

Tackling gender based cyberviolence among adolescent girls and young women



Needs assessment report

Deliverable 2.1

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Introduction

This document is the first deliverable in the framework of the second work package of the project “Tackling gender based cyberviolence among adolescent girls and young women-TRACeD”, which is co-funded by the EU and specifically by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV-2021-DAPHNE).

Advances in technology have transformed and expanded the ways in which sexual violence can be perpetrated while new manifestation of cyber violence is evident. As regards specifically incidents of gender-based cyber violence, there are various forms of such violence against women and girls (VAWG), such as online stalking, pornography without the consent of the person in the pictures (so-called revenge porn or image-based sexual abuse), blaming and harassment for sex, slut-shaming, unwanted pornography, sexual harassment (sextortion), rape and death threats, the collection of information about a victim and the disclosure of her private information on the Internet (doxing). The rate of cyber violence appears to be linked to the increase in internet and social media usage indicating that younger age groups who tend to use the internet more frequently than older age groups are more at risk of gender-based cyber violence. Worryingly, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown imposed in many European countries, has increased women’s and girls’ exposure to online gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, facilitated by the increased use of digital communications over this period.

Specific needs in combatting such incidents have been well enshrined in multiple reports of the European Commission and include 1) need for tailored and practical training to teachers, parents, children and students, on safe internet, 2) need for coordinated, multidisciplinary response to the needs of Cyber VAWG victims and 3) need for a support and early prevention mechanism. TRACED addresses these exact needs, though an interdisciplinary approach that aims to develop a tailored, intersectional methodology, which will be multi-agent, cross-cutting and participatory; and subsequently pilot this methodology in the participating countries, Greece, Italy, Slovenia and Cyprus.

More specifically, TRACeD will (a) undertake evidence-based assessment of the training needs of teachers, parents, professionals, children, and students. (b) provide high-quality, interdisciplinary training to teachers, parents, children, female students, on safe internet, human rights, sex education, privacy and data protection; (c) create a network of focal points within schools, to collect and record incidents of online violence against girls; (d) develop, pilot, and operate the TRACeD Platform, envisaged as an interactive and multi-functional online platform - simultaneously an education tool for students, teachers and parents, and a victims support mechanism which will be supported by a multidisciplinary team, the cyber guardians. TRACeD is supported by the Slovenian Ministry of Education and the Hellenic Ombudsman for children.

1. The Research methodology

The aim of this section is to present a comprehensive overview of the methodology and approach that was adopted in the implementation of the research. In particular, the method of field research was used to assess the project's target groups level of knowledge on the phenomenon of cyberviolence against women and girls, internet's risks, as well as on the different types of cyberviolence. Ultimate aim was to record the training needs of the project's target groups, namely, teachers, parents, professionals and children.

The method of focus group discussion was opted for the teachers, parents and professionals, as it promotes the interaction between the participants, bringing them together to discuss the subject matter in detail (Quintanilha et al., 2015). Focus groups make it possible to explore the personal attitudes and perceptions of the target group and population in general, as they provide a framework for participants to freely express their views around specific topics. At the same time, focus group discussions encourage an open environment, which alleviates potential fears and suspicions, cultivates a sense of shared responsibility, creates the conditions for new ideas and opinions to rise, and allows participants to become aware of divergent perspectives and agendas, while at the same time giving the researcher the opportunity to directly observe the interactions taking place.

For the conduction of the focus group discussions, the number and profile of the participants, the context of the discussion and the topics (which formed the guide followed by the researcher) were determined in advance.

Furthermore, in-depth interview was opted for the case of children as it allows a free two-way communication establishing at the same time a fairly open framework for discussion. For this purpose, a semi-structured questionnaire was developed which was used by the researcher throughout the interviews.

1.1. Focus group discussions with parents

3 Focus groups were carried out with parents in each participating country, the aim of which was to obtain a better understanding of the level of knowledge of the parents on the phenomenon of cyberviolence against women and girls, its scope, and different types of cyberviolence as well as its eliciting factors. In addition, to see their point of view on what kind of risks children face and whether they take any precautionary measures against these risks. Finally, to explore whether they know any judicial/non-judicial mechanisms and the availability of any kind of support services.

1.2. Focus group discussions with teachers

3 Focus groups were carried out with teachers in each participating country, the aim of which was to identify possible knowledge gaps and needs as well as to map and assess methods and practices applied in schools to detect, prevent and protect children from such incidents. In addition, the aim was to assess whether the existing curricula addresses the issues comprehensively and adequately.

1.3. Focus group discussions with professionals

3 Focus groups were carried out with professionals in each participating country the aim of which was to map and document gaps in services provided including an examination of evidence-based prevention and support of victims of VAWG services. Furthermore, to explore other initiatives already in place to avoid overlapping and duplications.

1.4. Interviews with children

20 in person interviews were carried out in each participating county with children, adolescent girls and students, the aim of which was to understand how they perceive and experience cyberviolence and how they deal with cyberviolence. In particular, two interview guides were developed, the first one was addressed to children aged 7-12 years old while the second one was addressed to children aged 13-17 and 18-25.

Research Findings

The case of Slovenia

Parents

3 focus groups were conducted, one of them was held in person and the other two online. Altogether, there were 18 participants in all of the groups. Additionally, six individual interviews were made with the participants that could not join the focus groups. Six of the participants and interviewees were men, and 18 of them were women.

Table 1 "Participants in focus groups with parents – Slovenia"

Focus Groups with Parents				
	Date	Participants	Female	Male
1st in person FG	01/06/2022	6	6	0
2nd online FG	02/06/2022	8	4	4
3rd online FG	20/06/2022	4	2	2
Interviews	In July	6		

Phenomenon of cyber violence: concept, terminology & causes

Most parents have already dealt with the phenomenon of cyber violence, but they feel that they do not have enough knowledge and understanding to address it effectively. Some of them feel powerless because even if they teach their child preventive and protective measures, they fear that their child will not behave accordingly when faced with challenges online. They believe that girls are more susceptible to this type of violence, as boys are more inclined to take things physically. Parents are aware of cases where cyber violence in girls has led to self-harm, eating disorders, and other negative consequences with girls. They speak of stolen accounts, abusive talk and exclusion in Viber groups (and groups on similar platforms). Many parents do not have enough knowledge or interest in this topic. Few parents are aware of technological trends. Most do not work on prevention. Children are not aware that this type of violence can also be prosecuted. Children should know that criminal liability begins at age 14, at the end of elementary school, they need to know that these are serious crimes. The worst cases occur among the girls themselves, insult, incitement, bullying, exclusion, sophisticated long-term harassment, body-shaming, sexual violence, identity theft, even financial extortion, racism, ghosting Often boys try to persuade girls to send them naked pictures, show them naked body parts etc. Children form chat groups within apps and talk about other children who are not part of the group, often shaming fictional or real characteristics of the excluded children. Schools do take action when parents complain, but they do not follow technological advances. Preventive measures are needed among parents, teachers, grandparents and children themselves, as parents are often uninterested and unable to cope or overwhelmed. There have been cases where intimate photos of girls taken and sent to their boyfriends were shared publicly, after things escalated when they broke up. Parents want teachers to take action in such cases; they have talked about the case in class and given a prevention talk, but parents feel that is not enough. Some schools tend to sweep the cases under the rug- to avoid problems and bad publicity.

In some schools, prevention talks start in 4th grade (elementary schools) and are held regularly, every month, which parents find very helpful. They talk about all types of violence. Such talks should be regular in every school, as part of the system. They should be coordinated with talks/workshops for parents, because what the children hear parents should also hear, to have the opportunity to talk about it. Children, when they get a little older, are grateful for the stories they heard when they were younger. Lectures by police officers in schools have been very useful.

Parents feel that there are not enough lectures and workshops; others cannot even remember attending one. Some parents do not use social networks; they do not know how they work. Sometimes schools hold workshops (e.g., “Being a parent in the Digital age”), but hardly any parents come, and their children often struggle.

One parent’s girl experienced other girls making fun of her online when she performed publicly (musically) at a school event, and she has had a lot of trouble performing ever since. Parents believe she may develop social phobia, tremors and stage fright. Boys find it harder to express emotions and tend to suppress them (the stereotype “boys don’t cry”).

The situation with the Covid-19 pandemic, school closures and online schooling made the situation worse, as children spent much more time online, even within school lessons, learning to trick the teachers and chat instead of working. Children of divorced parents were especially affected because their parents had less control. In addition, parents believe that teachers are not equipped with the necessary knowledge and technical skills.

Some parents believe that there is no difference between boys and girls when it comes to cyber violence. Anonymity is the main cause of the problem; children are brave because they are anonymous. They believe that their identity cannot be revealed and are not aware of how they can be tracked. Parents are afraid of what might happen because everything happens on the Internet. Even video games are problematic, because there are chats in them and kids talk. Children (and people in general) are capable of much worse behaviour online than in public.

Digital parenting - use of parental controls

Some parents have learned that they must keep their children’s passwords to (help them) prevent unwanted postings. Many parents do not have passwords but agree that the children have access to their cell phones from time to time (which they check randomly). They believe that mutual trust is very important. Some parents have taken away their children’s cell phones in the Covid- 19 pandemic lockdowns because they were spending too much time online. Some parents have no idea what their children are doing online. Most parents feel that they should know that they should care and that they should intervene if necessary. Some parents feel that looking at their child’s cell phone is the same as reading their diary – an invasion of the child’s privacy. Some parents tend to use parental controls and activate filters. Younger siblings are often problematic because parents feel they must give them the same rights as older children. Children are often resourceful when it comes to circumventing parental controls and restrictions (as well as time limits).

Some parents use Family link applications to limit their children’s online activities, as well as the Nanny application. Some have a daily time limit of 1 or 2 hours. Parents know that their relationship with their child is more important than the filters.

Some parents believe that children should not have access to cell phones (or own them) until they are able to cook two meals, go to the store and buy all the groceries etc., so that they are independent and mature enough. 10- year-old children are not yet able to distinguish between right and wrong; filters must be in place. Parents should not justify their children’s bad behaviour, which they often do.

Responsibility must be taught. Bullying is a major problem; it affects children and causes trauma that follows them into adulthood. As they grow up, they produce enzymes that can lead to depression and chronic illness in adulthood, which in turn puts a strain on public services and the health care system. So, children need to be supervised, parents need to be able to make print screens (printouts) of online violence to have evidence of it and be able to respond to it at school, with the police, etc. In addition, politicians and public figures should act as positive role models and not insult people everywhere (which they often do).

Most parents teach their children not to post personal information or pictures of themselves. They ask permission if they want to post something about their children (or a photo). Even if kids do not have their own cell phones yet, bullying can happen (if other kids have phones and chat apps). Some parents use Microsoft Safety, and their kids can only make calls (and not use other apps) for a limited time. Older kids (7th grade) may have cell phones, but no access to social media. Parents feel that they cannot always trust their children, that they are led to post inappropriate content. Sometimes they lie about undesirable behaviour, they want to be socially appropriate or show themselves in such a light, even though they are doing things that are not acceptable. They are vulnerable to risk.

Some parents feel that it is difficult to maintain limits for their children, regarding cell phone and computer use. The children strongly object to the limits, so many parents extend them or do not follow their own rules. Many parents do not have the knowledge and skills to use the surveillance applications and to monitor their children's behaviour online.

Positive parenting

Some parents talk to their children about the bad cases, possible violent situations, the consequences of sharing intimate photos, etc. Some of them together with their children watched a documentary about sexual abuse on the Internet and they all reported girls were horrified and shocked. They believe that all the kids should see such films and talk to their parents about the possible consequences of such behaviour online. Talking to victims is also useful, as is open communication with the parents and in schools. Practical information is more effective than simple theoretical lectures. When it comes to reporting online violence, some parents think that they need to talk to their child first, to see if he or she wants the parents to act and report the incident to school or even the authorities. However, children usually avoid reporting the incident, which is why parents feel it is important to explain to them why it is necessary to act in such cases.

Some parents talk to their children about appearances, sexual intercourse, relationships and social interactions. Some children feel that online violence is not a serious offence, that it is normalised and occurs every day. Parents try to explain that it can lead to more serious cases. Sometimes children hear lectures and know about the possible serious consequences, but still tend to engage in risky behaviour. Parents think that children do not understand the consequences, even if they are told what can happen. Some girls did not want to talk to their parents about the issue or watch documentaries (such as Caught in the net) with their parents, because they felt it was too scary. Some parents mentioned that as little girls they were taught that they had to be "good girls" and do what their elders (specifically men) wanted them to do. One mother said her friend had been sexually abused as a child but had not told anyone because she felt reasonably good that someone was treating her like an adult.

Some parents cannot talk to their children about sex because they think that the children are not mature enough (the parents do not have the capabilities or skills, they are not able to talk to young children about this subject). Some parents have a dilemma when talking to their children about fighting violence how to separate defence from revenge. Others find it difficult to talk about sexual issues

because they have not had such conversations with their parents; they have had to figure it out by themselves.

Role-playing with children seems to be a very effective way to teach children how to handle certain situations. This way they can put themselves in the shoes of the victim.

Parents try to teach their children positive manners, to be firm and confident, and not to seek validation online, but it is still important for children to have likes and followers on platforms. Parents feel that children often want to be the centre of attention, that they feel the need to be “cool”, to be seen, and heard, and understood, but that they lack communication skills. Influencers also do harm, because young girls who follow them are already getting dermatological corrections, breast augmentation, lip correction and the like ... they often have eating disorders or exercise excessively. Parents report a video game called Twerk, in which a character runs, and if she eats a burger, she gets fat; if she works out, she gets slimmer. Playing this game had a damaging effect on one parent’s 6-year-old child, who began fasting as a result. The parents feel that they cannot trust the game developers and that games can have terrible effects. Parents also know that children soak up the frustrations and thoughts parents feel and/or express. Positive examples work, but in the long run, not overnight. Trust must be built through the relationship. Parents know how important it is to make children feel comfortable so they can talk to them even about unpleasant things.

Access to remedies & support services

Parents tend not to report even serious cases of online violence to the police. They want to settle it in other ways, within the parent group or at school. Some parents think that more cases should be reported because of the criminal nature of the violence. In some cases, schools do not want to take action. They tend to say that what happens online is none of their business because technically it did not happen at school, or no school property was used (phones are private property of children or parents). Parents believe that there should be protocols and pre-planned courses of action as to what to do in such cases, and that it should not be left to the good will of teachers and/or principals.

Such projects (like TRACeD) should be done regularly because parents think that short projects do not work and that all the schools should be involved. Parents are different and children cannot be blamed for their parents not acting. Prevention is more important than police intervention; investigations are unpleasant and should be left for most severe cases. There should be lectures of legal experts in schools, in order to enlighten all the aspects and explain to the children what is legal and what is not. In addition, parents mention positive experiences in Denmark and Spain, where children are often using devices in schools. To prevent depression and other serious consequences in adulthood, systemic measures must be taken, such as prevention lectures as early as first grade.

Parents believe that children should also be aware of the commercial aspects of their digital lives (which is constantly sold to them).

Some parents have gone to the police to report an incident, but the police have not taken any action. In addition, social centres are not effective, parents report. In one case, the police did take action, but as the case progressed, there were no consequences for the perpetrator.

Teachers

Three focus groups were conducted, all of them held in person. Altogether there were 26 teachers in all of the groups. 5 of the participants and interviewees were men, and 21 of them were women.

Table 2 “Participants in Focus Groups with teachers – Slovenia”

Focus Groups with Teachers				
	Date	Participants	Female	Male
1st in person FG	31/05/2022	11	9	2
2nd in person FG	27/05/2022	7	6	1
3rd in person FG	30/05/2022	8	6	2

Knowledge gaps and needs

Teachers do have some knowledge; they have taken part in workshops on safer internet and violence. They also report on lots of experience with violence online (and in person). They see there is a lot of social exclusion, harassment, insulting and offensive speech, as well as posting inappropriate photos among their pupils. There were also cases of blackmail (cash included). Boys and girls are equally involved, they believe. Girls can be even meaner. But the offensive attitude is in rise. Some say it is harder for the girls because of older men trying to abuse them in a sexual way.

In one of the schools, they had lectures in 6th to 9th grades about cyber violence, prepared together with the Police. The children think the girl who makes the photo is responsible and not the one who spreads it further online. During covid crisis the workshops were not held, they somehow did not have time for such matters. Sometimes they talk about preventive content in class, but a few minutes after a girl still generates a nude photo and sends it to a boy.

In addition, teachers feel they are sometimes victims; there are channels they do not know about where pupils chat and mock the teachers. They feel they have little knowledge and power to protect themselves. They also do not have enough knowledge of what cyber violence is and how to tackle it. Sometimes teachers do not want to talk about it, they say it is happening in the afternoon and that it is not their business. Teachers would like to be more informed about GDPR and how they are allowed to gather information, evidence in such cases. They are not sure if gathering such information is even legal. They could also use technical support, about deleting content, how to first protect the evidence and such.

Teachers think children do not have enough digital literacy skills. They know how to use social media, but they lack essential skills, for example, how to save a document or how to search for information; they do not have critical distance, they take every information as true. There is lack of basic education on this matter. As a society teachers feel we are poorly educated, however some parents think children are very well equipped since they spend a lot of time online. Teachers warn this is a false feeling. Often parents don't know what their children are doing online. Educated parents are more aware of the dangers than those less educated.

There is a lot of space for improvement amongst teachers. They lack digital skills and competence. Many teachers do not want to be part of social media. They want the kids to be able to tell them when they have problems, to gain their trust. More empathy related skills should be included. There is usually one victim and one perpetrator, but many bystanders – they should be the ones to act and to tell.

Teachers see serious consequences for the victims of cyber violence. They lose the sense of security, especially in cases of social exclusion. Victims should get more support, often there are no consequences for the perpetrators which is even worse for the victims.

Preventive and protection practices and measures applied in schools

Teachers try to encourage kids to find a person they can trust within the school, be it a teacher or a child, social worker, school psychologist. Sometimes children come to tell teachers about their problems. It is hard for the teachers to divide schools' responsibility from private time activities the kids conduct in. Teachers are not sure what their duties are and what's the area parents should cover. In one class they had a case where girls were making money through Only Fans and their parents agreed with that. Parents often act too protectively and do not admit their children's mistakes or offences. Some teachers use the police to show the seriousness of the situation, often times they invite police officers to lecture about criminal offences and consequences of cyber violence. One school works with a "No Excuse" workshop, but they feel it is not efficient enough. Sometimes parents do not want to prosecute although the teachers feel they should. In one case the police did not take action, even though the teacher called and checked a few times, still no closure.

They never confront the victim and the perpetrator, they always talk to them separately. They try to explain to the kids that sexting is OK, but the problem is when the pictures are spread around. There should be more consequence for those who do that, most often they get away unpunished. So, they know they can do anything and they will do it again, maybe even something more serious. In one case there was a challenge where a kid walked half naked at school and the others filmed him. There were no sanctions, parents reactions were bland, as if they didn't care much.

Teachers feel that parents are not responsive enough, they lack interest in such incidents, often they do not even come to school to talk after an incident happens. The situation is worse in the cities in comparison to the countryside, people in the countryside are more responsive and do come. In addition, teachers feel that parents are not well equipped and that they won't control what their children are doing online because it is a hard job (children are not willing to limit their time online).

It is hard for the teachers to find the perpetrators, they feel it is not their place to search. The police should be the one to search and investigate. But there is a lot of paperwork included, so often evidence gets lost. When the children see that there are consequences, when the school acts quickly, things get better.

In one school in one case they conducted a channel where children could anonymously report, and it worked. But the teachers were aware they had to protect the witness and act as if they found out themselves.

Children are often not sure whether to tell teachers what happened, they are afraid or don't want to turn out 'pussies. There should be more support for the victims or for those who tell about the happenings (up-standers). Even the police have an anonymous phone line.

There are no clear protocols or guidelines in schools on how to proceed in cases of violence online. In one school there was a case of online violence which led to physical sexual violence. The teachers felt that they were powerless and that there was no efficient way to handle the case. The doctor who was involved sent them to the social services and everyone just deferred the responsibility. Teachers think that there should be clear and efficient guidelines that would work as a framework for the school and other authorities. There are even no bullying prevention workshops in schools. Violence is hidden and teachers need the children to trust them in order to find out about such incidents. Schools should have a holistic approach and children would be more confident if they knew there are certain rules,

guidelines or frameworks with clearly defined pathways of how to resolve conflicts. It should be a long-term process, politically (and nationally) acclaimed, so that the rules would not change every few years. “There is no other way. Violence that comes out, should be treated when the kids are still young. You cannot transplant an old tree, it is too late - you can only cut its branches,” said one of the teachers.

However, in some schools, there is a procedure for educational reprimands, but the problem is that not every teacher follows its guidelines. Apparently, it is not obligatory to follow them.

Teachers also feel that they should not have to ask anyone about these subjects, they feel like they should know everything (after having taught for several years) and they feel ashamed when they do not know what to do, how to behave. Therefore, they often keep silent in order not to be seen as ignorant.

Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

There is a (partially) open curriculum, teachers can choose content they deem necessary. Within the “cultural day” or “technical day” they can choose such content, but teachers also have to prepare activities in their classes.

Digital literacy is not part of the curriculum in Slovenia. Teachers think that more time should be devoted to this topic, but the curriculum is very full, and they do not see any space for it. They think that the teachers themselves also need further training. It is difficult for them to remember, what to do in a certain situation, because they do not have pre-prepared rules to follow in such cases of cyber violence.

In addition, there are no nationally excepted guidelines / frameworks considering the use of mobile phones in schools. Teachers have a lot of problems with the children bringing phones to schools and using them (even if they are not allowed to). Sometimes parents want the child to be accessible and they insist that he should have a phone within reach at all times.

Teachers know digital literacy is lacking in schools, but when they include such content in the classroom, they feel that they are “stealing” from and neglecting mandatory content. Children should be able to learn more about these aspects of life as they play an increasingly important role in their lives.

If a child chooses a class, such as multimedia or computers – these classes are optional; they can be taught, but many children do not choose these classes. Teachers think they should be mandatory. They have been discussing this for a long time, but nothing happens.

You can also cover such topics in additional activities at school, but that is also an optional choice.

Whether or not gender equality, stereotypes, and such issues are addressed in class is up to the teacher, and often there are dialogues between teachers where students receive negative messages. Sometimes individual teachers have a desire to talk about it, but they don't feel competent, are afraid that they won't be able to respond to students' questions, that they won't have all the answers. So, they prefer to stay on the safe side and let it go at that. This is where support is needed, teachers can get the content from outside, such as the “pink and blue glasses” project. But they'll do most of it by their own example, as role models. That starts with crossing the street: why should students walk in the crosswalk if teachers don't? Why should students use the computer safely if teachers don't?

In 4th and 5th grade there are social classes where children learn about gender equality. In the “Household” class, there are projects where all students cook, iron, and work with wood and/or iron materials, for example – the activities are the same for boys and girls. However, teachers see that some



children have already structured these models, that they are influenced by the role models they see at home.

Professionals

On 24th and 26th of May three focus groups were held with 17 relevant professionals in this field in Slovenia: two in person and one online. Additionally, interviews were made with 7 professionals who could not attend the organised focus groups.

Table 3 "Participants in focus groups with professionals – Slovenia"

Focus Groups with Professionals				
	Date	Participants	Female	Male
1st in person FG	24/05/2022	6	2	4
2nd in person FG	24/05/2022	4	1	3
3rd on line FG	26/05/2022	7	7	0
Interviews	In June	7		

Knowledge gaps and needs

Majority of the focus groups (FG) participants have good knowledge about online violence, the forms it can take and how internet may exacerbate it. They also understand it impacts differently on women and girls. The causes of the phenomenon that were mentioned by the participants are that younger and younger children go online and Covid pandemic pushing children online. There is also a practice of normalization of violence in our society. Media also play a role in this. Young people don't see it as violence, it is funny, it was just a joke. One of the reasons for youth violence is also that pre-frontal cortex of the brain only develops after 18 years of age so young people's brain is dominated by more primal, emotional reactions. Adults (teachers, parents, schools, decision makers) are not coping, not accepting the responsibility. Parents omitting control, they don't have the necessary knowledge, parental capacity to act preventively, maybe they are setting the time limits but content-wise not at all. They have stressful jobs 9 to 5, don't have time to spend time with their kids, the technology is a babysitter, a place to "park" their kids ("I had an awful weekend because my kid was without their phone"). Young people are in parallel world. Parents are afraid to confront their children, there is too little dialog and trust beside parental control. Parents make excuses when children are sanctioned at school: "this is his phone, he (9-year-old) bought it", "he only wanted to check the time". Some parents don't allow children to go to school trips, because phones are not allowed there. Parents also set bad example by being online themselves a lot. It is also hard for them to recognise the signs of their child being victim or perpetrator. They are unaware their 10-year-old is meeting with 38-year-old she met online. Insecure attachment in the family is making teenage girls searching for confirmation online, posting provocative content and consequently being targeted by inappropriate actions, contacts. They are being manipulated into believing it is love. Schools and pedagogical staff are lagging behind. They refuse to see the scope of the phenomenon; they are neglecting the ethic education side of their profession. Teachers need to be sensibilized to recognise violence, they don't think critically, are tolerant towards violence. New teachers that come from faculty have knowledge about gender equality, older school staff is "dusty" in their views. There were insults in a class based on gender identity, the teacher did not set boundaries, it went on for two years. It stopped when pupils themselves complained. Filming pupils on the toilet in school, 13-year-old girl gets raped by 13-year-old boy, he films it and shares with the whole school. School doesn't want to get involved! There is a tendency in some schools not to deal with cases of online violence that happen to their pupils. Re-traditionalization of the society and less gender equality were also mentioned. Statements like "women belong behind the stow" that are being said by school representatives, politicians without sanctions are very bad

examples for young people. Societal factors that cause violence should be addressed, hate speech against women sanctioned.

School representatives in the FG have mentioned they are in dire need for training on the subject. There are some training providers for professionals in Slovenia like hotline Spletno oko, Safer internet awareness centre Safe.si, ISA Institute, Šteker, Logout, Varni Internet ... A European project Click-off a few years ago also trained the trainers, social workers, NGOs, teachers, Police and judiciary staff about this topic across Slovenia. Currently there is a MOOC on the topic of online sexual violence against girl available for teachers and other school professionals.

Most of the focus group participants deal with cyber violence against girls and women in their professional lives, some daily and some occasionally. Police representative reports most cases they deal with are sharing child abuse material, grooming on social networks, sexting gone wide. Latest trend is children 5- or 6-year-old who film themselves naked and post it on TikTok or YouTube. The main cause being that children having no restrictions watch age-inappropriate content.

Assessment of the current legal and policy framework

Some of the FG participants believe there is a need for new laws that would address specifically online violence, give stricter sanctions, and redefine some offences into criminal acts. However, the majority claim this is not needed. The legal framework and laws are adequate, we have to look at how they are used and if violence gets reported. Here the problem is social consensus about which violence is allowed. Tolerance to violence is omnipresent in society. A lot of times also decision-makers, judges etc. do not recognise violence, do not have enough knowledge and so it gets tolerated. A lot of prevention work is still needed in this area to change the attitude towards violence. At the top of the values legally wise is the right to health, life and safety, all else is subordinated. But the problem is practice, which is not in line with that. Implementation of victim right's directive is also missing. A big problem is detecting the violence – here the internet service providers should be made more responsible for what goes on at their platforms. In Slovenia privacy rights and data protection are often above children's rights, also our Constitution is made in that way. For two years we do not have a strategy for gender equality, this has been neglected in the Covid crisis, when things have gotten even more severe in this sphere.

There are possibilities for reporting and seeking redress. But many times, the procedures at courts are too long. There are helplines like Tom telefon for children and young people. Also, hotline Spletno oko is providing facility for reporting of child sexual abuse material. Data protection officer, Human rights ombudsman, Advocate of the Principal of Equality are receiving reports. There are also alternative ways like collective lawsuits, NGO and Advocate of the Principal of Equality offer them, but they have not been used yet, We have to empower people and NGOs to use them. There is a need for concrete pilot cases on sexual violence in terms of gender discrimination.

No, there is not a comprehensive national data collection system in place in Slovenia. Some of the FG participants have called for this to be done systematically. There are also some pilot studies that have been conducted and can be used as good practice model. Politics should listen to people in the field.

There are projects, programmes, initiatives to promote gender equality (Play it for change, Daddy in action and other different projects at Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities), and to promote healthy behaviours in the digital space (Safe.si, Logout, Spletno oko, Leon, Click-off, Cybersafe, Cybersafe Mooc etc..).

Service provision

Participants assess there are quality resources, but the problem is if young people find them. Namely children and young people are not all sufficiently digitally literate, it is hard for them to access useful information. These topics should be part of the curriculum, agree most of the FG participants. Now it is up to schools, teachers, parents if they present the information to the youth. Also, many great resources are made project-based and the wide dissemination of them is missing in the end. It is important to make resources for children in a tips-kind of address and not based on restrictions – to show them positive examples, give them tools to behave, communicate in a right way. Regarding information and presentation of children’s rights, there is room for improvement, we are as a society too satisfied with status quo. We should comply more with the Convention of the rights of the child and prepare an overview report on the exact meaning of these rights in practice, make it clear to the children themselves. What is also important is promoting the rights together with the responsibilities. There is also a lack of education about emotions, emotional literacy should also be strengthened. Children poorly recognise emotions and don’t know how to deal with them. In school children should learn more about relationships, communication, gender stereotypes, inequality, prejudice and discrimination. The ethics and citizenship school subject should be more practical when handling these topics.

Police informs children through their children’s website which will be upgraded in the near future, they are trying to make it very interactive to bring the Police closer to children. Together with Interpol they are also preparing a website for victims of child abuse. Tom telefon helpline for children and youth is also adapting, has chatrooms, video call services and they cooperate with the Police to know which cases to report. But victims still often do not report violence online. There is also a problem of passive bystanders who are afraid of victimization, backlash.

There is too little education for parents available, it is left for schools to decide whether they will organise a parent evening on these topics, it comes down to the principals’ autonomy and their engagement. All the participants agree the approach to educating parents should be systematic and unified. Many believe the first front line in this are the parents. Parents are difficult population, some are socially deprived, have low income, some don’t have the parental strength in upbringing, some don’t have email, some don’t have critical thinking towards devices and internet. They are very difficult to reach, the timing of the parent evening does not suit them, they are busy, some believe they don’t need school for parents – “school is for children”. Experiences show only those parents come to parent evening who are already doing their best and the child has no problems and is prospering. Parents of vulnerable children do not show up. The only thing that “wakes up” the parents is when an incident happens online between the pupils. Schools must protect the involved parties and often don’t share the experiences with other parents, but it is a lost awareness raising opportunity. One of the participants suggested that engagement of the parents in school should be monitored at social service centres and those who do not participate could be left without the child support as a sanction. The pandemic brought online parents’ meetings that have proofed to be a better and more efficient way to reach parents.

Support provision to victims

Some female victims are more comfortable talking with a woman, so they can ask for a female officer when they come to report a crime reports the police representative. At the social service centre when assessing the quality of attachment in the family and poor sensibility of parents for children's needs is established, the victims are empowered for self-defence, for recognising the violence and improving their social self-esteem. Logout has a programme for the victims. First step is victim protection and reporting to the police if it wasn’t done yet. Here the first contact is important, since young people have

a lot of fear about going to the police. It is crucial at the police that there is a person who knows how to listen, knows how to talk to children, so they can open up to them. Second step is emotional processing, there is a lot of guilt and shame, serious psychological consequences. These programmes are financed by the state, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. There are also programmes at Društvo za nenasilno komunikacijo, Ženska svetovalnica, SOS helpline, PIC, there is a helpline for children and youth Tom telefon and some other NGOs that offer support and legal help to the victims. Otherwise, it is hard to get to psychological support, counselling centres are fully booked, victims and their families wait 8-15 months to get booked. There are not enough services offered by the state for this.

Human rights ombudsman has a helpline for kids 'If you see injustice, use your rights', but not many cases come to them. Some participants believe helpline is not the right approach to children, children will not phone. Services should move where children are, TikTok, 95 other social networks, QR codes...

Child Advocacy at Human Rights Ombudsman should not stay in the pilot phase for 15 years because they ran out of money. This is a crucial, critical thing. Barnahus is also not yet what it should be, hopefully it will be some day. Social services in schools need to be empowered. There is a huge hole in this area. Social workers in school come in contact with very serious cases. They also need help, how to deal with all this. Social service centres are overwhelmed – older workers ask for transfers, because the field work is so difficult, so the youngest inexperienced staff is working with hard, violent cases. All agree that in support services for victims the problems are overload of staff, lack of experiences and knowledge. At the Police the money goes to financial criminal, but the biggest department should be crime against children. Ministry of Internal Affairs is not working properly, it does not recognize needs, it is old fashioned and understaffed. At state attorney the biggest department is crime against children and women, but it is still 5 people short. Here everything is a priority, there is always too little time to investigate and not enough staff and burn-out staff. It depends if district judges have experiences to recognize the violence, they are overwhelmed with bureaucratic reporting so much they cannot do their work because they have to report so much about it. As a society we have left victims down. Weird decisions not to prevent access to child sexual abuse material (AKOS). Only one internet service provider is doing this.

The law amendments have been made about the rights of perpetrators who are minors. It brings more educational measures in comparison to sanctions. For professionals it brought possibilities for additional training and exchanging experiences on how to understand underaged perpetrators. There are rights for advocacy, for parent to be present, that they are understood and that their circumstances are taken into account. Many times, the perpetrator comes from a violent or not suitable home setting. This is important so they get help after. There is a problem with institutions where the perpetrators are placed. They are also understaffed. So, these minors are not appropriately dealt with, educated, supported. We then have a group of 15 youth with violent tendencies. The whole process is meaningless if in the end they end up on the street. There are NGOs who offer programmes for perpetrators, but it is not available for everybody. This kind of programmes should be offered by the state. Social service centres work, but this is needed even broader. School, courts also need to be involved. As part of judicial penalty there should be a training for perpetrators for assertiveness, communication skills etc. The punishment is not the way to deal with it in school, then they just do something to avoid the punishment. It makes more sense to work with the perpetrators to realise they've done something wrong, see it, regret it, try to correct the wrong, change their behaviour. This is an investment in relationships. An individualized educational plan needs to be made. But the practice is different in schools, there is not enough knowledge to do it. There are also programmes to empower parents who don't have the parental and personal strength to support their children. A lot is expected if EU will transfer the Istanbul convention provisions into its directives, then we will have preventive



interventions to empower the perpetrators and potential perpetrators. This should not be only available by the NGOs but should be provided by the state.

Children, adolescent girls, students

In May and June 2022, we conducted 20 interviews with girls and young women. Some were conducted in person and some online. Five young women (university students) were interviewed between the ages of 22 and 23, five adolescent girls (high school students) were interviewed between the ages of 15 and 17, six girls (secondary school pupils) were interviewed between the ages of 13 and 15, and four girls (primary school pupils) were interviewed between the ages of 10 and 11.

Table 4 “Interviews with children, adolescent girls and students – Slovenia”

Interviews with children, adolescent girls and students				
	Date	Participants	Female	Male
1 st Interview	08/06/2022	1	1	
2 nd Interview	9/06/2022	1	1	
3 rd Interview	30/05/2022	1	1	
4 th Interview	30/05/2022	1	1	
5 th Interview	30/05/2022	1	1	
6 th Interview	30/05/2022	1	1	
7 th Interview	30/05/2022	1	1	
8 th Interview	27/05/2022	1	1	
9 th Interview	27/05/2022	1	1	
10 th Interview	27/05/2022	1	1	
11 th Interview	27/05/2022	1	1	
12 th Interview	27/05/2022	1	1	
13 th Interview	30/05/2022	1	1	
14 th Interview	30/05/2022	1	1	
15 th Interview	30/05/2022	1	1	
16 st Interview	30/05/2022	1	1	
17 st Interview	30/05/2022	1	1	
18 st Interview	10/06/2022	1	1	
19 st Interview	10/06/2022	1	1	
20 th interview	10/06/2022	1	1	

Perceptions on cyberviolence

Girls and women aged 15-25 years and aged 13-18 years

All of them have already heard of and are aware of online violence.

Their perception of violence is that everything online has its consequences. Many mentioned stalking, harassment. If you post an inappropriate photo, you are subject to various provocations; if you give your location, you can be found and hurt. But it can also be coincidental - you can be harassed by someone even if you do not expose yourself too much online.

“Even if the photo is not suggestive, but a girl posts normal photos of herself, a freak can become obsessed with her, phone her in the middle of the night.” (a female university student)

Sexual violence is something that was mentioned very frequently by the interviewees. They receive unwanted images of a sexual nature in their inbox. High-school girls in particular said they were frequently approached by older men in this way.

“Older men tend to send their nude photos just like that. Instead of introducing themselves nicely they just send the photos. My friends are not OK with it, but they just delete the photo. They do not tell anyone or report it.” (a female high school student)

“Older men text all the time.” (a female high school student)

“It happens someone adds you and you think he just wants to be your friend. But it is an older man, and he wants something from you which is not appropriate” (female high school student)

University students as well as high-school and primary-school pupils reported that demands for nude photos are something girls are more likely to be harassed with than boys.

“Boys ask for nudes, girls send them, he screenshots them and then demands money or sex, blackmails them.” (a female high school student)

“A lot of times boys ask for naked photos of girls. Those who send it ... the boys take screenshots and share it to others. That’s how it gets spread and parents find out.” (a female secondary school pupil, 13 years old)

“Online violence ... that’s asking for inappropriate photos. If you don’t know the person, it’s even worse.” (a female high school student)

In their opinion girls do not demand a nude photo from a boy. They also believe that girls and women are more likely to be victims of sextortion. It is rare that a boy has problems with the publication of his nude photo.

“Boys probably face different types of violence, more aggressive. They do not get extorted or asked for nude photos as often as girls do.” (primary school girl, 13 years old)

Body shaming and slut-shaming were also brought up. If a girl has multiple sexual partners, she is degraded as a ‘whore’, while boys are even praised as “cool” for such behaviour. Girls who post selfies on Facebook are likely to be bullied, body-shamed by mean comments: “look how ugly she is” “look at her terrible hair” “yuck, she is not shaved”, “her tits are too small”. Negative comments pile up.

There is also a trend for girls to post photos when they meet to have fun. The comments are then demeaning like “look at those hens” (a derogatory term for women in Slovenian). One student explains that she has not noticed the same kind of reactions when boys post their group photos.

Some students believe that a woman’s body is provocative in itself, even if the photo is not meant to be seductive. They mentioned an influencer who posted her photo in a bathing suit to encourage women to feel more comfortable in their bodies. Still there were a lot of negative backlashes from men and even women. Comments of the “slut-shaming” type: “She flaunts herself too much online”.

“They filled her inbox with insults.” (student)

High school girls also mentioned insults, being mean to someone, bullying, blackmail.

“Maybe if you did something, a girl in your class threatens to post it, blackmails you. It depends on what you did – if it’s important, I would pay her the money. But on the other hand, then she would always ask for more.” (high school girl)

Some reported feeling increasingly insecure online. Through fake profiles, false identities, and hidden identities, people tend to write things they would otherwise be afraid to say. When they read or hear about cases of online violence against girls (e.g., a case of forced filming of a 16-year-old naked girl), they become more cautious and afraid. They tend to avoid situations where something like this might

happen. They are afraid that someone will take advantage of them, film them and put them on the Internet

"At least as far as that is concerned ... well, your drink can be spiked ... But I try to avoid situations like that." (female university student)

"I know some people hide behind profiles, people of all ages get extorted, I am aware there are all sorts of crooks out there, they hide behind screens, I am aware of the danger." (primary school girl, 14 years old)

Students think it is difficult for younger girls who want to have fun and enjoy themselves and can never know what will end up on the internet. Some are afraid of negative consequences, blackmail and losing opportunities in life due to this.

Students believe women are more often victims of online violence. In their opinion women and girls are more exposed to online violence because men are more likely to write to and harass women online. The reason mostly being the age (young girls are more exposed) and personal "goals" men have of sexual nature. It is very common that boys make a fake profile or doctors the photos of a girl and post mean comments to her online. There are still quite some stereotypical assumptions regarding gender-based violence, online and offline: A student reported that women are exposed to all kinds of violence in greater extent than men because they are the "gentle" sex and men pick on them. Another student also explained she believes women are more emotional and are more affected by the negative experiences. Some of them also reasoned perpetrators are more afraid of causing violence to men.

"My younger brother would rather make a fake profile to a female class-mate than a male class-mate." (student)

The type of violence that boys are exposed to are different than those girls are exposed to. However, students agree also men and boys can be subjected to stalking online - women too can be annoying and can harass online.

Highschool girls were not so unanimous in their opinions regarding the gender differences in violence. It varied according to their experiences. The girls that reported no incidents that happened to them stated that the dangers online are the same for boys as girls or that *"women are more exposed to online violence, because they spend more time online while, while boys tend to spend their time outdoors"*. Others who had their own experiences with online violence assess, that girls are more likely to be targeted (but not exclusively), are targeted more often and are victims of different kind of online violence than boys.

"Girls are victims in 90 % of "revenge porn" cases. It is very rare that a girl would share a boy's photo, maybe 10%". (high school girl)

However, all of the primary school girls in this age category have stated girls are more exposed to online violence than boys.

"In my opinion girls are more exposed to violence online and offline in many types of violence, except fights. When I am walking behind a woman, she always turns back to see who is behind her. Boys never turn to see." (primary school girl, 13 years old)

"Online if people know you are a girl they abuse you because you are a woman ... like something sexist, with photos of their body, more sexual and to do with the woman's body." (primary school girl, 13 years old)

“Girls are more and in different ways exposed to violence than men. There is more of extortion for naked photos.” (primary school girl, 15 years old)

Girls aged 7-12 years

With the youngest age category of girls interviewed the perception of violence varies a lot. It mostly depends, as it turns out, on the level of parental guidance and control children have at home. Those who have little, or no limits set by their parents about what they can do online, those who have profiles on those social networks that do not allow so young children to have accounts and those who use internet a lot, already have some experiences with online violence. They understand it as nasty, mean comments, weird contacts from strangers online. The girls who have stricter rules at home, don't have social network profiles and do not use internet a lot, have no experiences with online violence and their perception of it is scary videos with monsters they've seen or viruses, ransomware and strangers pretending to be children that they heard about from their parents or in school.

“I am afraid of scary pictures to turn up online on You Tube.” (girl, 10 years old)

“I you don't look for it (something disturbing), it doesn't come to you. You never know when something comes, something nasty. But if we don't publish something weird, it will not come.” (girl, 11 years old)

“It bothers me online that people are nasty, just because they didn't get something, they are vicious. They don't understand and start writing ugly things to you. Mostly on TikTok but also other applications. These are unknown people; they saw me online and started. When I look at comments, I see they comment in a mean way to others too. I am not afraid online; I don't care what people say or think. It is important what you think of yourself. It is like in school. If you are fat, they say you are 'yak', if you are thin, then you are sick. If you have braces, what is wrong with your teeth. It is never OK, you always correct yourself, but still, they will find something.” (girl, 10 years old)

They all remember their teachers or some outside workshop provider talking to them in the classroom about rules of online safety, mostly protecting their privacy. Some remember it very good, others not as much.

“Once teachers have told us something about online safety. Long ago. I don't remember it anymore.” (girl, 10 years old)

“We talked with teachers about it, about our personal data, about giving someone you don't know in person your phone number ... Everybody should now this.” (girl, 10 years old)

Experiences

Girls and women aged 15-25 years and aged 13-18 years

There is a lot of harassment: message requests, dick pics, requests for nudes, phone calls through messengers from strangers, repeated calls and similar. There are also quite some inappropriate contacts in games some high-school girls play a lot.

“They [older men] use to write all the time, but I deleted it. They write 'you are beautiful, we can get together, I can buy you a car ...' I am being nice, and I told him, that I like Porsche. He said he will buy it for me. Then I told my friend, and she started talking to this mister and she went out with him. They talk, I have nothing from it. I never thought about reporting this or reporting to the police. But I would not go out with him, I know myself. I wouldn't tell parents nor teachers. I can tell my girlfriends, well ... depends which girlfriend.” (a high school girl)

“It used to happen to me, but now it is not that often anymore. It was not OK, inappropriate photos of his genitals. But he wasn’t the only one. It was over 30 of them. I just blocked the person without saying anything. I didn’t have the time to deal with this. The first time I was shocked, then I accepted it. It happened around 30 times.” (a high school girl)

“I have experience with violence online. Sometimes they ask me for naked photos, but I block them completely. It was also one boy that I knew that asked me, otherwise it is strangers. On Snapchat. I feel like boys and also men, only see girls and women as bodies and not personalities. That hurts me, I am angry most of the times.” (primary school girl, 13 years old)

“I knew a girl that was extorted for photos. He posted it on Instagram and wanted more explicit photos. She blocked him. Parents, Police and school counselling service were involved.” (primary school girl, 14 years old)

Some report of being attacked just over expressing an opinion in the comments section. Some are very hurt by the negative backlash. Especially comments that attack a girl’s appearance are demeaning and can hurt a lot.

One student reported content to TikTok: very inappropriate footage, full of discrimination. She felt it is only right that the algorithms would be notified which users post such things. One had negative experiences at the ASK platform where anonymous questions and answers were possible. Also, on Tinder there are some very inappropriate comments. Students state one needs inner strength not to get very hurt by some of them. As soon as a bit more revealing profile photo is posted (even without intention to get such attention) unwanted sexualization begins, comments from total strangers go straight to the topic of physical appearances and sexual attractions. That is unnerving, makes you feel uncomfortable.

“That is why I got stuck with buttoned up shirts ... you have to hide yourself somehow.” (student)

One remembers a case in primary school: a girl’s naked photos were published online. She was absent from school for a long time after this. The student remembers feeling this was not fair.

“Even if the girl did indeed send the photo to someone trusting them ... this would not happen if she were a boy.” (student)

Some students still believe that this kind of approaches by men are innocent. (They just got used to it, it is normalized, since it is so present in the society. This can be viewed as a reflection of patriarchal subordinate position that is still assumed for women in the society.) But they do believe it can escalate to a horrific scene.

Students discuss their experience online mostly with their friends, peers of approximately the same age. Not so much with parents.

“It is not like I am hiding it from parents, but parents cannot relate as much, while friends have similar experiences.” (student)

However, if something serious comes up online, they would turn to parents in addition to their friends, other relatives.

As I get older, I see it is important to have such relationships. When I was younger, everything was nuisance to me, I used to say: mom, stop bothering me. Now I feel it is much easier if you talk to someone.” (student)

One student feels in her group of friends and family there is too little conversation about these topics, no in-depth talks about this, it is pushed under the rug. Some heard that the police were not efficient in some cases in which their friends were involved.

Reports from the high-school girls are more diverse. On the one hand one high school girl reported her mother wanted her to watch a documentary about human trafficking and online predators. She also tells her mother what she does online. She feels she can talk to parents, friends and teachers about topic of online safety. If something would happen, she would turn to her mother.

Another girl also talks to her parents, relatives and girlfriends about her experiences online:

"I don't have anything to hide. It helps me to talk about it. Even if I am already in high school, they still control what I do online. It is only right for them to look at what I am messaging with other people. Why would I hide this?" (high school girl)

Others have totally different views and experiences. They don't think they would be able to tell anybody if something bad happened to them online. Certainly not to teachers, maybe parents or friends. Some are certain they would keep it to themselves, they would not tell anybody.

"I would never tell my parents; we do not talk about this kind of things. It is a taboo. Our conversations are not about this, we talk about cooking, religion, the bible. This is the kind of relationship I have with my mother." (high school girl)

"It is hard for me to talk about these things to parents, teachers, relatives. They would not believe me, they wouldn't understand. I would like to, but I dare not talk about it. I never told at home to my parents about my experiences." (high school girl)

"I cannot talk about experiences online or online risks with my parents or relatives. Neither they ask me, neither I respond." (high school girl)

However, parents and also some teachers do tell these girls about dangers and risk, warn them to be careful, to care for themselves online, to be cautious about what they do online and explain what is safe on the internet. Some talk about it with their friends at school, but not with teachers.

"They [parents, teachers] tell me what people can be like. But I am still afraid to talk about this with them." (high school girl)

All of the primary school girls in this age range have claimed in the interviews they can talk to their parents about online experiences and risks. If something serious happened to them online, parents would be the first choice to turn for help. Most of them feel they can also turn to their teachers. They also discuss these topics among friends.

Girls aged 7-12 years

As already mentioned above some girls in this age category have little or no experiences with online violence, some have friends who have experienced something violent online but some already have their own experiences.

"Once parents typed something online and there were scary pictures that turned up. I was very afraid, that this might happen to me. There were pictures of scary monsters. Dad turned down the computer and said to me to go away, that he will remove these strange pictures." (girl, 10 years old)

"I had Instagram profile, because my sister has it and once some guy wrote ugly words to me. I didn't know who he is. He said I know who you are, don't mess with me. I wrote to him that he doesn't know

me. He apologized for being wrong. I blocked him and deleted Instagram. I did not tell my parents, because I didn't feel bad." (girl, 10 years old)

"I never experienced something bad online. But I have a friend, that is two years older. A year ago, she was insulted for posting something online, her opinion, which meant a lot to her. But she was responding to them, instead of reporting it to the app and then the app would fix this. She told her mom." (girl, 11 years old)

"I am on Tik tok a lot. There are fun pages Addison, Charlie. Some kids take their videos, add color, text, questions. And then there are mean comments: to bright complexion, yak you are too young, very vicious comments about being juvenile, that you are only 7 years old because of that. After I ignored them, they stopped. I felt like I didn't give a hoot, because if they don't like me, they don't. You can't make everybody happy." (girl, 10 years old)

Coping strategies

Girls and women aged 15-25 years and aged 13-18 years

One frequently mentioned coping strategy was ignoring. They are not opening, looking at the request sections of their profiles.

"You just learn to ignore all the harassment; you don't look at those messages." (a student)

Blocking inappropriate requests, approaches, contacts, profiles is another most common coping strategy.

"I don't not talk to suspicious people that much. If you don't like them, if they are giving you a hard time, you block them. You don't post personal information ..." (primary school girl, 13 years old)

"I blocked him, not anything else and I hoped it wouldn't happen again. I know I can report it, but I never did, because I never saw this [receiving nudes from strangers] as a serious thing. I also do not know this person; he is not from my neighbourhood and he couldn't be found." (high school girl)

But still an unpleasant feeling remains. Students believe that even if you block someone, he can make a new profile and start all over.

"It is a "shitty" feeling, a felling of powerlessness. In the end what can you do? You are afraid that you or him [the perpetrator] will have to stop using the networks to protect yourself. It is "panicking" in a way, but still a real potential for this development does exist, lurks on you." (student)

"I am quite careful what I do [online], so I am not afraid really. If something happened, I would take some action. If someone was picking on me, I would ignore, block them. There is no point in making 'big drama' out of this. I would also not try to get back at them, that would only make it worse." (high school girl)

"If something happens, I stop talking to them. They don't know me that well, I did not trust them, these are just some strangers." (high school girl)

Girls are self-censoring: they are careful what they are posting online, what they share, which parts of themselves they show. They tend to limit the photos of themselves that they publish as much as possible, they mainly post nature, places of interest from travels, group photos of friends, kittens, food in restaurants, celebrities, etc.

"I do not share anything with others that I do not know personally. There are risks, dangers. I am careful, afraid of viruses, of extortion. I do not want to take risks, I do not want to do anything that could be

dangerous. I am very untrusting when it comes to this. Internet has more negative than positive sides. Especially social networks. As soon as you share your data it is dangerous.” (primary school girl, 15 years old)

“Most of the time I feel unsafe online, I am afraid. To protect myself I do not publish anything. On Instagram I do not follow a lot of people, only those I know personally.” (primary school girl, 13 years old)

“I only look at what other publish, I don’t post anything myself.” (primary school girl, 13 years old)

Students say they are also careful how they are dressed on the photos they post. Cleavage mustn’t be too low, the skirt too short. They are under impression that girls need to “hide” themselves and their bodies online. They think this is not fair.

“In the end this [breasts] is part of my body. It is not my nipples I am showing!” (student)

They also think about possible negative consequences, how the photo, data could be used by someone with bad intentions, to harm them.

“I know what can happen if I do certain things. That is why I always think first. I do not publish myself, my data, my age, my name ...” (primary school girl, 14 years old)

They all do not accept strangers as friends online and are not answering and blocking unknown phone numbers.

“I used to respond to inappropriate requests, something like ‘fuck off, dude’ but now I just block them.” (student)

“I never add people I don’t know as online friends. I feel safe online. Before, when I was adding everybody, it was different, but now this does not happen to me anymore.” (high school girl)

“In a way I do not feel safe online, I am a little scared. I do not give my data, my profile is private, so not anyone can look at it, I only add those I know and trust.” (primary school girl, 13 years old)

It is also disturbing that some of the girls would quit using the network, message service where the violence took place. They would remove all the data and photos from the profile. They would minimize the profile only for communication purposes. Some even already closed their profiles altogether.

Coping strategy only mentioned by some of the students and primary school girls is using privacy settings to keep profiles “closed” for public, being careful with one’s personal data. And reacting immediately, by first signs of violence to protect themselves. Some students and high school girls admit that when they were younger, they were not so “smart” online, did not behave in a self-protective way.

“It is best to stay safe and what you are doing. Because I can be simply tricked into something, but I learned from it and now I am careful about what I do, I do not trust that easily. I know what people can be like.” (high school girl)

“A man just sends his [naked] photos or he first starts working on friendship and tries to manipulate you to send your photos. But now I know how this goes and they cannot trick me anymore.” (high school girl)

Most students remember having a workshop about online safety in primary school, but not in high school anymore. Most of them also had some of these topics in some classes at the university. One has younger brothers and sisters, and they learn about this in school. Some feel that there is a lot of

knowledge about this, but there needs to be a reminder here and there, because it is easy to forget about the consequences.

Interviews with high school girls revealed a different picture. None of them recalled having any workshop about internet safety in school, they did not receive any information at school on how to protect themselves online. However, some of them remember seeing awareness raising videos about topic of online violence on the social networks and one of them has at her own initiative watched educational videos about sexual predators on YouTube. She found them very informative and gained useful knowledge to better protect herself.

With primary school girls it varies. At one school we visited there was a female police officer that had conducted a workshop for pupils. It was very well accepted apparently, since all of the girls interviewed remembered it and said they like it and that it was useful.

"We had a workshop about internet and bullying. It was a police officer that presented it to us. I knew all of the things she told us from before, but for those pupils whose parents do not take so much effort, it was OK to know where they post photos, that they stay there forever, and everybody can see them."
(primary school girl, 14 years old)

On the other school that we visited the girls were not sure whether they had a workshop on this topic or not. They did not remember it, although the school counselling worker has told us, that the workshops have been organized for all the pupils.

All of the students can talk to their parents about sexual topics, sex life and online issues related to this.

"This is an important part of our lives, and it is good to talk about it. Through sharing your own experiences and listening about other people's experiences you can develop a healthy point of view towards these topics." (student)

With younger girls in high school things are different. Only one of them said she can talk to her parents about this. The others said they cannot talk openly about this.

While with primary school girls again all of them said they are talking with their parents about these topics. Some say they are not so interested at this yet, others report they are interested and would like to know even more.

Students report that when they were younger, they had strict time limits for online time (1-2 hours a day). Today they are grateful they had it even if it was annoying at the time. To some students' parents used to limit their access to social networks (no Facebook not until 9th grade), they remember that was something very important to them, but they were not allowed to use it although all the other peers had profiles.

High school girls however claim they have no limits regarding time or content online. They say parents know them and trust them. They can be online for as much time as they want. One reports that she had some time limitations when she was younger, but now they rely on her to know when is enough. Her younger sister also does not have any limitations, so she puts time limits to her sister.

Only one high school girl reported having time limits set by her parents. Approximately 1 hour per day (when she comes home from school) and slightly more over the weekend. She generally respects those boundaries, only sometimes she breaches them a little. She has younger brother and sister, and she thinks it is fair she doesn't use her phone a lot if they shouldn't.

A bit surprisingly also primary school girls that were interviewed do not have any time limitations regarding the use of internet and their mobile phones. Two girls explained that the time spent on their

phone depends on the results they get in school. If there would be some problems with schoolwork or they would get lower grades, parents would limit their time online.

“Regarding control, I can do whatever I want most of the time. Mom only advises me, we talk about it, she doesn’t forbid anything. She said it is not good to have many profiles online, because it is time consuming. I consider her advice. I think that is good, because if you are alone, you don’t even know all the things that could happen to you.” (primary school girl, 13 years old)

All of them also report that parents have access to their phones. Whether they have passwords or they ask them to show them the phones unannounced or they check casually what they are doing on the phone when they are sitting together.

“I can give my mother my phone, I don’t have anything to hide, she has access to everything., my profile is not locked, I don’t have anything special published there. She doesn’t limit how much time I can use the phone; I can do it myself, I let go of the phone when I have enough. I think I have an OK attitude towards my phone. My life is not only about the phone.” (primary school girl, 14 years old)

Girls aged 7-12 years

None of the girls or their parents have reported anything to the Police. Three of the girls interviewed said they would turn to their parents if something bad happened to them online. If the troubles were connected to school, they would turn to their teachers.

“If strange pictures turned up again, I would turn to my parents. If these happened in computer room at school, I would tell the teachers. If somebody would write something bad to me in messenger app, I would tell my parents. If I would be home alone, I would just stop chatting. I never go on YouTube alone; I ask my parents to be by my side to see what I type.” (girl, 10 years old)

Two girls reported they would not turn to their parents in case of online violence.

“If I didn’t feel safe online, I would ask my sister for help, not parents, that would be weird, I am ashamed to ask them. I can tell my sister everything, she will be 13 years old soon.” (girl, 10 years old)

“I don’t tell my parents because they don’t care. They always say: if somebody doesn’t like you or talks to you in a bad way, you can solve this yourself, no need to tell us. I only told my cousin. She also got ugly replies when she posted her face online. She is 12 years old. But she is different, she starts to cry, she is hurt by that. I talked to her and told her not to listen to them. Those people only say nasty things because they are not happy with their lives, because they are angry with somebody. I learned this like I learned English, on YouTube. There are videos that show you this from Dhar Mann. If somebody doesn’t like you, it is their problem.” (girl, 10 years old)

Other coping strategies mentioned by pupils were: quit chatting with the person who is mean, blocking the person, deleting the nasty comments, reporting them.

“If someone said something nasty about me online, I would not trouble myself, I would block him, maybe I would tell my schoolmates. As long as he is just mean, that’s OK, you can block him.” (girl, 11 years old)

Most of them also claim to take one or more of the following precautions online: not posting their photos, not showing their face in the photos, not making videos of themselves, only accepting people they know as friends online, protecting their profiles, protecting their personal data, checking with parents if it is appropriate to publish something online. One girl reported that she put false information on her profile: false name and pretends she is older.

“I am careful not to publish my photos, not to make videos of myself. I ask people online if we know each other first., I ask them who they are. There are a lot of people with my surname, I ask my mother first, if this is someone we know. Then she first chats with this person to see who it is.” (girl, 10 years old)

“My TikTok account is protected. I don’t post my face, because you never know. I don’t let others write to me, I am careful with my personal data. I only share with those I know in person, those who tell me in school their online names.” (girl, 11 years old)

“I don’t put much online, I usually just watch. I don’t post pictures of myself, absolutely not, I post black picture with quote about my religion. When I first came to Slovenia from Bosnia and Herzegovina three years ago, I used to make videos of me dancing. But then that got boring, and I stopped, now it’s fun for me to play music but not posting. Everyday ten times a day I go to the restroom and dance, so my parents can see me. I don’t want people to know my name, how old I am, I make up an English name, I pretend I am older, I am fourteen. It is not good if you are too old, nor if you are too young, then they say, what are you doing here. (girl, 10 years old)

Regarding parental control again reports from the girls are very diverse. Two girls reported having parental controls: one is not allowed to make videos of herself and put it on YouTube, the other has time limits (she can use internet only 1,5 hour per day) and is not allowed to have profiles on Facebook and Twitter.

“Yes, I have limits: I mustn’t make videos of myself and put it on YouTube. But I don’t know how to do it anyway. I consider my parents; I do not use internet in secret.” (girl, 10 years old)

“Parents trust me, I have time limits 1,5 hour per day, but I never spend so much time online. 1 hour is a lot for me. Parents do not let me have profiles on Facebook and Twitter. They think things on such networks are not important and interesting for me. They did not forbid it, but they recommend it, since this is making you stupid and gives you too much unnecessary information.” (girl, 11 years old).

Conclusions

The need for training to parents, teachers, and children emerged from the Focus Groups, underlining current gaps that hinder an effective response. Similarly, the impact of Covid19 pandemic was mentioned as a factor aggravating the phenomenon. Another perception was the absence of sufficient parental control and the lack of trust within the family environment as root causes. Although parents pointed out the necessity for supervising their children, the use of parental controls varies, since they were thought as harmful for the relationship among parents and children. Most participants stated having experienced an incident and do not perceive Internet as a safe space; women and girls adopt coping mechanisms, even self-censoring, for fear of being victimised. Another issue that was apparent, is the inadequacy of measures applied within schools and the necessity to implement common guidelines, protocols and a common systematic framework, including training, taking into account the fragmented character of current initiatives. In addition, reporting is not common, due to the protracted procedures; within this context, another crucial issue refers to the demand for capacity-building efforts and trainings for judges, so that they have the necessary expertise to handle such cases. Worrying is that according to the opinion of the participants, children are not informed about their rights, complaint and grievance mechanisms, services and remedies available in case of violation or abuse of their rights in relation to the digital environment. Finally, and turning to service provision, they noted that the problem is the lack of sufficient resources and knowhow; social services are overloaded and staff lacks experiences and knowledge.