestic violence, rape and sexual assault incidents. But there is yet to be established a unified system of data collection amongst the relevant agencies. Population-based surveys on the prevalence as well as the effects of all forms of violence against women, including IPV, DV and SV, have recently been conducted that give additional information on the extent and impact of violence against women in Cyprus.

The criminal statistics produced by the **Statistical Services** and the **Cyprus Police** provide data on sexual offences as these are categorized as 'serious crime'. Sexual offences include rape, attempt to commit rape, abduction, defilement of girls 13-17 years of age, unnatural offences, incest (violence in the family) and the sexual exploitation of juveniles. Offences against the person that fall under the category of violence within the family include 'causing grievous bodily harm' and 'wounding and similar acts'.³²

Available data on sexual offenses reveal that incidents of sexual violence, specifically rape, have seemingly dropped in Cyprus in recent years by almost 50%. Between the years **2009-2011** there have been 101 reported rapes, between **2012-2014** there were 57 reported rapes and lastly between **2015** and the **first semester of 2016** there have been 28 reported rapes. Even though statistical evidence shows a significant decrease in reported rape cases one cannot overlook the possibility of this being the result of underreporting as shown by the existing studies³³, but also due to the low conviction rates and prosecution of perpetrators committing such crimes. Myths associated with rape, namely that women must take steps to avoid 'provoking' men, and that the absence of physical injury indicates that the victim consented along with the victim-blaming and the stigmatization that follows are also important factors that may prevent the victims from reporting

³² European Institute of Gender Equality, (2014). *Country Profile on Gender-based-Violence against Women: Cyprus*, p.10.

³³ Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies, (2008) *Date Rape Cases among Young Women: Strategies for Support and Intervention*, University of Nicosia Press: Nicosia

such incidents to the authorities. The lack of victim-support services, such as rape helplines, rape crisis centres, or inter-departmental cooperation and specialised resources for rape or sexual assault in Cyprus for either adults or adolescents also contributes to the hesitation of women to report such cases.

Conclusion

What emerges from this report is a picture of extensive abuse –often unrecognised- that affects the lives of many young women and girls. Although many stereotypes have been overcome, at least in the minds of younger generations, what still persists is opinions and attitudes that are conducive to violence such as ‘victim blaming’ and the belief that the use of violence is acceptable under certain circumstances, which also can lead to underreporting of such incidents. Men and women still label some women as being ‘easy’ proliferating in that way the myth of the victim provoking the perpetrator. Even among female university students, as seen in the date rape study, traditional beliefs about women and sexuality surfaced, reinforcing patriarchal attitudes around the subject.

Another issue that surfaced was the increase of cyber-harassment incidents, which seems to be one of the most rapidly growing forms of sexual harassment towards young women in Cyprus, but also on a European level. This can also be applied as a form of SVH at the UTLIs since young adults of this age, the majority if not all, use social media and electronic devices.

When it comes to date rape, female college students confirm the existing stereotypes and gender roles, as *“societal expectations with regard to gender roles can contribute to an atmosphere where date rape is possible and indeed acceptable.”*³⁴ Many young women have not been able to recognize rape as such, due to the inconsistent number of the reported and attempted rapes with the ‘unwanted sexual experiences’. Which leads to the conclusion that more awareness raising is needed in UTLIs.

Taken together, these findings indicate that attitudes conducive to gender based violence are normalised amongst adolescents and young adults Women bear the brunt of gender-discriminatory attitudes within their intimate relationships and violent behaviour (sexual, verbal, coercive control) is often considered acceptable. These findings emphasise the need for wide and systematic

³⁴ Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies, (2008) *Date Rape Cases among Young Women: Strategies for Support and Intervention*, University of Nicosia Press: Nicosia. p.24

prevention programmes on different structural levels (e.g. Education, Labour, and Judicial) including awareness raising programmes and campaigns targeting young people.

The findings also call upon further research both on prevalence rates, as well as on the state of specialised victim-support services, such as rape helplines, rape crisis centres, and inter-departmental cooperation for rape or sexual assault cases in Cyprus for teenagers and young adults.

Recommendations

For tertiary education:

- Organised and dedicated student unions or student groups that can raise awareness on issues concerning SVH on campuses;
- Establishment of protocol and procedure to prevent and respond to gender-based sexual violence at the UTLIs. This protocol should require the creation of a department or a board that will deal with cases of SVH by providing counselling but also redirecting victims to different services (medical, psychological support etc.). Therefore, the department/board can be the link between university authority, police forces, and any existing services and NGOs outside the university.
- Creation of a database for SVH cases at every university enabling in that way the undertaking of research and in-depth analysis of the issue. This can help create new policies and measures to prevent and deal with SVH cases more efficiently.

For government:

- Public services specialised in victim support, such as rape helplines, rape crisis centres, including inter-departmental cooperation for rape or sexual assault cases in Cyprus for teenagers and young adults.
- Better communication between governmental services and UTLIs. For instance, police forces and medical services should be easily accessible by students at university campuses. Good communication coupled with awareness raising can improve student trust with the aforementioned services, eliminating reluctance to report SVH cases.

- Broad and systematic prevention programmes on different structural levels (e.g. Education, Labour, and Judicial) including awareness raising programmes and campaigns targeting young people.

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