

**STUDY ABOUT
EXPERIENCE AND PREVENTION OF
VIOLENCE AMONG YOUTH IN BOSNIA AND HER-
ZEGOVINA**

*Challenges and perspectives in creating an inclu-
sive and safe environment with a focus on gen-
der-based violence*

Tatjana Žarković, Jelena Gaković, Amila Ždralović, Sandra Bjelan

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Publisher:
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Authors:
Tatjana Žarković
Jelena Gaković
Amila Ždralović
Sandra Bjelan

with contributions from:
Mija Vukšić, Amina Omerović, Lejla Smajević, Merima Tarakčija,
Asja Kurtagić and Ajna Koso

Reviewers:
Lejla Kafedžić
Stefan Jansen

Proofreading:
Elma Durmišević

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Table of Contents

ABOUT EUPEACE PROJECT	4
INTRODUCTION	6
YOUNG PEOPLE AS ACTORS OF CHANGE IN RECOGNITION AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE	8
Young people about previous experiences of working on violence prevention projects	11
METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESEARCH AND PROJECT ACTIVITIES.....	13
Expected outcomes of the change and impact on the academic community.....	16
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AMONG YOUTH	18
The concept and typology of violence	20
Workshop I: DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS AS FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS OF COOPERATIVE WORK.....	23
Workshop II: INTERSECTION AND MULTIPLE DISCRIMINATION	30
Workshop III: ART, POWER AND VIOLENCE OF VISUALIZATION.....	36
Culture and Education: The Challenge of Transformation	38
Workshop IV: MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKS	41
VIOLENCE PREVENTION OR WHAT YOUTH CAN DO DIFFERENTLY?	49
The Role of Bystanders	50
The role of bystanders of violence in preventing and combating violence.....	51
The gray area between violence and acceptable behavior	52
The Bystander effect observer	54
The role of young people in the prevention of violence	56
The role of culture and art in the prevention of violence	58
Public impact and public reaction	60
From definition to protection: A multidimensional approach to violence in society.....	61



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Reasons for not reporting violence and the complexity of obstacles for victims	66
Recognizing and reporting violence: guidelines and protection strategies	72
RESEARCH RESULTS	75
ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF QUESTIONNAIRES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE ...	76
YOUNG PEOPLE TALK TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE (NON)GOVERNMENTAL SECTOR.....	115
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	124
RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	130
KEY TERMS	137
LITERATURE	139
ANNEX 1.....	149
EXCERPTS FROM REVIEWS	158





ABOUT EUPEACE PROJECT

EUPeace is the European University for Peace, Justice and Inclusive Societies.¹ Our mission is to equip the citizens of tomorrow with the knowledge, skills and experiences needed to shape peaceful, just and resilient societies. Inspired by the restored Mostar Bridge – a symbol of dialogue and reconciliation – EUPeace translates European values into practice. The EUPeace network consists of nine higher education institutions: the University of Marburg (Germany), the Justus University Liebig in Giessen (Germany), University of Limoges (France), University of Calabria (Italy), Comillas University (Spain), University of West Bohemia in Pilsen (Czech Republic), University of Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Çukurova University (Turkey), University of Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), as well as our affiliated partners in Europe and beyond.

Philipps University Marburg		Marburg University
Justus Liebig University Giessen		Justus Liebig University Giessen
University of Limoges		University of Limoges
University of Calabria		University of Calabria
University Pontifical Comillas		Comillas Pontifical University
West Bohemian University of Pilsen		University of West Bohemia in Pilsen
University of Mostar		University of Mostar
Çukurova Universities		Çukurova University
University of Sarajevo		University of Sarajevo

¹ See more at: <https://www.eupeace.eu/>.



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The mission of the EUPeace project extends beyond the academic sphere. Work Package 7 (WP7) EUPeace The Alliance is committed to the development of EUPeace Living Lab, a dynamic platform aimed at fostering civic engagement and innovation. By facilitating collaboration between diverse stakeholders, including academia, citizens, civil society, policymakers, and the private sector, Living Peace Lab strives to encourage dialogue and create concrete and innovative solutions on the topics of peace, justice and inclusiveness. With the establishment of EUPeace Living Lab, WP7 is also establishing a Social Dialogue Group (SDG), consisting of representatives from within and outside the Alliance. This group is tasked with developing a format for ongoing social dialogue.



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INTRODUCTION

The project called "Living Peace Lab: Developing Peer Education Initiatives" explores the key role of young people in understanding the causes of increasing violence in the community, and its goals stem from the mission and goals of the EUPeace Alliance, which include fostering dialogue and generating innovative solutions in the areas of peace, justice and inclusiveness. The project leaders are Dr. Tatjana Žarković and Prof. Dr. Jelena Gaković from the University of Sarajevo - Faculty of Philosophy. In addition to the project leadership, the research team also included associate academic members of the research team Prof. Dr. Amila Ždralović from the University of Sarajevo - Faculty of Law and Prof. Dr. Sandra Bjelan from the University of Sarajevo - Faculty of Philosophy. Given the importance of collaborative, or inclusive, work methodology, students from various study programs at the University of Sarajevo were actively involved in the research, who significantly contributed to research activities and the design of educational tools for the prevention of various forms of violence in society. In accordance with the principles of the EUPeace Alliance, which emphasize the importance of connecting the academic community with other social participants in order to achieve positive social changes in our environment, the above project was designed in cooperation with the CURE Foundation and the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina. All activities were implemented on the premises of the Centre for Human Rights of the University of Sarajevo, where, within the framework of work package 7 (UNSA coordinator: Dr. Gaj Trifković) the EUPeace Living Lab was established in 2024.



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YOUNG PEOPLE AS ACTORS OF CHANGE IN RECOGNITION AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE

Young people are in a particularly vulnerable position in society, where on the one hand they are in the process of forming their personal and collective identity, while on the other hand they are exposed to pressures and expectations that often exceed their resources and capacities. During this period, violence can act as an obstacle to development, but also as a serious obstacle to the realization of the right to security, education and self-realization. Violence among young people represents one of the most serious social challenges of the modern era. Its forms and intensity vary depending on the cultural, socio-economic and institutional framework, but in almost all contexts it leaves long-term consequences for individuals, their families and communities.

One of the key dimensions of violence is its gender conditioning. Gender-based violence, which takes many forms – from physical and sexual to psychological, economic and symbolic – is deeply rooted in social structures of power and inequality. With young people, this problem is particularly pronounced, because it is connected with the processes of socialization and internalization of gender roles that shape their behaviour and relationships. Thus, while violence in the narrower sense is often visible and recognizable, gender-based violence is often normalized, justified or trivialized, which makes it difficult to identify and prevent it.

Project Living Peace Lab: Developing Peer Education Initiatives starts from the assumption that young people are not just passive recipients of knowledge about



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violence but can and must be active actors in recognizing and preventing it. Peer education, as one of the most effective tools in working with young people, enables the topics of violence and gender equality to be conveyed in a way that is understandable, close and contextually relevant to young people. In this way, prevention becomes a process of joint learning and action, in which young people shape strategies that correspond to their real experiences and needs. It is necessary for us as a society to recognize the importance of young people's participation in decision-making processes, especially when it comes to topics that directly affect their everyday lives. In the context of violence, this means that their experience and perspective represent an indispensable resource for understanding the causes, manifestations and consequences of violent behaviour.

According to research, young people are often the first to notice violence in their peer group, but they are also the ones who, if empowered, can react in a way that prevents the escalation of conflict (e.g. Hajncl, Takšić and Kuprešak 2010). Their role is multifaceted, because in addition to detecting problems, young people can also act preventively as educators, peer counsellors, activists, and mediators in resolving conflicts. One of the key challenges is the transition from the passive role of “observer” to the active role of “intervenor”. This is precisely why, in successful approaches to violence prevention, young people are assigned the role of leaders and creators of change. This means giving them space and responsibility but also providing them with the tools and knowledge they need to act.



Peer education is an effective method in working with young people, because it starts from the principle that young people are most receptive to messages coming from their peers. Unlike traditional models, where adults are seen as the only authorities, *the peer -to -peer* approach emphasizes joint learning and sharing experiences.

The benefits of peer education include:

- a) Relevance and familiarity of the messages, because young people recognize that the messages come from those who are going through similar experiences.
- b) Breaking taboos through openness, as topics that are often stigmatized (e.g. sexual harassment, intimate partner violence) are more easily opened in peer dialogue.
- c) Empowering youth, as participants develop communication, leadership and critical thinking skills.
- d) Sustainability, because peer educators continue to spread knowledge in their communities even after formal programs.

Within the *Living Peace Lab* project, peer education is linked to the concept of “young people as knowledge creators”. This means that they do not just transmit pre-prepared information, but also actively participate in researching the local con-



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text of violence, creating educational materials and developing prevention strategies. In this way, the learning process moves from static to dynamic and participatory.

Young people about previous experiences of working on violence prevention projects

Based on interviews with students during workshops within the project, it can be seen that the previous experiences of young people in violence prevention projects and programs are not equal and are significantly conditioned by the educational level and availability of opportunities. Less than half of the participants in the workshops had previous experience with such activities, trainings, workshops, etc., or 36% of the total number of attendees. Interestingly, almost all of those with previous experience were students in the second cycle of studies, which indicates that such activities during primary and secondary education are much less common and less available.

Participants also raised certain criticisms of the projects so far. They often described the workshops as “empty forms that are reduced to protocol”, with “the focus being on fulfilling the agenda and procedures, rather than on the actual outcome or benefits for the participants”. A psychology student (second cycle) described this experience in the following words:



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"Sometimes I feel like a tool that will cover the form, without focusing on the end product. Because of this, every activity and workshop starts to resemble each other."

This perception indicates that the content and essence of the workshops are lost in the pursuit of form and rules, with the end product not meeting the intended goals, and participants not feeling that their needs and interests have truly been considered. A law student (second cycle) points out that it often happens that after such workshops, participants do not have concrete knowledge or new insights:

"It often happens that after such workshops no one has learned anything in the end."

She emphasizes the importance of careful selection of participants and lecturers, as well as content planning, warning that space is not given "just like that" just because of the function, name, or formality that the project requires.

On the other hand, experiences are not exclusively negative. The criminology student (second cycle) states that her impressions are mostly positive, noting that it would be very useful if in the future more emphasis was placed on practical solutions and applicable knowledge:

"Always only a positive experience, but a greater focus on practical solutions would be very useful. You learn from everything, even from not so skilful attempts."



These insights indicate that young people value opportunities for learning and development within projects but also highlight the need for them to be intrinsically relevant, interactive and practically oriented, in order to go beyond form and leave a longer-lasting impact.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESEARCH AND PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The methodological framework of the project relies on the principles of *Challenge-Based Learning* (CBL) and participatory research, where young people do not only participate as respondents, but also as co-creators of the research process and knowledge. The study starts from the problem of different and increasingly complex forms of violence among young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a special focus on gender-based violence, its visible and latent forms, and obstacles to its recognition and reporting. The subject of the research includes perceptions, experiences and attitudes of young people about violence, as well as the potential of peer education (peer-to-peer approach) in the prevention of violence and the construction of a safe and inclusive environments in the educational and broader social context.

The aim of the research is to analyse how young people understand and experience different forms of violence, especially gender-based violence, and to examine the role of young people as active actors in its prevention. An additional aim is to assess the effectiveness of a participatory and peer-based approach in empowering young



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people to recognize, respond to and advocate for non-violent patterns of behaviour, as well as to develop educational and preventive strategies in the community.

The study is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, within a participatory and interdisciplinary research design. The following methods and techniques were used: qualitative content analysis method (narrative analysis and discussions during workshops); survey method, through youth surveys; semi-structured interview method, realized through guided conversations with students, as well as representatives of the non-governmental and government sectors. The following instruments were used: a youth questionnaire, created in a participatory process together with workshop participants; a semi-structured interview protocol interviews; research notes and reflections created during workshops within *the Living Lab* activities.

The research sample consisted of male and female students at the University of Sarajevo, from different study programs and levels of study, who participated in workshops and research activities within the project. The sample is intentional and convenient, formed with the aim of including young people with different educational, social and experiential backgrounds, in order to encompass diverse perspectives on violence and its prevention. An explanation of the sample and other details related to the survey questionnaire, conducted together with the workshop participants, are given in the chapter Analysis and interpretation of the youth questionnaire.



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Unlike traditional teaching approaches and methods, which are based on the mediation of facts and the transfer of pre-prepared knowledge, CBL encourages participants to ask questions, identify and investigate problems, and devise solutions. *Challenge-Based Learning* (CBL) implies an efficient and effective framework for teaching and learning while participants are actively involved in solving real social problems.

Basic characteristics of CBL (The Challenge Institute, 2018), which were the methodological guidelines in the implementation of the project and associated workshops during the process of preparing this study, are:

1. *Student- centred*: young people are at the centre of the process; they not only participate but also shape/identify the problem and propose solutions.
2. *Real- world problems*: the problems are authentic and related to local and global challenges (in our example, it is youth violence and gender-based violence).
3. *Innovation-focused*: the approach emphasizes creativity, requires critical thinking, and encourages innovative strategies in approaching, researching, and solving problems.
4. *Action-oriented*: the process does not stop at theoretical knowledge and facts, but leads to concrete products, campaigns or manuals.
5. *Collaborative*: participants work collaboratively, in teams and with external actors (professors, NGO sector, institutions...).



The CBL methodology is particularly relevant to violence prevention topics, as it encourages young people to connect their personal experiences with broader social processes. It empowers them to be researchers, critics, and innovators in finding solutions.

Expected outcomes of the change and impact on the academic community

One of the key expected outcomes of the project is a change in the way young people understand and recognize violence. Through workshops and participatory research, participants had the opportunity to develop new patterns of thinking and behaviour within various topics with the expected outcomes of change:

1. from passive observers to active actors, as young people explore independently and learn how to react to violence in their environment and how to provide support to victims,
2. from internalized stereotypes to critical understanding, i.e. by deconstructing gender roles and norms, young people explore and recognize how social structures shape violence,
3. from individual responsibility to collective action, recognizing that violence prevention is a shared obligation, not just an individual's personal decision.

Changing perceptions and looking at problems from different perspectives and 'shoes' is particularly important because it influences the creation of a culture of non-violence in student and youth communities. The project has the potential to leave a lasting mark on the academic environment. Faculties and universities are



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not only places of education, but also spaces where social values and norms are shaped. The introduction of peer education and a *peer-to-peer* approach contributes to the transformation of academic institutions into inclusive and safe spaces. Some of the expected impacts on the academic community are:

1. of professors and assistants to recognize and respond to (gender-based) violence;
2. development of policies and procedures for the prevention and sanctioning of violence;
3. networking universities with the civil sector with the aim of strengthening mechanisms for violence prevention;
4. promotion of an interdisciplinary approach (sociology, law, psychology, pedagogy, art, communication studies) as extremely important in understanding social phenomena and adequate responses to those that negatively affect children and youth.



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AMONG YOUTH

Violence in the youth population has certain specificities that distinguish it from violence in other age groups. First of all, young people are in a phase of intensive socialization, which means that violence affects not only their current relationships but also the shaping of their identity, value system and the way they will build relationships in adulthood.

Relationships in adolescent and student relationships are often idealized, but precisely because of the lack of experience and the imbalance of power, young people can be exposed to control, manipulation and physical violence in their intimate relationships. The imbalance of power is, outside the parental home, particularly pronounced in educational institutions, and violence in educational institutions includes various forms of bullying among peers, but also the abuse of authority by teaching staff. A particular problem is sexual harassment, where due to institutional and structural violence there are various obstacles to prevention, but also to reporting when violence has already occurred, which include fear of retaliation, lack of trust in institutions and the normalization of problematic behaviour.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as violence directed against a person based on their sex or gender identity. It is rooted in unequal social power relations and perpetuates gender stereotypes and discrimination. In young people, GBV is particularly dangerous because it occurs during the learning phase of social norms, and the normalization of violence can lead to its reproduction in adult life. Such quasi-normalization of violence leads to obstacles in recognizing the fact that a



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person suffers and experiences violence. We will highlight some of the main obstacles in recognizing GBV, which were given special focus during the study and research:

1. Misconceptions and stereotypes – e.g. yes 'doesn't mean yes'; that someone 'offers himself' with his style of dressing; that the violence is exclusively physical; or that the victims are always women.
2. The 'grey zone' between acceptable behaviour and violence - e.g. due to cultural and social stereotypes and imposed patterns of behaviour, the boundary between flirting and harassment is blurred.
3. Normalization through culture and art – the portrayal of derogatory or violent patterns in films, music, and literature.
4. Abuse of authority – when individuals use their position, privilege or influence to justify or cover up violent behaviour.

One of the key challenges in the prevention of RZN is the fact that different actors can interpret the same event in completely different ways (Hagerlid, Štulhofer, Redert and others 2024). For example, while one person may consider a certain comment as a compliment, another perceives it as insulting and humiliating. Factors influencing different interpretations include the multiplicity of differences and differences, such as gender and gender identity, but also power relations and hierarchies and contextual factors. This multi-layered perception creates obstacles in the creation of universal definitions and protocols for response, **which highlights**



the importance of constant vigilance and support, whereby strengthening peer support, awareness and cooperation have priority.

The concept and typology of violence

According to the World Health Organization, violence is the use of physical force or power, actual or threatened, against oneself, another person, or a group, that either results in injury, death, psychological harm, or deprivation of fundamental rights (more on this in WHO 2025). Although often identified with physical attacks, violence encompasses a whole spectrum of forms, from visible and direct, to subtle, symbolic, and structural. There are different typologies of violence in the literature, which indicates that violence is a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be reduced to individual acts alone, but must also be viewed as a social and cultural problem. We highlight the typology below:

Physical violence is the most visible form and involves the direct application of force that can cause bodily harm. It includes hitting, slapping, choking, pulling, using weapons, as well as forcibly restricting the victim's movement. According to research, physical violence often occurs in the context of peer conflicts, but also in young people's partner relationships (more on this, for example, in Zečević 2010).

Mental or emotional violence includes behaviours that violate the dignity and emotional integrity of the victim. These include insults, threats, humiliation, control, isolation, but also manipulative forms of behaviour that lead to confusion and a feeling of powerlessness in the victim. Emotional violence is considered one of



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the most widespread and at the same time the most difficult to recognize (more on this in Sweet 2019; Katz 2016)

Sexual violence includes any sexual act or attempt to perform it without consent, including harassment, pressure, unwanted comments and touching, and even rape. In the youth population, sexual violence often occurs in the context of intimate relationships, but also in educational institutions, where the abuse of authority within institutions also plays a major role (e.g. see Brownmiller 1975; Gavey 2005; Foucault 1978; Hirsch and Khan 2020).

Economic violence involves the deprivation of resources and control over financial assets. In young people, it manifests itself through dependence on parents, partners or institutions, which further hinders their independence and the ability to report violence (see, for example, Benería 2003).

Institutional and structural violence refers to situations in which social and institutional structures create or maintain inequalities and discrimination. In the case of young people, this may include inadequate protection mechanisms in schools, colleges, or social and legal support systems (e.g., see Galtung 1969; Farmer 2004; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

Cyberbullying as a modern form of violence highlights the problem of violence in the digital world, which is particularly widespread among young people and has profound consequences for mental health (e.g. see in Patchin and Hinduja 2015).





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Workshop I: DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS AS FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS OF COOPERATIVE WORK

Within the project "Living Peace Lab: Developing Peer Education Initiatives " four workshops were held with several goals and topics: to improve participants' skills in the field of assertive communication for cooperation, active listening and non-violent conflict resolution, then on the topic of intersectional discrimination, then on the role of culture and art in the prevention of violence and finally education on forms of digital violence, but also on social networks as a constructive tool for raising awareness about non-violent conflict solutions. The participants were extremely motivated to further develop their ideas and attitudes in the context of a specific social challenge, such as violence, so together with the working group mentors they created interview questions, as well as a survey questionnaire that provided valuable insights into the issue of violence among young people.

In addition to the fact that the project strengthens the cooperation of the academic, non-governmental and public sectors in order to overcome conflicts and the culture of violence in society, what makes the workshops special is the peer-to-peer approach - a method in which young people, with moderation, learned from each other through sharing experiences and skills, so that they could further improve the acquired competences and encourage their peers to do the same. The successful implementation of the EUPeace Living Lab workshops, developed in partnership with young people, who know the challenges of their generation best, shows how important such meetings are, especially when it opens up space for



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young people to design specific research segments and strategies for combating violence.

With the aim of getting to know the participants, establishing the rules of joint work and group dynamics, the first project workshop was held under the title "From *me* and *you* to *us* - diversity and inclusiveness as fundamental assumptions of cooperative work". The first workshop had a primary focus on developing cooperation among the participants in order to orient them towards joint action according to the requirements of the CBL methodology.

Below we present the scenario for the implementation of the first workshop with descriptions of the activities.



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1. WORKSHOP: FROM ME AND YOU TO ME - DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS AS FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS OF COOPERATIVE WORK			
Date	11. 3. 2025.	Duration	09:00–13:00
Participants	Students (maximum 25 in the group)	Host/ moderator	Sandra Bjelan Tatjana Žarković
Workshop objective	The aim of the workshop is to get to know each other and to establish the rules of joint work and group dynamics. Also, the goal of the workshop is to familiarize the participants with assertive communication techniques and to form cooperative groups.		
Expected learning outcomes	After the workshop, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• highlight their own strengths/traits/characteristics/skills that make them competent in nurturing interpersonal relationships;• to review the effectiveness of one's own strategies in dealing with the challenges of meeting the other and the different;• apply assertive communication techniques;• propose topics that can be researched with the aim of advocating for a safe environment for all and activities for the purpose of violence prevention.		
Shapes, teaching and learning techniques	Frontal, group, pair work and individual form of work. Oral presentation (explanation) method, conversation method, illustration and demonstration method, practical work method.		
Didactic tools, aids and materials	Laptop, projector, speakers, stickers, pens/markers, white paper for writing		
Activity/duration	Activity description		
Session 1: Introduction to the project, working methods and establishing group dynamics			
Agreement on the way of working at	After the introductory remarks in which the participants will be introduced to the project and the cycle of workshops they will attend, an		



the workshop (15 min .)	<p>agreement on the way the workshops will work is made. This includes establishing rules that will create a safe environment for each participant, discussing the expected dynamics and structure of the work, as well as the participants' expectations from this/the first workshop. This is an opportunity for the facilitators to emphasize, among other things, that all participants in the workshop will be able to actively participate in a way that best suits their style, but that there are no observers, that it is important to listen to each other and not deviate from the topic during the presentation and discussion, since the time for each activity is limited. It is also important to ask (and adhere to this as facilitators) that everything said in the group stays in the group, and to treat the experiences of all participants with respect and attention.</p>
Activity: "I am" (30 min .)	<p>For the realization of this activity, it is necessary that all the participants as well as the presenters sit on the chairs previously arranged in a circle or semi-circle formation. Ask the participants to introduce themselves to each other by saying their name and some trait/characteristic/skill/ability that starts with the first letter of his/her name. During the introduction activity, after you have given the instructions, start the introduction by first introducing the presenters and in that way modelling the activity and leaving room for those who may not have understood the instructions to know exactly what they need to do. For example: I am Alma - authentic Alma. Or: I'm Sandra - patient Sandra...</p> <p>After everyone has introduced themselves, ask them to write their name on the stickers you prepared earlier and put their name in a visible place so that you can all address each other directly until the end of the workshop.</p> <p>When everyone introduces themselves in this way, ask them how this trait/characteristic/skill/ability helps or hinders them in their daily roles and the relationships they build with people? What other strengths do they have that help them build good interpersonal relationships? What are the challenges they face along the way?</p> <p>Now ask the participants to stand up and to fill the space with their spontaneous movement. During this time, the presenters will read some statements, and they will use their body position in space (grouping) to communicate the degree of agreement with the statement. Here it is important for the leader to show that, for example, in the far right part of</p>



	<p>the space the answer is <i>I completely agree</i>, and in the far left <i>I do not agree at all</i> or yes/no depending on the question. It is important that the statements/questions are non-threatening and use familiarization as the main goal. For example : I grew up with parents who loved music; I grew up in a home with more than 50 books; I have a fear of closed spaces; I am a tactile person and I like touch; I would say that I am a very shy person; I am satisfied with my life and what I have achieved so far; when I think about the future, everything seems clear and simple: I enjoy reading and research ; I like tasks where I have to work with others; I like to go for long walks in the city or in nature, when I get nervous I start breathing slowly and deeply; I am strict with myself; I love the sea; i like snow etc.</p>
Activity: "Experiences and expectations " (45 min)	<p>Brainstorming session where the only goal is to actively listen to students (each of us to record the flow of the story and everything we notice verbally, non-verbally, emotions during the conversation), determine pairs of two by random selection (e.g. by throwing a ball) and ask two of them to moderate the discussions that will take turns every ten minutes. The questions that the facilitators use to focus them on the topic may be: have you attended workshops/lectures/activities on violence so far during your schooling or non-formal education ; have the educations you have attended so far been useful; in what ways have they been useful, and in what aspects perhaps not; have the previous workshops you attended on the topic of violence been implemented in a way that supports and builds a sense of belonging and active participation in building the process and the final result of the workshops, how can this be achieved, how to focus on your understanding, ideas, system of relevance, how to connect the activities here with activities in the community, etc. Use <u>the brainstorming session notes for the following activities.</u></p> <p>This activity ends with the participants writing on stickers of the same color (for example, blue) what they bring to this workshop. This could be a good mood, a trait that can benefit the group, interest, motivation, etc. On a different color of sticker, they will write their expectations, i.e. what they want to take away from the workshop. Everyone can stand up and use the previously prepared <i>flip chart</i>. <i>chart</i> to stick their stickers on. The facilitator will just briefly go through the resources and challenges we have in the group (I BRING stickers) and verbalize the expectations written on the I BRING stickers. It is important that they remain visible during the workshop so that at the end the participants can take the sticker with them if they assess that the expectation has been realized.</p>



Session 2: Assertive communication as a tool for cooperative work	
Lectures with discussion and exercises (60 min)	<p>In this part of the workshop, the facilitator will present the importance of assertive communication in the everyday functioning of every individual, which is best characterized by the skill of standing up for oneself. The skill of standing up for oneself involves standing up for one's own rights, as well as clearly expressing one's needs in an acceptable manner. Adopting this skill affects self-esteem, which contributes to developing a better self-image and more effectively nurturing relationships with others that exclude violence. Assertive communication can help prevent conflicts and resolve them more successfully, but also in standing up for the rights and needs of others.</p> <p>The facilitator will discuss active listening techniques, the use of "I" messages, and conflict resolution using the "winner-winner" method. The techniques will first be briefly presented, followed by examples, and then exercises for participants.</p>
Session 3: Forming cooperative groups. Reflection and instructions for work until the next workshop	
Activity: Forming cooperative groups (40 min)	<p>The facilitators will now discuss with the participants what the priorities are in addressing peer violence with a focus on gender-based violence (the facilitators take notes as they discuss). After the discussion, it is important to summarize what has been said together, name the types and forms of violence; discuss and agree on the priorities, and individually argue why the set of priorities was chosen. Topics can be sexual violence, cyberbullying, verbal violence, physical violence, violence experienced by marginalized groups, the risk of victimization and the individual's ability to report violence and seek protection, prevention of violence in focus, victim blaming and difficulties in identifying violence, ignoring and exclusion as a form of violence, art and violence...</p> <p>Now is the time to form cooperative groups to further work on the priorities that have been agreed upon. It is important to list a sufficient number of priorities in the previous step so that each group can receive a different task. Groups should have 3 or 4 members - more or less can make cooperative work more difficult. Groups can be formed according to criteria, preferences, etc. One should be careful with the instruction that</p>



	<p>they can choose who they want to work with, considering that it can also happen that they are not selected, that is, that someone is left out. Managers can prepare certain criteria in advance and make grouping targeted.</p> <p>After the groups have been formed, it is important to assign topics/problem situations/chosen priorities. State that within each topic and each priority, the gender issue is inevitable and deeply woven - discuss in what way in each of the listed priorities.</p> <p>After the formation of the groups, each group gets its own mentor who helps in the process.</p>
Activity: Reflection and instructions for work until the next workshop (20 min)	<p>In the final activity with the participants, the presenters reflect on the process and content offered at the workshop. Everyone can say a word/sentence/thought/feeling related to the workshop they went through. Also, each of them should stand up to flip chart, find your IZNOSIM sticker and take it if the expectation has been realized. If it has not been partially or completely, they can explain why/what has not been realized and their suggestions for further work.</p> <p>For the next workshop, the cooperative groups are tasked with exploring how different forms of violence affect their community and discussing the role that young people play in generating and understanding possible solutions, placing this in the context of the topics/priorities they have chosen. In this context, they are also tasked with exploring the concepts of intersectionality and intersectional discrimination. The task can be prepared in the form of a presentation, poster presentation, video material, drama, etc.</p>

In order to enable a change in the way of understanding, in addition to the aforementioned workshop, three more were held, where the problem of violence among young people was looked at from different perspectives. More details about the other workshops are given below.



Workshop II: INTERSECTION AND MULTIPLE DISCRIMINATION

By social stratification we mean “a particular form of social inequality that concerns the existence of observable social groups that are ranked above one another in terms of factors such as prestige [reputation] and wealth” (Haralambos and Holborn 2002: 47). On the other hand, discrimination is an action or process that can enhance or worsen social stratification, but it is not the same as stratification itself, which is a broader concept and refers to the entire structure of social inequalities. Social stratification includes various processes and actions that produce and maintain social inequalities, and discrimination can be one of such actions or processes. The manifestation of discrimination is the product of the existence of stratification as a permanent and systemic form of inequality that is determined on the basis of social facts of class, sex, gender, prestige and power in a specific context (Saunders 2001: 2–4).

“Discrimination is any form of abuse and repression, which may or may not include physical violence. Based on the principle of distinction and diversity, it ideologically and through institutions that have the power to monitor and punish, deprives the rights of all those who do not fit into the dominant matrix in one way or another. The principle by which discrimination operates can be linked to both ignorance and privileged knowledge, but its basis is intolerance and power.” (Banović 2011: 17)

Depending on the level at which it is manifested, discrimination can be: a) individual (which refers to discriminatory behaviour exhibited by an individual or group



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of individuals and directed towards other persons or groups), b) institutional (policies or practices of institutions towards individuals and /or certain social groups; institutional policies that favour one group over other groups and/or have a negative impact on other social groups) and c) structural discrimination (the existence of the same policy towards everyone without taking into account the differences that characterize members of minority groups and/or structural obstacles that do not provide groups with equal access to resources) (Mršević 2011: 38–39).

The Law on Gender Equality in BiH (ZoRSBiH) defines the following forms of discrimination: direct, indirect, harassment, sexual harassment, incitement to discrimination and violence based on gender (Article 3, paragraph 2). In addition, in the section relating to definitions, discrimination in language is also recognized as the use of exclusively one grammatical gender as a generic term (Article 9, paragraph e).

According to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination of BiH (Article 4, paragraph 6), “a severe form of discrimination shall be considered discrimination committed against a certain person on multiple grounds referred to in Article 2, paragraph 1 of this Law (multiple discrimination), discrimination committed more than once (repeated discrimination) and discrimination that has existed for a longer period of time (prolonged discrimination)”.

The concept of 'multiple discrimination' refers to all cases of discrimination arising from several discriminatory grounds and can manifest itself in two ways – as 'additive discrimination', "when discrimination is based on several separate grounds, or as ' intersectional discrimination' where two or more grounds for discrimination



interact in such a way that they become inseparable" (EIGE 2016). The concept of intersectionality has pointed to discrimination that occurs at the intersection of identities. It is feminist theorists, among whom Kimberle stands out in particular, Crenshaw, show how different forms of discrimination work together and reinforce discrimination.

An intersectional approach implies an understanding that gender-based violence is not a homogeneous experience, but is also shaped by other social determinants, such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability or socio-economic status. When it comes to gender-based violence, various studies highlight that LGBTQ+ people, ethnic minorities and young people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable, facing multiple discrimination (e.g. in Coulter et al. 2017; Hebarth et al. 2020; Wood et al. 2021). This approach is crucial for the development of effective prevention strategies, as it allows for the recognition of specific vulnerabilities and ensures inclusive protection.

We implemented the above topic with the Project participants in the following workshop scenario, which we present below:

1. WORKSHOP: CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS (INTERSECTION DISCRIMINATION)			
Date	22. 4. 2025.	Duration	09:00–13:00
Participants	Students (maximum 20 in a group)	Host/ Moderator	Amila Ždralović Tatjana Žarković



Workshop objective	The goal of the workshop is to introduce participants to different experiences of discrimination and the intersecting factors that increase possibilities of experiencing discrimination and violence. In addition, the goal is to jointly choose the main topics for the creation and elaboration of a set of questions for data collection in the field together with the participants.
Expected learning outcomes	<p>After the workshop, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize intersecting factors in experiences of exposure to discrimination and violence; • recognize one's own positioning and situated view of others and the different; • create a questionnaire for the purpose of collecting data relevant to the research objective.
Shapes, teaching and learning techniques	Frontal, group, pair work and individual form of work. Oral presentation, discussion, illustrations and demonstration of tasks, practical work.
Didactic tools, aids and materials	Laptop, projector, speakers, stickers, pens/markers, white paper for writing
Activity/duration	Activity description
Session 1: What is intersectional discrimination? Theory and exchange of ideas, knowledge and experiences.	
Theoretical input, discussions and exercises (45 min)	The introduction to the theoretical input begins with an activity that aims to point out different practices of denigration and disparagement that are reflected in language itself. Different words are written on a piece of paper that must be as striking as possible, where the goal of the game is to use the resulting word (hidden and drawn from the hat) in one sentence. The resulting word must be packaged and hidden in the sentence in such a way that it cannot be guessed which is the secret word. Anyone who succeeds in doing so gets points. One group of words



	<p>written on a piece of paper, which each participant will draw, will be generally striking, but neutral, e.g. flamingos, cockpit, anteater, cello, connotation, glitter, etc.; and another group of words that are striking, but not neutral, but also bring with them the issue of political correctness; e.g. gypsy, illegal, invalid, cross-eyed, divorcée, etc. Once they get the words, they also come up with situations in which the word must be used, for example : you are in a large elevator with several strangers and the elevator is stuck; you are in a yoga class; you have received a fortune cookie , read what it says on it; you are recounting a dream that never came true; you are on a plane and you feel strong turbulence; you are at a wedding and you are giving a toast to the newlyweds; you are encouraging a friend to stand up to her superiors, you are on a picnic in a beautiful meadow full of flowers, you are trying to fly with the wings you made and you succeed, etc. Participants are instructed that if they wish, they can also use the help of AI on their phone to create sentences that will hide the secret word in given situations.</p> <p>After the above activity, a discussion begins about how difficult it was to hide both previously mentioned groups of words and reflections on the previous game.</p> <p>After the discussion, the moderators will present the theoretical and legislative concepts of intersectional and multiple discrimination and, based on these inputs, encourage further discussion.</p>
Brainstorming session: “Action and reaction” (45 min)	<p>Brainstorming session where the only goal is to actively listen to the students (each of us notes the flow of the story and everything we notice verbally, non-verbally, emotions during the conversation), determine pairs of two by random selection (e.g. by throwing a ball) and ask two to moderate the discussions, which will take turns every ten minutes. Given that, according to research, the response (adequate reaction) of peers to violence or rudeness that they notice and that occurs in their environment is crucial for reducing peer violence, the facilitators will further direct the discussion with questions:</p> <p>– does it happen; is there an adequate response; when yes, when no; why; is it sometimes difficult to recognize violence and is that the reason why we do not react; have we become numb to violence and rudeness and why; if so, why have we become numb, what factors can we distinguish there; how much of a problem is fear; how to get rid of it; how to</p>



	<p>seek support in case of fear of reacting; if there is a reaction to violence, how to react, how to encourage it, promote an increase in reactions, raise awareness of the importance of reactions, is it important? Use the brainstorming session notes for the following activities.</p> <p>The issue of adequate and timely response should be further deepened through – brainstorming on intersecting factors, such as: 1. gender, 2. socio -economic status, 3. institutional influences and responses. Emphasize the issues of institutions and legal regulations and recognition in positive law. Each factor will be discussed separately – e.g. whether the situation would change further if the person were Roma, LGBT, or a person without parental care.</p>
2nd session: How to develop a questionnaire; joint work on the creation of questionnaires according to selected topics and priorities	
Lectures with discussion and exercises (60 min)	<p>In this part of the workshop, the facilitator will present basic academic writing skills (citing and searching for sources) and basic rules for creating questionnaires, as well as the most common mistakes that must be avoided.</p> <p>After the presentation of the basic rules, the joint work on the preparation of the questionnaire begins. Each of the previously formed groups (according to priorities) will highlight the main topics, which they consider to be particularly important, and further, according to individual groups and their topics and sub-topics, specific issues will be jointly developed. Use notes from previous brainstorming sessions to create the questionnaire. The questionnaire is intended for young people, and the group will discuss the target group and the age of the respondents. After the questionnaire is created, by the next session everyone has to find 20 people to complete the questionnaire with and bring the completed questionnaires to the next meeting.</p>
Presentations of completed tasks by individual groups (45 min)	Presentations of completed assignments (assignment received at the previous session during the first workshop), where cooperative groups explored how different forms of violence affect their community and discussed the role that young people play in generating and understanding



	possible solutions, placing this in the context of the topics/priorities they chose, and in that context exploring the concept of intersectionality and intersectional discrimination. The assignment is presented in the form of a presentation, poster presentation, video material , drama, etc. Within each topic and each priority, the gender issue is inevitable and deeply embedded, and again the issue of gender was specifically thematized in the groups in relation to each of the topics and presentations.
Session 3: Reflection and instructions for work until the next workshop	
Activity: Reflection and instructions for work until the next workshop (15 min)	<p>In the final activity with the participants, the presenters reflect on the process and content offered at the workshop. Everyone can say a word/sentence/thought/feeling related to the workshop they went through.</p> <p>For the next workshop, the cooperative groups are tasked with jointly preparing questions for the BiH Agency for Gender Equality and representatives of the CURE Foundation, based on the above priorities. The activities of the aforementioned organizations will be previously researched. The facilitators will announce their arrival at the next workshops and provide instructions for further work on the youth questionnaires.</p>

Workshop III: ART, POWER AND VIOLENCE OF VISUALIZATION

Visual culture shapes the ways in which we experience the world, identity, and “otherness.” Artistic canons are not neutral but necessarily carry within them gender and social biases. Haraway in her work *Situated Knowledges* (1988) points out that “seeing is always a question of the power to see – and, quite possibly, of the violence implied through our practices of visualization”. Longino (2004) emphasizes that feminist epistemology exposes precisely this “gender bias” that permeates both narrow academic fields and disciplines, as well as broader visual and ar-



tistic practices. This highlights the importance of moving away from universal narratives, and the necessity of starting from partial perspectives that recognize historical and gender contexts.

Critical reflection on art raises the question: who has the right to interpret the work and from whose perspective? Traditional education presents art and literature through universalist narratives, thereby implicitly denying the identity of the observer. Vogel (1988) points out that many “classical” works of art, such as François Boucher’s Rococo nudes, are “stripped of their full historical meaning and consigned to the realm of universals,” and as such function as a mechanism of ideological mystification. The subjects (most often women) are reduced to objects of aesthetic or sensual enjoyment, while the audience is taught to view it as “art,” devoid of the real relations of power and violence that it implies.

In this way, art can become a space in which violence is normalized, concealed, and legitimized through aesthetics. Hall (1997) speaks of the process of “decoding” cultural messages and thus emphasizes that the audience never consumes content passively but interprets it in relation to their own positions and contexts. Butler (1990) further emphasizes that identity is imposed as a normative ideal, and thus gender is not just a descriptive category, but a product of the political and cultural centres in which it is constantly maintained. This means that cultural works not only reflect reality but actively shape gender identities and power relations. When violence is portrayed as romantic, desirable, or trivial (e.g., through films, music, popular culture), young people adopt these patterns as part of the “normal.”



Culture and Education: The Challenge of Transformation

Culture and art are not neutral spheres but, on the contrary, deeply political and gendered. Their power to shape perceptions of identity, violence and power can be used both to reproduce patriarchal patterns and to deconstruct them. When art is used as a space for critique and participatory learning, it becomes a means of preventing violence and empowering young people. This is how its full potential is realized, which is for art to be not just a simple reflection of society, but also one that recognizes and directly or indirectly initiates and monitors social change.

For art to have a preventive function, it is also necessary to transform the way it is taught and presented. Instead of a universalistic and ahistorical approach, a critical education is needed that encourages dialogue, questioning, and questioning of dominant narratives.

This is exactly where art connects with methodologies like Challenge-Based Learning, where young people develop critical thinking through artistic creation and analysis, become aware of the gender dimensions of violence, and create new narratives of resistance.

We implemented the above topic with the Project participants in the following workshop scenario, which we present below:

2. WORKSHOP: ART AND MEDIA – A TWO-EDGED SWORD			
Date	13. 5. 2025.	Duration	09:00–13:00



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Participants	Students (maximum 20 in a group)	Host/ Moderator	Tatjana Žarković Amila Ždralović
Workshop objective	The aim of the workshop is to explore the role of media and art in the reproduction of harmful patterns associated with violence on the one hand, and on the other hand the benefits of using media and art in the prevention of violence. In addition, the aim is to jointly select the main topics with the participants for the creation of an in-depth interview protocol and the development of a set of questions for data collection, using the expert interview technique.		
Expected learning outcomes	After the workshop, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• approach media content critically;• critically approach different artistic expressive forms and contents of culture and art;• create a set of interview questions for the purpose of collecting data relevant to the research objective.		
Shapes, teaching and learning techniques	Frontal, group, pair work and individual form of work. Oral presentation, discussion, illustrations and demonstration of tasks, practical work.		
Didactic tools, aids and materials	Laptop, projector, speakers, stickers, pens/markers, white paper for writing.		
Activity/duration	Activity description		
Session 1: Art and Media – a double-edged sword			
Theoretical input, discussions and exercises (30 min)	Presentation of different artistic expressions and discussion of experiences when encountering selected works of art in groups. Theoretical input on the issue of exclusion from the field of art based on various factors (class, gender, race, disability...). Good practices in using art. Aesthetic insecurity vs. Artistic canon. The question of authority. The critical mind in encountering art has gender – the truth from a different perspective, different from what we are taught within formal education – Boucher’s nude (example with Lisa Vogel). Also discuss the end		



	of the film Kuduz "Let me fall and kill you" (https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x248ln9) from different perspectives and views. Art and media. Art and social networks.
Elaboration of topics and questions for the interview with experts (30 min .)	<p>Lecture and theoretical input: Main rules when choosing topics for creating a protocol for an in-depth interview and developing a set of questions for data collection, using the interview technique with experts. Protocol handout. How to make a transcript handout.</p> <p>Presentation of completed tasks from the previous session where, according to the selected priorities, the groups prepared questions for the BiH Agency for Gender Equality and representatives of the CURE Foundation. Further elaboration of topics and interview questions, in order to prepare and finalize questions for the planned visits during the day. Instruct the groups that they will conduct interviews/conversations based on the prepared questions, and to record these interviews, in order to prepare a transcript and analysis of the interviews (respecting research ethics and following interview protocols).</p>
Session 2: Interviews and visits by representatives from the non-governmental and governmental sectors	
Visit by representatives of the NGO CURE Foundation, (60 min)	Visit by representatives of the CURE Foundation, a short presentation of their work and interviews with representatives in groups (a visit by several representatives of the CURE Foundation is planned, where each will be interviewed separately in groups). Instruct the groups to record the conversations/interviews, in order to make a transcript and analysis of the interviews.
Visit of representatives of the ARS BiH to the MHRR (60 min)	Visit of representatives of the ARS BiH to the MHRR, a short presentation of their work and interviews with representatives in groups (a visit of several representatives of the ARS BiH to the MHRR is planned, where all will be interviewed separately in groups). Instruct the groups to record the conversations/interviews, in order to make a transcript and analysis of the interviews.
Session 3: Reflection and instructions for work until the next workshop	



Activity: Reflection and instructions for work until the next workshop (30 min)	<p>In the final activity with the participants, the presenters reflect on the process and content offered at the workshop. Everyone can say a word/sentence/thought/feeling related to the workshop they went through.</p> <p>For the next workshop, the cooperative groups are tasked with preparing transcripts and analysing interviews with representatives of the government and non-governmental sectors.</p>
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Workshop IV: MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks and digital media play a key role in shaping young people’s perceptions of violence today. For young people, digital media have become a key space for socialization, making them an indispensable factor, if not the most important form of influence, in cultivating attitudes, behaviours, and social expectations. The virtual world opens up opportunities for creative expression, the constitution of digital identities, and “communication of the self” (Castells 2009). In this sense, virtual identity represents a key space for self-presentation, through which young people shape their personal and social identities, maintain social connections, and internalize the norms and values of the digital environment.

Another important aspect of communication in the virtual sphere that is important for a better understanding of online verbal and psychological violence is the possibility of relative anonymity (Kardon 2013), which is provided by digital media with fake profiles, and which can be an additional trigger for this behaviour. This dimension is closely related to the increased frequency of cyberbullying and other forms of online aggressive behaviour. In the context of violence in general, as well as gender-based violence, social media are becoming an easily accessible source of vio-



lent content despite the regulation and rules of the platforms. However, social networks are not only a place of passive exposure to violent content, but also act as active instruments of violence, e.g. through hate speech, cyberbullying, doxing and other forms of digital aggression.

As Zgrabljic points out Rotar (2005) adequately addressing the problem of violence in the media requires the development of a comprehensive approach that assumes raising awareness in society about this problem, media literacy of citizens, strengthening media ethical and professional standards, as well as modernizing legal solutions in accordance with today's social conditions. Relevant international institutions, such as the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, have long recognized digital violence as a serious form of gender-based violence and require their members to integrate the fight against digital violence into national strategies for the protection of women and children. In accordance with these guidelines and the EU Directive, the 2025 reforms of the Criminal Code ² of the FBiH brought a new approach to the prevention and sanctioning of gender-based, domestic and digital violence. The introduction of ICT terminology has for the first time legally specified that the Internet, social networks and electronic devices can represent instruments for committing criminal offenses, which reflects the application of appropriate legislative solutions to the pressing problem. In this way, a clear legal basis has been provided for the prosecution of criminal offenses committed through digital media,

² <https://depo.ba/clanak/277772/izmjene-zakona-fbih-prosle-nezapazeno-rodno-i-digitalno-na-silje-vise-nije-nekaznjivo> (access 5 September 2025)



which disproportionately affects women due to gender-based patterns of discrimination, which are present in different socio-cultural contexts. According to the definition of the European Institute for Gender Equality, online violence against women and girls includes the following:

Internet violence against women and girls is gender-based violence carried out through electronic communication and the Internet. Although online violence can affect both men and women, women and girls are exposed to different and more traumatic forms of online violence. There are various forms of online violence against women and girls, including but not limited to online stalking, involuntary pornography (or “revenge pornography”), gender-based slurs, hate speech and harassment, slut-shaming, offering unwanted pornography, sextortion, rape and death threats, and electronically assisted human trafficking. Internet violence is not a separate phenomenon separated from violence in the “real world” since it often follows the same patterns as offline violence.³

The definition presented highlights an important dimension, which is that violence that occurs online is often a continuation of violence that occurs in the world outside the digital space. In discussions with workshop participants, in the context of gender-based violence, the case of femicide of Nizama Hećimović from 2023 when the perpetrator broadcast the crime live via the Instagram platform, stood out as

³ https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1311?language_content_entity=hr (access 10/06/2025)



particularly disturbing. There is an open question about the shortcomings of the regulation system on social networks, responsibility and the speed of removal of disturbing content, such as this one. In addition, as part of the social reproduction of violence, sensationalist media coverage was emphasized, which, along with media commercialization, represents a disease of today's media reality, and at the same time prevents a responsible public treatment of a serious social problem.

During further discussions at the workshop, attention was focused on the connection between the public social reaction to violence against women (or the lack thereof, or rather the brevity of it) in relation to the normalization of violence or the reproduction of existing patriarchal patterns. It was concluded that such trends are favoured by modern digital environments, networked with a multitude of information that changes quickly and occupies media space for a short time. It was also emphasized that today artificial intelligence (AI) is posing a significant challenge in the field of gender-based violence, especially due to the development of *deepfake* content. Social networks have also been considered a powerful tool for empowering women's voices, as demonstrated by the global movement called #MeToo or the regional women's initiative against sexual harassment and violence #IDidn'tAsk, which have enabled women to, by sharing their own experiences with violence, point out to the wider public the prevalence and frequency of this problem. By publicly calling perpetrators of violence to account and demanding better protection of women's rights, the campaigns have also influenced the social stigmatization of victims of violence. In this sense, the power dynamics in contexts



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of gender inequality are even clearer, where victims of violence are regularly marginalized or silenced through mechanisms of social stigmatization. Students demonstrated a high level of media and information literacy through the workshops held, which was confirmed by their ability to competently recognize and adequately respond to online violence by reporting profiles, posts or comments on social networks based on violent content, harassment or hate speech.

We implemented the above topic with the Project participants in the following workshop scenario, which we present below:

3. WORKSHOP: MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKS AS A TOOL			
Date	16. 9. 2025.	Duration	09:00–13:00
Participants	Students (maximum 20 in a group)	Host/ Moderator	Jelena Gaković Tatjana Žarković
Workshop objective	The goal of the workshop is to educate young people on how to use social media as a tool to combat violence, raise awareness and promote non-violent conflict solutions. Through the workshop, participants will develop skills to recognize, prevent and report online violence, as well as to use social media for positive purposes.		
Expected learning outcomes	After the workshop, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• recognize different forms of online violence, including cyberbullying, verbal violence, etc., and understand their consequences;• report violence or hate speech through social networks using anonymous or public mechanisms;• know what resources and organizations offer assistance to victims of violence;• develop digital literacy skills, including understanding safety measures on the Internet and ethical behaviour on social networks.		
Shapes,	Frontal, group, pair work and individual form of work.		



teaching and learning techniques	Oral presentation, discussion, illustrations and demonstration of tasks, practical work.
Didactic tools, aids and materials	Laptop, projector, speakers, stickers, pens/markers, white paper for writing
Activity/duration	Activity description
Session 1: Media and social networks as a tool	
Theoretical input, discussions and exercises (30 min)	<p>I Theoretical input: Instructions and discussion on how to report violence or hate speech via social media using anonymous or public mechanisms.</p> <p>The role of individuals, groups and social networks.</p> <p>Acquaint those involved with resources and organizations that offer help to victims of violence.</p> <p>II Online campaigns for violence prevention and awareness raising in your (virtual) community:</p> <p>Exercise: Recognizing online violence. Task: Students will be given several examples of real posts, videos, or messages from social networks (anonymous or simulated) where they need to recognize different forms of violence. The task also includes suggesting reactions or ways to report such content.</p> <p>Discussion: What are the strategies for responding to online violence, and what responsibilities do platforms have?</p>
Brainstorming session and task: "Action and reaction" (60 min)	<p>A brainstorming session where the goal is to actively listen to students (record the flow of the story and everything we notice verbally, non-verbally, emotions during the conversation), determine pairs of two by random selection (e.g. by throwing a ball) and ask two to moderate the discussions that will take turns every ten minutes. The questions that the facilitators focus on and that serve as the basis for brainstorming are: What are the most common forms of violence you encounter online? How do social networks affect violence among young people? Can social networks be a tool for spreading violence? In what way? Can</p>



	<p>social networks also help in the fight against violence? If so, how? What is cyberbullying, and how do we recognize it? What messages or content on social networks can cause violence or have a negative impact on young people? How can we use social networks to raise awareness about violence among young people? What messages do you think would be the most powerful in campaigns against violence? What social networks, hashtags, video content or creative ideas for fighting violence can you suggest? What are some ways to help survivors of violence, especially when the violence happens online? What resources or organizations can we use to report bullying on social media? How can we promote positive values, such as respect, kindness and understanding through social media? How can we protect ourselves from negative or violent content online? How can we build a community that opposes violence on social media? What are the motives that could inspire young people to become active in the fight against violence? How could we create more positive content on social networks that can be an inspiration to young people? What would be most useful in video content, stories or posts that call for non-violence and respect?</p> <p>These questions are designed to encourage participants to think, discuss, and creatively present ideas. The workshop leaders will use them to initiate discussion while allowing participants to provide their own perspectives on problems and solutions. The brainstorming session notes will be used for subsequent activities.</p> <p>Task 1 and brainstorming within groups: Students will work in groups to design and create an online campaign that addresses youth violence prevention. This may include creating posts, video content, hashtags, and a call to action for their community.</p> <p>Brainstorming: How can we engage young people in violence prevention campaigns using social media?</p> <p>Task 2: Agree on the finalization of the manual and the date and method of promotion. Jointly plan and design the promotion of the manual live and on social networks.</p>
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	Brainstorming How to present the manual in your local communities, ideas: importance - social networks, video, influencers, research, contextual analysis, propose and identify innovative solutions and perspectives on the problem through discussions; how to use existing resources and social networks to promote the Manual.
Session 2: Presentations of collected data and data analysis by groups	
Discussions and exercises (45 min)	<p>In this session 2, we aim to encourage young people to recognize and express the need for additional concrete knowledge and skills in order to be even more empowered to actively act against violence and encourage positive change. Topics that could raise the issue of the need for additional knowledge or skills are, for example, political culture, awareness-raising and activism; then negotiation, critical thinking and strategic communication, leadership skills, etc.</p> <p>Question to participants: <i>“What skills do you consider most important for initiating social change?”</i></p> <p>Group discussion (15 minutes) Objective: To reflect on one's own skills and identify strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>Activity: Divide participants into groups (4–5 people each). Each group is given a scenario that includes a social problem (e.g. homelessness, climate change, discrimination) and a question about how they would react in that situation. For example: <i>“Your school or community is facing an increase in peer violence. How would you launch an initiative to raise awareness about this problem?”</i> The group should discuss and choose which skills are most important for successfully solving the problems listed and how they would apply them in practice. Each group writes on a flipchart or whiteboard the skills they consider to be key to solving the problem. Finally, ask all participants: <i>“What skills do you think you lack the most, and which ones would you like to develop?”</i></p> <p>Self-assessment and action plan (10 minutes)</p>



	Activity: Distribute cards on which participants write down which skills they think they already have and which skills they want to develop. Each participant then shares with the group one skill they want to improve and a brief plan for how they can develop it (e.g., participating in training, reading literature, engaging in community initiatives).
Presentations of completed tasks by individual groups (60 min)	<p>Presentations of completed tasks in group exercises from the previous meeting. Presentations of collected data and data analysis by groups. The task is presented in the form of a presentation, poster presentation, video material, drama presentation, etc.</p> <p>Within each topic and each priority, the gender issue is inevitably and deeply woven - discuss in what way in each of the mentioned topics and presentations and go through it again in groups.</p>
Session 3: Reflection and instructions for work until the next workshop	
Activity: Reflection and instructions for further work (15 min)	<p>In the final activity with the participants, the presenters reflect on the process and content offered at the workshop. Everyone can say a word/sentence/thought/feeling related to the workshop they went through.</p> <p>Task: Create a list of suggestions for improving the knowledge and skills of young people (soft skills), based on discussions at the workshop,</p> <p>Structure of the proposal presentation: a) Introduction; b) Identification of required skills; c) Proposed strategy plan; d) Conclusion and reflection; e) Questions and discussion.</p>

VIOLENCE PREVENTION OR WHAT YOUTH CAN DO DIFFERENTLY?

PEOPLE DO DIFFERENTLY? were written by representatives of the formed cooperative groups of participants in the project, in cooperation with the mentors in the groups. The authors of the texts are: Amina Omerović and Mija Vukšić - "The role of bystanders"; Merima Tarakčija and Asja Kurtagić - "The role of culture and art in



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the prevention of violence” and Lejla Smajević - “From definition to protection: a multidimensional approach to violence in society”.

The Role of Bystanders⁴

The concept of so-called **bystander intervention** is gaining increasing importance. It is based on the idea that bystanders, although not directly involved in a violent act, have the power to react and prevent escalation. For young people, the role of bystanders is of crucial importance because they often find themselves in situations where violence is not reported but is visible within a peer group.

Barriers to active bystander intervention include:

- Fear of negative consequences or retaliation.
- Uncertainty about whether certain behaviour actually constitutes violence.
- Normalization of violent behaviour (“it’s just a joke”, “that’s how everyone behaves”, etc.).

Violence, in itself, cannot be seen as an isolated act between the perpetrator and the victim, but rather represents a social problem that undermines security, solidarity and cohesion within communities, which proves that violence does not only affect the direct participants but also the entire society, disrupting the feeling of trust and social cohesion itself, and as a result normalizing aggression. Although

⁴ The text under this title was written by students **Amina Omerović and Mija Vukšić**, members of the Research Project Team.



bystanders often have the opportunity to stop the violence or at least mitigate its consequences, they often remain passive. Their passivity most often stems from unclear boundaries between acceptable and violent behaviour, fear of judgment, a sense of powerlessness or lack of support and knowledge / skills on how to react.

If violence becomes a part of everyday life, young people may perceive it as socially acceptable behaviour. Passive bystander behaviour does not, in fact, mean neutrality, although it is characteristic of our communities that the concept of passivity is equated with the concept of neutrality. An active reaction can save the victim and send a very clear message about the unacceptability of violence in society.

The role of bystanders of violence in preventing and combating violence

Although bystanders are not directly involved in the act of violence and represent a third party, they have the potential power to influence the outcome of the act of violence. The reaction of bystanders can be crucial in stopping the violence, providing support to the victim, but also in sending a clear message that violence is unacceptable. However, numerous studies have shown that bystanders very often remain passive, thereby enabling the continuation of violent behaviour and further discouraging victims from seeking help. Common reasons for children providing active or passive support to perpetrators of violence are close relationships with the perpetrator and ignorance or antipathy towards the victim, which is usually summarized in the phrase “friend with the perpetrator, enemy with the victim” (Thornberg et al. 2012, according to Bilić 2013: 201).



Possible reasons for bystander passivity in the literature include: learned helplessness, which implies that bystanders have been convinced in the past that violence goes unpunished, and therefore believe that there is no need to react; normalization of violence that occurs due to frequent exposure to violence, and precisely because of that exposure, everyone in the community considers it a normal and common occurrence; trivialization of the situation; egoistic motives, and the like (Bilić 2013: 203). In our communities, it is also characteristic that there are prejudices against certain groups, so for example, if it is a woman from a marginalized ethnic group, bystanders believe that the violence in that case is less serious or even that the victim herself is responsible for the situation that is happening to her, and the credibility of the victim's statement is sometimes questioned. Bystanders may also have empathy, depending on how much a victim fits into social norms and values. It very often happens that people are neglected or favoured depending on how society accepts them. It is important to emphasize that bystanders play an important, even crucial, role in shaping social reactions to violence, including institutional responses to violence.

The grey area between violence and acceptable behaviour

The role of the observer of violence, as we have already indicated, cannot be reduced to a neutral or passive position, but the observer appears as an active component of the reproduction of violence through the “grey zone” of moral responsibility. In layman’s terms, we can define the “grey zone” as the “space” of the (un)permitted, i.e. a situation that is not legally regulated. Bourdieu introduces the concept of so-called symbolic violence into sociological discourse. As the backbone



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of contemporary sociology, Bourdieu developed an analysis that describes the interaction of society, status and body (Ignatow 2009). According to Bourdieu's theory, an individual habitus consists of unconscious schemas, acquired through constant exposure to social conditioning, through which we perceive, judge and act in the world" (Bourdieu 1972/1977; Wacquant 2008, according to Wiegmann 2017: 96–97). Therefore, there are meeting places, or so-called "social arenas", professional, personal, political fields, etc., but roles and power relations are regulated by capital (Wiegmann 2017). This implies that habitus are subject to external influences and that the influence of the media, socialization in several stages and the very institutionalization of permitted behaviour are deeply woven into the categorical apparatus. Therefore, Bourdieu introduces the concept of "symbolic violence", that is, that language, socialization, habits, the routinization of everyday life are key in creating a "symbolic universe" (Berger and Luckmann).

"Symbolic universe" is a term introduced into sociology by Berger and Luckmann to explain the construction of social reality, according to which social reality is based on the following fundamental dialectic: "Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product." (Berger and Luckmann, 1966/1992: 82) Ideas, symbols and patterns of behaviour that individuals create in everyday interactions become "objective" reality, that is, subjective constructions become objective and naturalized. The human mind has a tendency to put everything in order (Berger and Luckmann call this phenomenon deposition or sedimentation of knowledge), and therefore their everyday life, and from this originates the institutionalization of behaviour patterns through the process of deposition of knowledge



and tradition, which must undergo processes of legitimation so that knowledge can be passed on to the next generation and thus be legitimate and justified (Berger and Luckmann 1966/1992). A common language is essential for this process, which "... then allows its incorporation into a wider corpus of tradition through moral teaching, inspiring poetry, religious allegory, and so on" (Berger and Luckmann 1966/1992: 90). Symbolic violence thus becomes sedimented if the same knowledge that is legitimized, whether morally, socially, or legally, is passed on to new generations. The passivity of observers is often a reflection of acceptance of the order, not individual weakness, whether it is school violence, violence against women, racist practices, or authoritarian political structures, as the concept of "symbolic violence" suggests, where a "grey zone" is formed between awareness of injustice and social pressure not to react, i.e. to maintain the position of a safe observer for other reasons, which this research will examine.

The Bystander effect observer

The term "The Bystander Effect " derived from psychology refers to "the inhibiting influence of the presence of others on a person's willingness to help someone in need" (Blagg 2025). We can explain it as a phenomenon in which people are less willing to help someone in need when more people are present, which is supported by the theories of explanation discussed earlier in the text, according to which violence is normalized. The bystander effect, "Bystanderism", as a psychological and social phenomenon, reveals the mechanisms behind human passivity in situations of violence. Although it is often believed that most people would spontaneously



help in crisis situations, research shows that the presence of others significantly reduces individual responsibility and willingness to act.

Effect bystander apathy was first investigated by Darley and Latané (1968), who found that individuals were less likely to intervene when they were not the only witnesses. Their study showed that 100% of participants helped when they were alone, while only 62% did so when they were in a group (Hortensius and De Gelder 2018). According to the authors, “three psychological factors are thought to facilitate bystander apathy:

- a) feeling of less responsibility when more observers are present (diffusion of responsibility),
- b) fear of unfavourable public condemnation when helping (fear of evaluation), and
- c) the belief that, since no one else is helping, the situation is not actually an emergency (pluralistic ignorance) (Hortensius and De Gelder 2018).

In revising the analysis of this research Hortensius and De Gelder have created a new theoretical perspective that explains bystander apathy in the face of violence, in which they include “emotional, motivational, and dispositional aspects. In the presence of other bystanders, personal discomfort is intensified, and fixed patterns of avoidance and freezing action dominate” (Hortensius and De Gelder 2018).



The role of young people in the prevention of violence

Young people relatively often find themselves in the position of bystanders to violence, whether it is peer violence, domestic violence or digital violence. As previously stated, although they are not directly involved as victims or perpetrators, bystanders have the potential power to influence the outcome of an act of violence. Various studies have shown that factors such as empathy, feelings of self-confidence and moral reasoning are associated with the likelihood of a young person intervening when witnessing violence. Research conducted by Hu et al. (2023) showed that adolescents with a higher level of empathy and self-confidence are more likely to help victims, especially those young people who believe in their abilities and that their actions will not have negative consequences. One of the main reasons for passivity in young people is the fear of being blamed; many of them fear being judged by their peers, losing their status in the group, or being retaliated against by the perpetrator. In this case, numerous preventive programs that strengthen the resilience and social skills of young people play a very important role.

Lee et al. (2019) detail the specific action plans of young people after numerous training sessions, and it was shown that students indeed developed a number of nonviolent strategies for dealing with bullies. Strategies such as redirecting attention, involving adults, or working together with other witnesses have proven to be effective methods of nonviolent intervention.



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In addition to the above direct methods, young bystanders can play a very important role in spreading non-violent values within their communities. When young people feel that they are part of an environment that does not tolerate violence, they are more willing to react, and schools also play a very important role in this. Schools and communities also need to systematically develop a culture of non-violence, not only through punitive measures but also through numerous education, conversations and empowerment. What is very rarely emphasized is that bystander reactions themselves are not always simple, as stated in the literature, some young people do not recognize violence because it can be subtle, while others do not have enough self-confidence to act correctly. It is particularly important to work with young people to develop empathy and understanding of the consequences of violence for the victim, but also for society as a whole. Ultimately, young people are not just the future, as is often stated in the public sphere, young people are the present and their role as bystanders can have an extremely positive effect, but only if they are given enough knowledge, space and support to recognize violence and respond to it adequately. Investing in educational programs that develop emotional literacy, nonviolent communication, and intervention strategies means investing in a safer and healthier society.



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The role of culture and art in the prevention of violence⁵

Culture and art have an ambiguous role in relation to violence. On the one hand, they can be a mechanism for the normalization and reproduction of gender stereotypes and hierarchies of power, while on the other hand they represent a space for critique, emancipation and prevention of violence. Understanding art as a “field of struggle” (Bourdieu) allows us to see its transformative power, but also the risks of reproducing violent patterns.

The concept of authority occupies a key place in understanding social structures and mechanisms of power. It can be understood as the exercise of legitimate influence by one social actor over another. There are many ways in which an individual or entity can influence the behaviour of another, but not all of them have the same legitimacy to be considered authority (Britannica 2025). Precisely because authority is based on recognition and legitimacy, it carries the potential for abuse. Related terms such as “abuse of power ” occur more often in legal and institutional contexts. However, the concept of “abuse of authority” is not clearly defined or unambiguously accepted but is used in different disciplines and with different accents. In this paper, a working definition will be used according to which “abuse of authority” means any use of power, position or trust arising from a recognized role or status, whether formal or informal, in a manner contrary to its legitimate purpose, with the aim of achieving personal benefit or causing harm to others. This definition allows us to view the concept beyond the exclusively legal framework

⁵ The text under this title was written by students **Merima Tarakčija and Asja Kurtagić**, members of the Research Project Team.



and to analyse its broader dimensions: cultural and artistic, socio-hierarchical, symbolic and its impact on the public.

Culture and the arts are areas where authority can have a powerful, but often subtle, influence. Authority in culture is not limited to institutions such as museums, academies or cultural councils, but also applies to individuals, such as artists, critics and intellectuals, i.e. all those who shape the tastes and value orientations of society. Raymond Williams emphasizes that culture is never neutral but always connected to certain power structures (Williams 1983).

Abuse of authority in culture and the arts can take many forms. One of them is the imposition of “cultural standards,” which privilege certain aesthetic forms while marginalizing others. This can lead to elitism and the exclusion of social groups whose expressions do not conform to dominant norms (Williams 1983). Culture and the arts can also be “instrumentalized for political purposes,” as in propaganda, where the authority of artists or cultural institutions serves to reinforce hegemonic narratives (Williams 1983). In this way, the cultural field becomes a space for the legitimization of authority, but also for its abuse through the manipulation of symbols and values (Williams 1983).

Hierarchical relations form the backbone of social structures and organizations. In modern organizations, hierarchy is necessary for efficient functioning, but it also opens up space for abuses and multi-layered discrimination. These include nepotism, clientelism, selective enforcement of rules, but also informal pressure on subordinates. Abuse of authority in a hierarchy may not always be visible – it is often



concealed through “normalized” practices of obedience and discipline. Thus, hierarchical relations become ambivalent: on the one hand, they enable stability, and on the other hand, they produce power asymmetries that can turn into mechanisms of domination (Weber 1978).

One of the most influential concepts for understanding the abuse of authority at a subtle level is “symbolic violence” developed by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1991). It is a form of violence that is not recognized as violence but is experienced as a natural and legitimate order. Symbolic violence operates through language, education, cultural norms and everyday practices that impose certain values and thus reproduce existing power relations (Bourdieu 1991). In this sense, the abuse of authority does not have to be reflected in direct repression or physical violence, but in “the imposition of norms that individuals accept as self-evident” (Bourdieu 1991). An example of this is gender roles: when a certain hierarchy is justified by “natural” differences, even though it is a social construction. Symbolic violence is particularly dangerous because it works from the inside: subordinates adopt the view of the dominant and thus unconsciously participate in their own subordination (Bourdieu 1991). This “grey zone” shows how the abuse of authority can be invisible, yet extremely effective in maintaining social inequalities.

Public impact and public reaction

Authority in contemporary societies is inextricably linked to the public, which has a dual role: on the one hand, it legitimizes authority, and on the other, it can delegitimize it through criticism and resistance. Michel Foucault points out that power



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is not concentrated only in institutions, but also circulates through networks of relationships, and thus the public is also part of the process of producing and contesting power (Foucault 1995). The abuse of authority therefore always has a dimension of public perception. When the public is passive or misinformed, abuses can go unpunished. However, when the public is activated through the media, social networks or protests, the abused authority is challenged. The public's reaction can take the form of scandal, social pressure or political mobilization, but it can also fail if it is itself susceptible to manipulation. That is why an analysis of the public and its reaction is necessary for understanding the social mechanisms by which authority is maintained or contested (Foucault 1995).

Through the aforementioned dimensions: culture and art, hierarchical relations, symbolic violence and the public, it is possible to view the abuse of authority as a complex social phenomenon, but also to better understand how to prevent and respond to this problem. It is not limited to legal categories or formal excess of authority, but also encompasses broader patterns of domination, manipulation and legitimization of power.

From definition to protection: A multidimensional approach to violence in society⁶

Violence is a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon that manifests itself in various forms, from physical and psychological, through sexual and verbal,

⁶ The text under this title was written by student **Lejla Smajević**, a member of the Research Project Team.



to socio-economic and structural violence. It is not limited to individuals, but can be present within families, peer groups, organizations, and even states. Its complexity requires precise definition, in order to distinguish intentional, harmful and unjustified acts from accidental or justified actions, such as accidents or self-defence (Hamby 2017; Žilić and Janković 2016).

Understanding violence cannot be reduced solely to its extreme and obvious forms, and its recognition requires an understanding of the psychological, social and cultural factors that influence the perpetrator and the victim. The complexity of violence is also reflected in its prevalence from the private sphere, through partner and family relationships, to the public space, media and digital networks, where it appears in the form of an “epidemic of violence”, especially in communities affected by the consequences of war, economic insecurity and social frustrations (Mikolajczak 2020; Žilić and Janković 2016).

Underreporting of violence further complicates its research and prevention. Victims face various barriers, psychological, social and systemic, while cultural norms, stigmatization and insufficient education of institutions often further perpetuate the cycle of violence. Therefore, the development of effective protection and prevention strategies is only possible through a multidisciplinary approach that includes coordination between the police, judiciary, social services, civil society and the education sector (Bašić 2025; Lisko 2024).

Violence is a social phenomenon that is explained through various theoretical approaches and definitions. It has been present since the earliest periods of human



history and remains widespread in modern society, as intelligent species continuously strive to impose their dominance over others (Žilić and Janković 2016). The definition of violence must clearly distinguish between behaviours that do not belong to it, such as accidents or self-defence, and those that are undoubtedly violent, such as child abuse, sexual offenses or murder. A comprehensive definition includes four key features: violence is behaviour that is intentional, unwanted, unjustified and harmful. Neglecting these elements can lead to the reduction of the seriousness of certain forms of violence, such as sexual abuse or bullying, which do not correspond to common examples. Precise definitions allow for better monitoring and understanding of violence, a more accurate assessment of its causes and consequences, and the development of more effective prevention and treatment measures (Hamby 2017).

Violence can be perpetrated by an individual, peer group, social class, organization, or state. It is most often defined as social behaviour directed against someone or something, with a clear distinction between the aggressor and the victim, while at the same time representing a complex and multidimensional phenomenon (Mikołajczuk 2020). In modern society, violence also spreads through digital networks, which has led to the description of an “epidemic of violence”, especially in communities affected by the consequences of war, unemployment, and social frustrations, and which is often taken out on vulnerable individuals, including family members. Precise data on the prevalence of violence is difficult to obtain due to cultural differences and the concealment or underreporting of violence (Žilić and Janković 2016).



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Violence can be covert or overt, manifesting itself at the micro level through pressure, extortion, restriction or incitement, and at the macro level through wars, terrorist acts, crises or revolutions. It is not limited to physical or psychological forms; it can be personal or structural, emotional or rational (Mikołajczuk 2020). Allen and Anderson (2017) point out that violence is often a subset of aggression, where extreme forms of aggression aimed at serious injury or death constitute violence. Accordingly, all forms of violence can be classified as aggression, but not all forms of aggression are violent.

Aggression can be described as a relief mechanism aimed at reducing internal tension, while violence is any behaviour aimed at harming another person, stemming from the innate will for power and the need for dominance (Žilić and Janković 2016). Key factors include the intent to harm, the intensity and duration of the act, the power of the offender, the vulnerability of the victim, the lack of support and the consequences of the act.

The complexity of violence is reflected in a wide range of spheres of action, starting from culture, sports and politics, through the media and public life, all the way to the private home. A narrow definition of violence cannot encompass all its dimensions, because it reduces the phenomenon to extreme cases and shows only pathology, not the entire reality (Mikołajczuk 2020). Violence serves to establish control over family members, intimate partners, colleagues or other individuals, and it can appear in relationships that vary from the closest to those with complete strangers. It can be one-time, subtle or repeated with escalation over time, deeply threatening the health and well-being of the individual. The roots of violence lie in



social inequalities and serve to maintain power and control, reflecting the imbalance between victim and perpetrator.

Functionally, violence is divided into instrumental, when it serves to achieve a goal or control, and hostile, when the goal is to cause pain and harm (Nedimović and Biro 2011, according to Žilić and Janković 2016). According to the way of perpetration, direct violence is distinguished, directed at a person or thing, and indirect, when the consequences of violence are manifested through surrogate goals. It is important to note that different forms of violence often overlap in practice. Domestic violence, sexual harassment and violence in intimate partnerships often include a combination of physical, psychological, verbal, sexual and socio-economic violence, where the intensity and duration can vary depending on the context (Council of Europe 2025; Alberta Human Services 2008 ⁷).

Violence can be manifested in the private sphere, such as family, school and intimate relationships, but also in the public sphere, where the perpetrators can be unknown individuals, organizations or even the state. The connection between the form of violence and the context in which it occurs enables a better understanding of its causes and consequences, and thus the development of more effective prevention and intervention strategies (Milašin et al. 2009, according to Žilić and Janković 2016). The private and public spheres are not clearly separated when it comes to the typology of violence, for example sexual violence – it encompasses

⁷ See: <https://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/PFVB1100-men-abused-by-women-booklet.pdf> (September 17, 2025).



unwanted sexual acts, including forced sexual contact, rape, incest, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and often human trafficking. Sexual violence can occur in the private sphere, within the family or intimate partnerships, but also in the public sphere, for example as sexual violence in the workplace or in the context of war (Rutherford, Zwi, Grove, and Butchart 2007). On the other hand, structural violence arises from unjust social, political, and economic systems that marginalize certain groups, but is necessarily within both the public and private spheres (Rutherford, Zwi, Grove, and Butchart 2007; Burton, Gilpin, and Draughon Moret 2021).

Each of these forms of violence has a strong psychological aspect, as the primary goal is to violate the integrity and dignity of the person. Even covert forms of violence, such as institutional or structural violence, have long-term consequences, including marginalization, social exclusion and reduced life opportunities. (WAVE 2023).

Reasons for not reporting violence and the complexity of obstacles for victims

Non-reporting of violence is one of the key challenges in the prevention and suppression of abuse, where the reasons are multiple, complex and intertwined. Men and women stay in abusive relationships for different reasons. Fear, guilt, financial insecurity, commitment to a partner, or cultural and religious expectations often keep them in a relationship. When children are involved, an additional motive may



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be the desire to maintain contact with them or the fear that the children will remain with the abusive partner. Social prejudices and stereotypes make it difficult to admit one's own victimization, while experts and the police sometimes do not take such cases seriously. Consequences include depression, humiliation, guilt, sadness, frustration, and even a sense of loss of identity (Alberta Human Services 2008). Cases of sexual violence, including male rape, are rarely reported due to psychological consequences, stigma, social myths and distrust of institutions. Myths such as the belief that "real men can't be raped" or that "male rape is not traumatic" diminish victims' experiences and discourage reporting, while police actions sometimes further retraumatize survivors (Widanaralalage, Hine, Murphy, and Murji 2022).

Particular barriers are faced by older adults, indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2SIA+ communities, immigrants and refugees, who face isolation, language barriers, stigma, fear of deportation and a lack of inclusive resources (Gurm, Salgado, Marchbank and Early 2020). Reporting violence and leaving a violent family are often associated with serious economic and social consequences, including living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet. It is therefore important to provide free legal support to victims and introduce administrative mechanisms for resolving property claims in criminal proceedings, which increases the protection and autonomy of survivors (Boxer and Sloan -Power 2013).

Reasons for non-reporting include a combination of personal, social, and systemic factors. Victims struggle with their own thoughts and feelings after the assault, face stigma and community condemnation, and fear of disbelief. Lengthy and often



traumatic court proceedings, lack of evidence, or perceptions that the assault is not “serious enough” further discourage reporting, especially when no physical harm has occurred (Stewart, Willmott, Murphy, and Phillips 2023; Huneycutt 2021). Social norms and rigid gender roles further enable denial of responsibility and justification of violence to the perpetrators (Council of Europe, n.d.).

The process of recognizing, changing, or leaving an abusive relationship is often challenging and time-consuming, especially when children are involved. Deciding whether to continue or end the relationship requires careful consideration to ensure a safe and stable environment. Successfully leaving violence allows for a return to safety, self-confidence, and quality of life (Alberta Human Services 2008). Whether police are involved depends on personal circumstances, prior experiences, and advice from loved ones, while the perception of the seriousness of the incident significantly influences the decision to report. Women in particular perceive sexual acts involving penetration as more “reportable” than other forms of assault, although any sexual assault can cause long-term psychological harm (Stewart, Willmott, Murphy, & Phillips 2023).

Victims of violence are often isolated, which leads to alienation, depression and a decrease in social skills, making it difficult to maintain social contacts and personal development, and these consequences are often transmitted to the next generations (Žilić and Janković 2016). Gender-based violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to which women and girls are most exposed, is rarely reported, and punishments are often inadequate. Distrust in institutions, patriarchal attitudes, ignorance of



the victim and fear of consequences are the key reasons, while the media and social discourses additionally imply the responsibility of the victim, encouraging the impunity of the perpetrator (Vukmirica 2022).

Solutions require systemic reforms, including police and judicial education, the development of inclusive services, the removal of institutional barriers, and changing social norms that allow violence to remain invisible. Protective factors, such as personal resources, family support, and external social networks, can build resilience and help survivors cope with challenges (Boxer and Sloan -Power 2013).

No single institution, discipline or expert can provide complete and adequate assistance to victims of violence, perpetrators and family members. Therefore, a multidisciplinary approach is necessary, combining the expertise and resources of different actors and enabling more effective intervention. Multidisciplinary work, the foundation of the Istanbul Convention, places victims' rights at the centre of all interventions and requires coordinated cooperation between institutions. However, victims' rights are often compromised due to poor information exchange among protection actors, even when clear legal frameworks exist (Bašić 2025).

Research indicates deficiencies in the coordination of the police, judicial bodies and social services, which hinders access to justice and reduces the protection of victims. An effective response requires improving legal practice, continuous education of police and judicial officials, and strengthening cooperation between state institutions and the civil sector. Changing social norms that perpetuate victim blaming and minimize the severity of violence against women is also crucial. It is



necessary to increase the capacity of shelters, standardize risk assessment, develop specialized services and train experts based on the principles of informed trauma (Lisko 2024; Bašić 2025). Problems additionally arise from the fragmentation of the legal system in BiH, which operates through four separate systems and many law enforcement agencies. Political influence on appointments compromises independent law enforcement. Formal frameworks for cooperation with civil society, the media and the business sector are often not implemented, which limits their participation in decision-making and the monitoring role of NGOs (Transparency International Bosnia and Herzegovina, n. d.).

The victim's first contact with the police is crucial for building trust in institutions and willingness to cooperate. Negative experiences can generate distrust and undermine the legitimacy of the justice system. Mechanisms such as ethical leadership, control systems, continuous education, and improving professionalism in hiring are essential for rebuilding trust, with an emphasis on the quality of police services (Inzunza 2022; Kassem and Erken 2024).

Research shows that police officers may show bias towards certain victims, suggesting the need to develop educational tools and materials to reduce differential treatment. The literature to date has focused mainly on intimate partner violence and sexual victimization, while other forms, such as stalking or homicide, have been less frequently investigated. Victim-blaming myths and perceptions of danger vary depending on the familiarity with the perpetrator, the victim's level of intoxication, or the victim's professional status, which requires further research into police perceptions (Eliasson and DeHart 2022).



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Police officers play a key role in achieving justice for victims of sexual violence. Early detection and reporting of assaults are crucial for activating support systems and the legal process. However, survivors often face negative reactions, while the experiences of police officers remain under-researched. Qualitative studies highlight the lack of training, variable empathy, complications in the investigative process, and frustrations among police officers. Archaic practices, a disproportionate burden of proof on the victim, and lengthy proceedings further exacerbate the situation, highlighting the need for procedural justice that gives victims a voice throughout the process (Murphy- Oikonen , McQueen, Miller, and Chambers 2024).

Courts also play a significant role in protecting vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and victims of sexual and gender-based violence. However, limited resources and the need to balance the rights of victims and defendants remain challenges. The future of the judiciary depends on its ability to continuously adapt its practice to ensure that victims' rights are a reality, not just a formal framework (International Criminal Court, n. d.; Criminal Justice iResearch-net, n. d.). Victim participation through reports, statements, evidence and testimonies is crucial for the legitimacy of the justice system. The lack of clear protocols and procedures hinders cross-sectoral cooperation and leads to shifting responsibilities between institutions. The fragmentation of the system is seen in cases of domestic violence, when social services and the police accuse each other of inaction, or when schools and health institutions avoid responsibility (Krstić, n. d.).



The complexity of the problem is particularly evident in school violence, where multi-level strategies are needed, involving collaboration between students, teachers, parents, police, health professionals, and the local community. Successful programs emphasize a clear message about the intolerance of violence, involve all stakeholders in education, remove communication barriers, and strengthen student-community partnerships (Prevention Institute, n. d.).

Access to justice is further hampered by complex procedures, fear and a lack of information about rights and support. Emotional trauma requires specialized services and support models based on trauma-informed principles. An effective system requires a multidisciplinary model that brings together the police, justice, social services and the civil sector, with independent legal representation and *pro bono* services available. Such an approach empowers victims, enables them to actively participate and ensures that their rights are effectively protected (O'Connell, n. d.).

Recognizing and reporting violence: guidelines and protection strategies

Recognizing and reporting violence in a timely manner are key steps in protecting victims and preventing further abuse. A particular challenge lies in the fact that violence often occurs in the private sphere, under the guise of intimate or family relationships, which makes it more difficult for victims to recognize patterns of violence or hesitate to report them. Education and clearly defined guidelines can significantly empower individuals to recognize early signs of violence, distinguish healthy from unhealthy relationships, and recognize situations that require an immediate response. The line between healthy and violent patterns is not always



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clear, and many situations fall into the “grey zone” of unhealthy relationships. Education on the distinction between these categories is particularly important, as victims often underestimate the seriousness of the situation.

One of the challenges in recognizing violence is the concealment of forms of harassment and sexual harassment, which can be verbal (unwanted comments, questions about sexual fantasies), non-verbal (looks, gestures, visual content) or physical (unwanted touching, kissing, hugging). According to the Istanbul Convention and EU Directive 2002/73/EC, all these forms of behaviour are considered undesirable, as consent often results from fear or pressure.

Violence is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon whose understanding requires the integration of different theoretical, practical and institutional perspectives. It is not only manifested through physical harm, but also encompasses psychological, verbal, sexual and socio-economic dimensions, and is present in the private, public and digital spheres of society. Its complexity and prevalence make it particularly difficult to recognize and prevent, while cultural norms, stigmatization and institutional weaknesses further complicate the protection of victims.

The underreporting of violence and the obstacles faced by victims point to the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach. Multidisciplinary cooperation between the police, judiciary, social services, education system and civil society is crucial for effective protection, prevention and empowerment of survivors. Education, clear protocols and timely recognition of risky behaviour patterns enable society to respond to violence in a way that reduces its frequency and conse-



quences. Prevention and protection require continuous adaptation of social policies, institutional capacities and educational strategies, so that the rights and safety of victims are real, not formal. Therefore, understanding and action against violence must be systemic, coordinated and directed towards creating a safer and more just society for all members of the community.



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RESEARCH RESULTS



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ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF QUESTIONNAIRES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

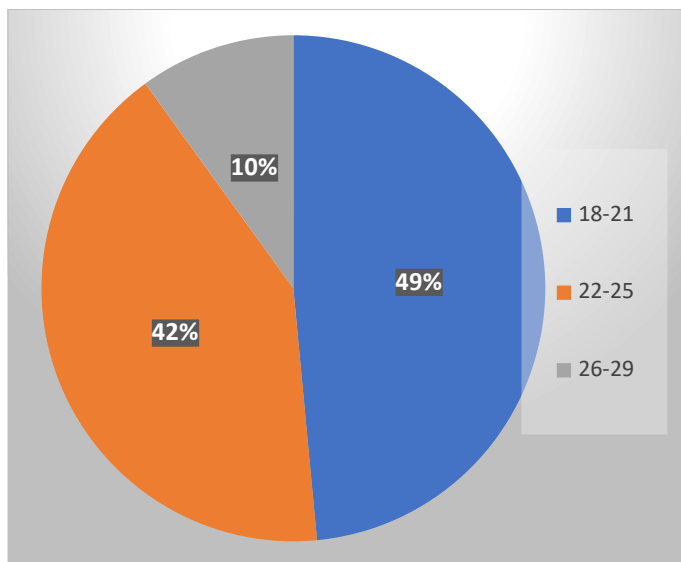
As one of the project activities within the workshops, an online survey questionnaire was created⁸ to collect data on experiences, opinions, attitudes and knowledge about the topics of violence among young people. Due to the approach and methodology of the workshops and during the study, it was important, in addition to the analysis of the questionnaire results, to also highlight the comments and discussions that occurred among young people at the workshops themselves when presenting the results of the survey responses. Accordingly, the analysis presented below consists of:

1. presentation of results and analysis of responses from the online survey questionnaire, where the influence of the gender variable on the responses to questions was examined in particular detail and
2. display of comments and discussions at workshops when the results of the questionnaire analysis were presented.

A total of 200 respondents answered the questionnaire, most of whom are women, namely 72% women and 27% men, and 1% respondents who chose not to answer. The sample mainly consists of male and female respondents who indicate that they are studying in the first cycle of studies (57%), live in a city (approx. 60%) and are mostly between the ages of 18 and 22 (48%) or 22 to 25 (42%).

⁸ See Attachment No. 1.





Graph 1. Age of respondents

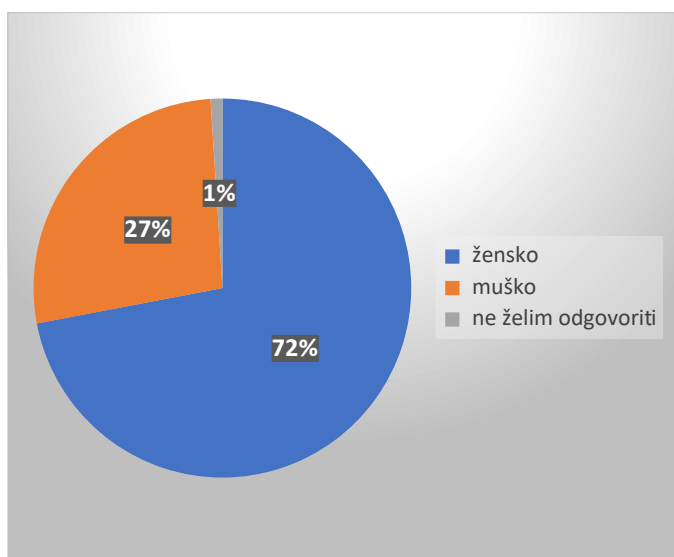


Chart 2. Gender of male and female respondents



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The representation of other categories in the sample is satisfactory, so we also have 15% of high school students, 13% of second-cycle students and 13% of those who are not in the process of formal education. Only 2% of the sample is on the third cycle of studies, which can be explained by the instruction that the questionnaire is answered by the population older than 18 and younger than 30 years, and in the range of 26 to 29 years there is a total of 10% of respondents. Although it is predominantly indicated that they live in the city, in the sample we also have a significant percentage of male and female respondents who indicate that they live in the countryside (18%) or in smaller local communities (19%), and this representation is also satisfactory.

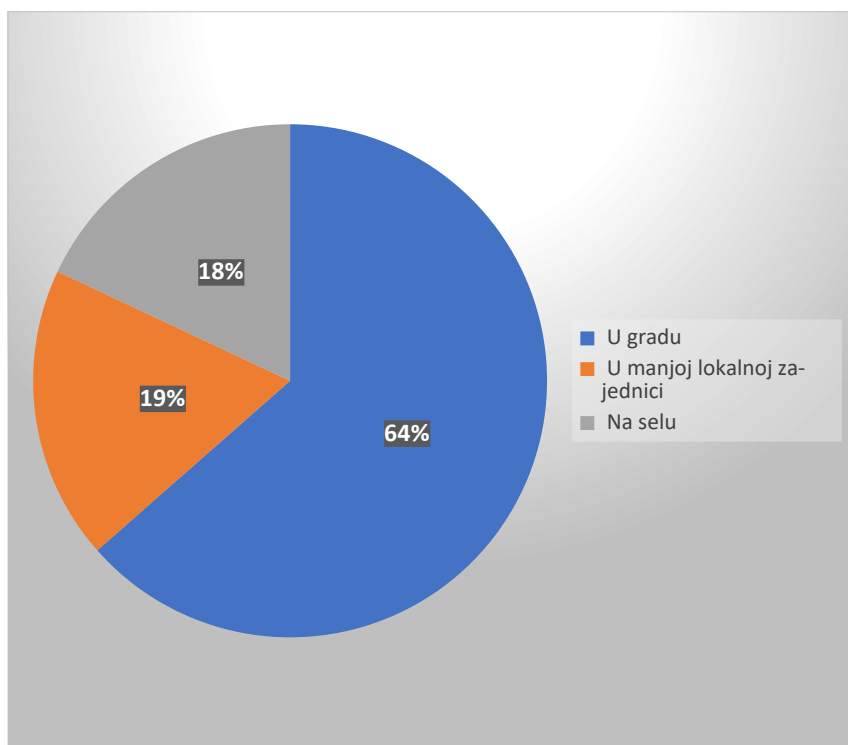


Chart 3. Place of residence



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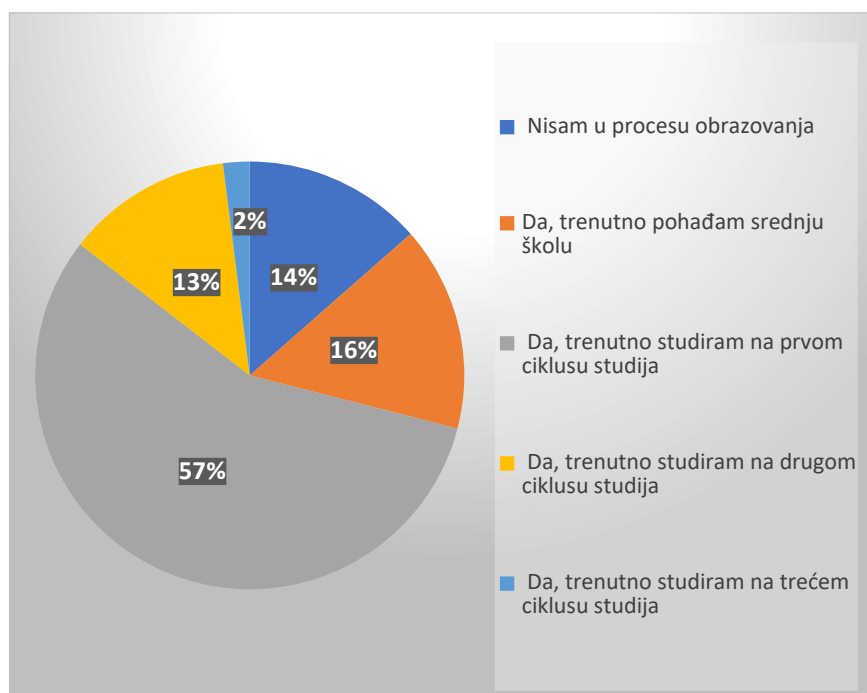


Chart 4. Education

The questionnaire also contains questions that give us insight into the extent to which young people have had the opportunity to participate in seminars, trainings or similar activities on the topic of violence prevention within formal or informal education. We received an unexpected answer to the above question, whereby 56% of respondents indicated that they had not had the opportunity to participate in such activities either within formal or informal education. Within formal education (e.g. within activities in high schools or at university), 24% of respondents had the opportunity to participate in various activities on the topic of violence preven-



tion, and within the activities of non-governmental organizations and informal education, 20% of the sample did not participate in such activities. Therefore, more than half of the respondents did not participate in such activities.

As part of the activities of presenting and commenting on the questionnaire results, most workshop participants were surprised that a larger percentage of the sample did not have the opportunity to participate in the aforementioned activities within the NGO sector and non-formal education, as they are familiar with a significant number of youth work projects within international organizations. A possible reason is that such projects do not try or fail to reach a wider population, but rather “rotate their already familiar circle of people at various activities”, as one of the workshop participants pointed out.

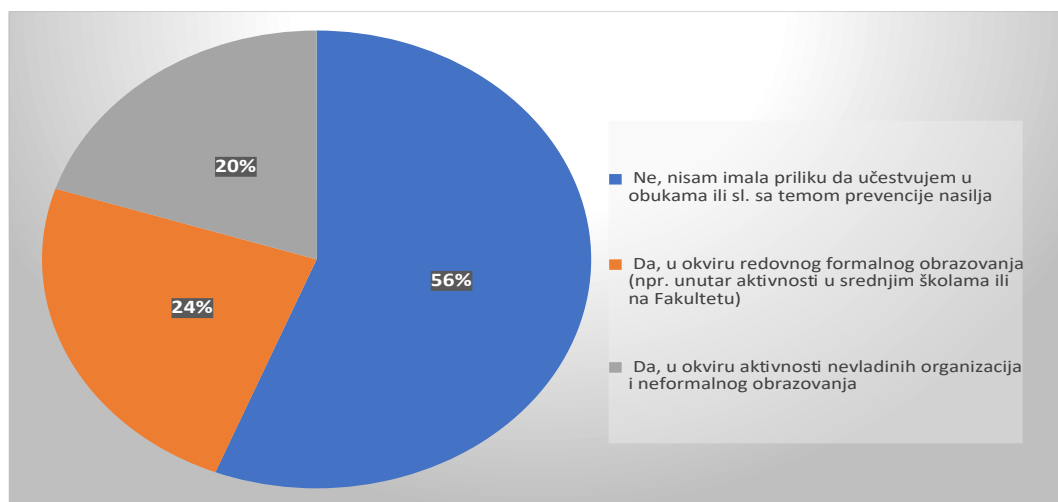


Chart 5. Availability of seminars and similar activities on the topic of violence prevention within education



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The positive effects of high exposure to information and general connectedness in the information age can be recognized in the fact that, despite the rare opportunities to participate in activities with the topic of violence prevention within formal or informal education, in our sample the respondents were mostly instructed and sensitized to recognize different types of exposure to violence, as shown by the results below.

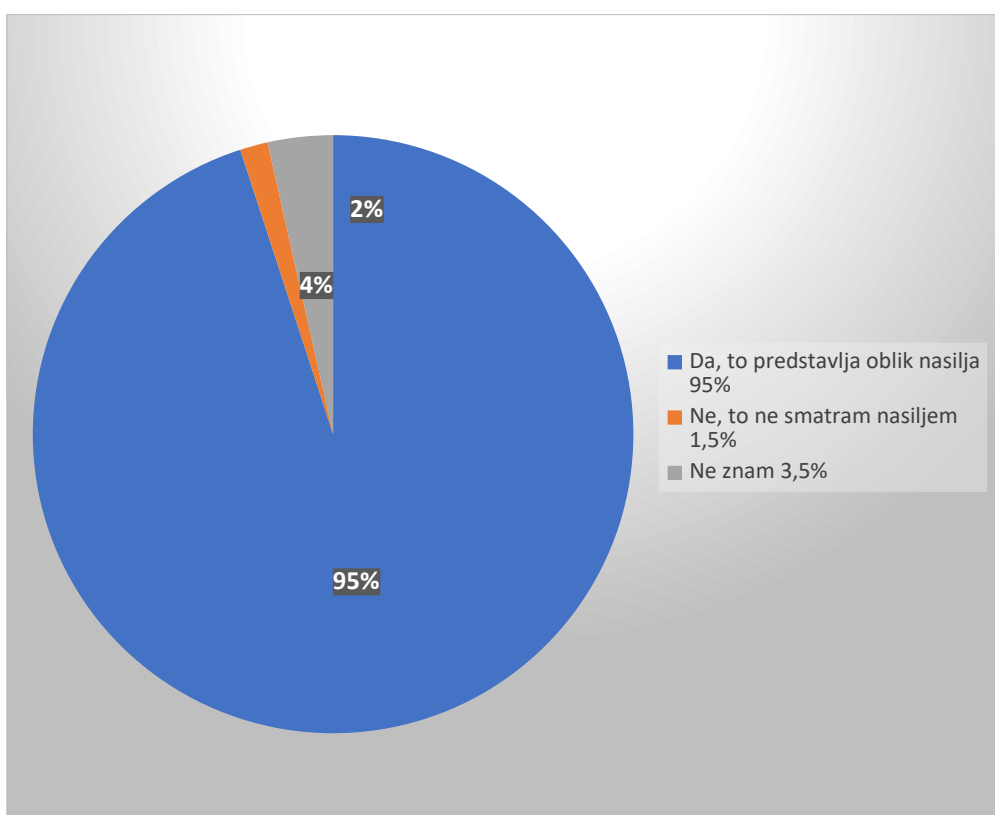


Figure 6. *Recognizing violent behaviour – physical force*



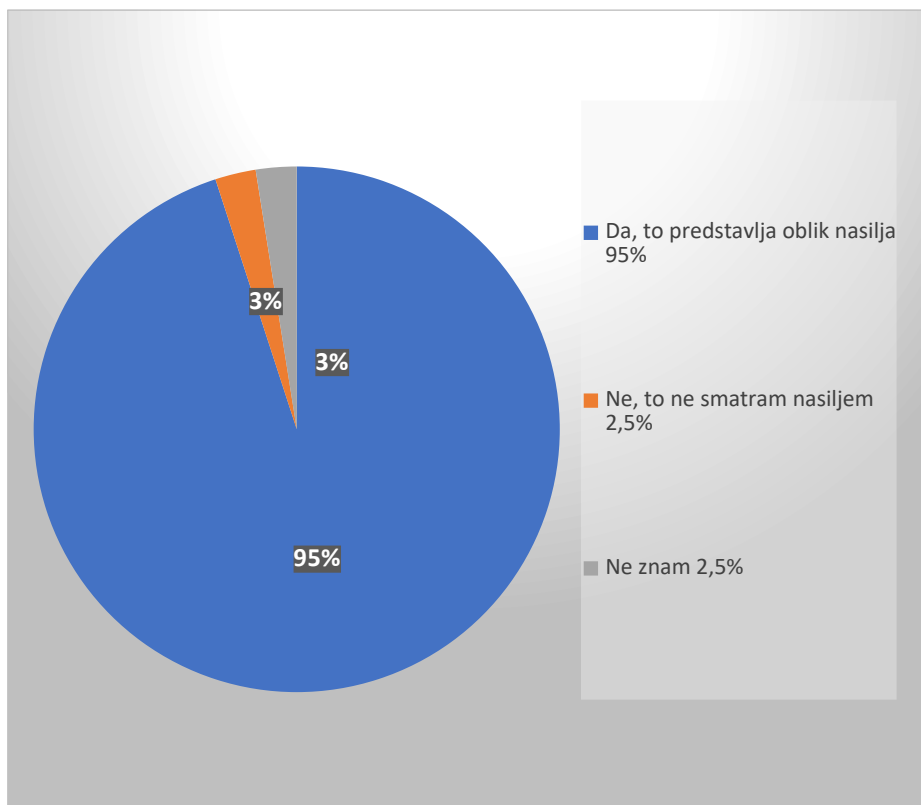


Chart 7. Recognizing behaviour as violent - ridicule: sexuality and the body

As many as 95% of respondents in the sample clearly recognize the use of physical force, as well as "ridicule at the expense of sexuality and the body" as violence, and a large percentage (94%) also recognize "blackmail with financial means" as a form of violence. Very high, as previously mentioned, the statement "telling a person that they are mentally unstable or incapable" is recognized as a form of violence, in 91% of responses, while 5% of respondents do not consider it violence, and 4% do not know how to rate it.



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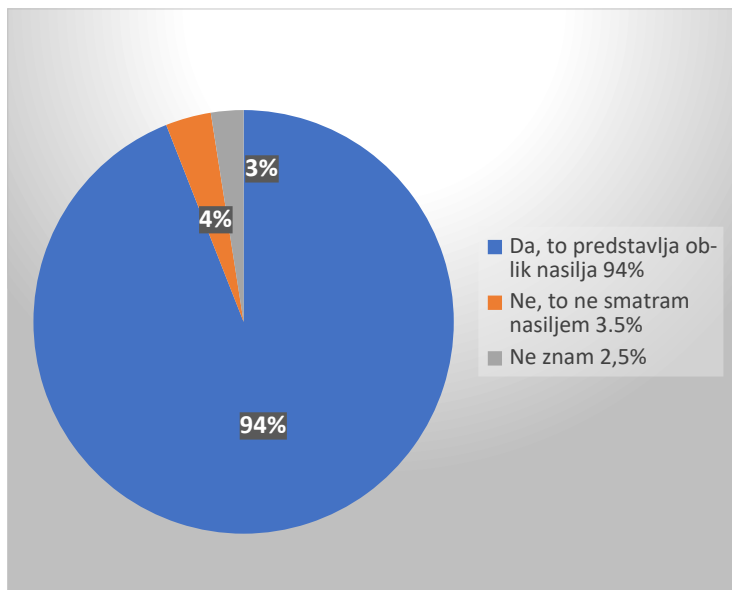
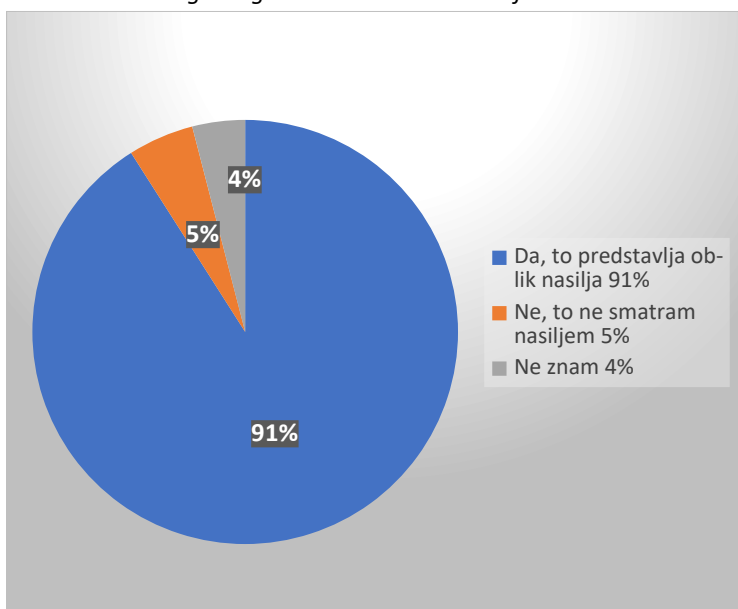


Chart 8. Recognizing behaviour as violent – financial blackmail



Graph 9. Recognizing behaviour as violent - disparagement



To a slightly lesser extent, the statement “b. Exposing a person to excessive jealousy, accusations and controlling behaviour in order to limit contact with others” is recognized as violence, in 86% of responses, while 7% of respondents do not consider it a form of violence, and another 7% indicate the option “I do not know”. The statement “Limiting freedom of choice in terms of clothing or hairstyle, forcing a person to dress in a specific way” is recognized the least as violence, in 75% of responses, and 15% of respondents emphasize that they do not consider or recognize it as a form of violence, while 10% cannot determine.

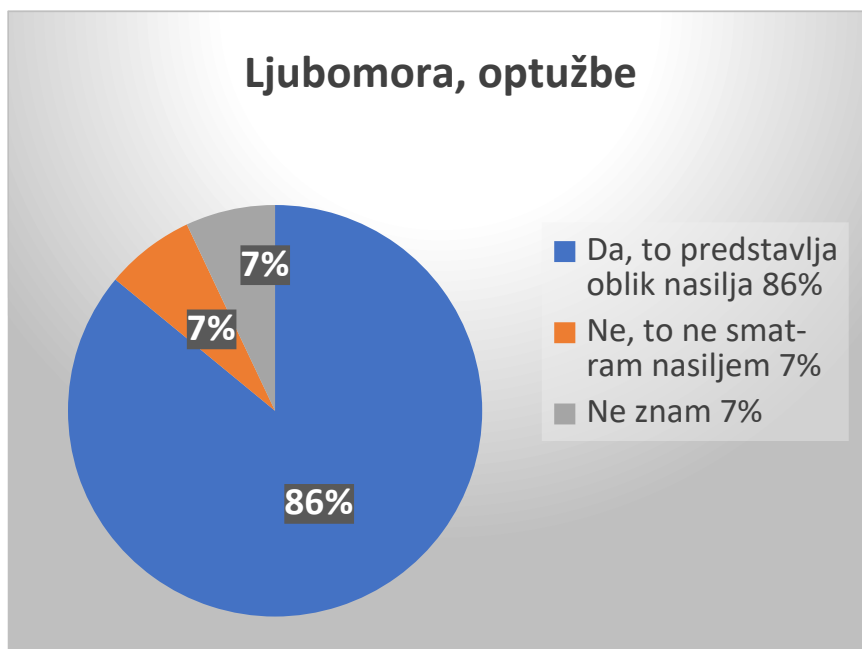


Chart 10. Recognizing violent behaviour – jealousy and accusations



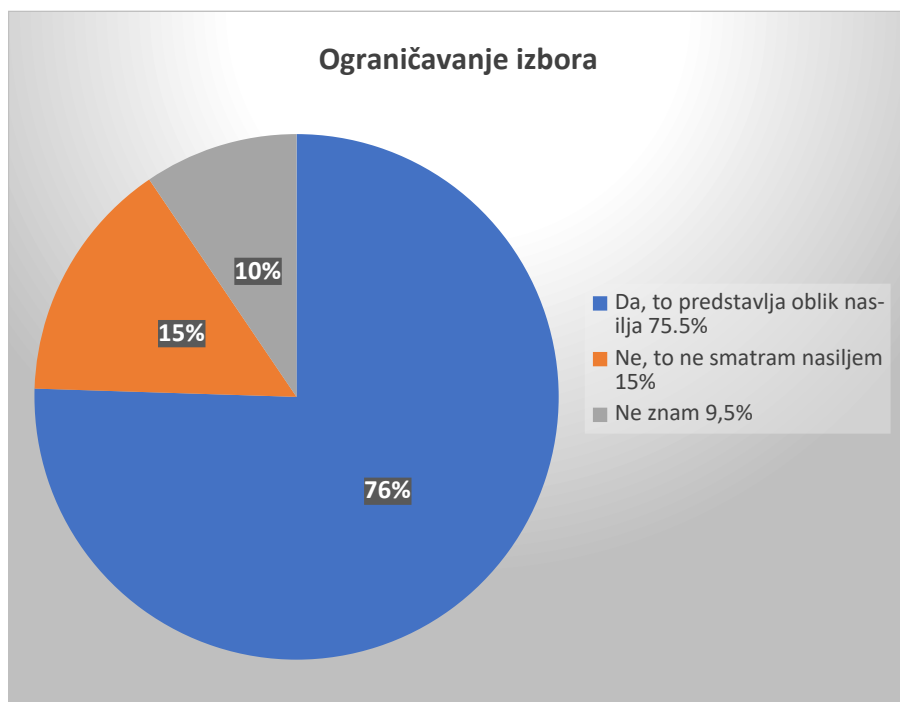


Chart 11. Recognizing violent behaviour - limiting choices

The influence of the gender variable is statistically significant in the previously mentioned less recognized forms of violence. Therefore, where there are less experience and recognition that the mentioned claim is a form of violence, it is gender conditioned. The results of the chi-square test showed a statistically significant association between gender and recognition of "Exposing a person to excessive jealousy, accusations and behavioural control in order to limit contact with others", as a form of violence, $\chi^2(2, N = 198) = 11.55, p = .003$. The size of the effect, expressed by Cramer's V, was .173, which indicates a lower intensity of the connection, but still, men and women respond to this question statistically significantly differently, with women marking jealousy and accusations as a form of violence



significantly more often than men. It is similar to the assessment of the claim "Limiting the freedom of choice in terms of clothing or hairstyle, forcing a person to dress in a specific way", where the influence of the gender variable was also confirmed as statistically significant. The results of the chi-square test showed a statistically significant association between gender and recognition of "restriction of freedom of choice" as a form of violence, $\chi^2(2, N = 198) = 14.8, p = .001$. The effect size, expressed by Cramer's V, was .217, indicating a moderate intensity of association. Women significantly more often mark "restriction of freedom of choice" as a form of violence compared to men.

A set of statements concerning attitudes and opinions about the influence of art, culture and education on the creation and reproduction of harmful patterns, behaviour and practices, as well as the issue of abuse of authority, was also presented, whereby respondents rated the degree of agreement with the statements presented in the questionnaire (on a scale of 1 to 5).

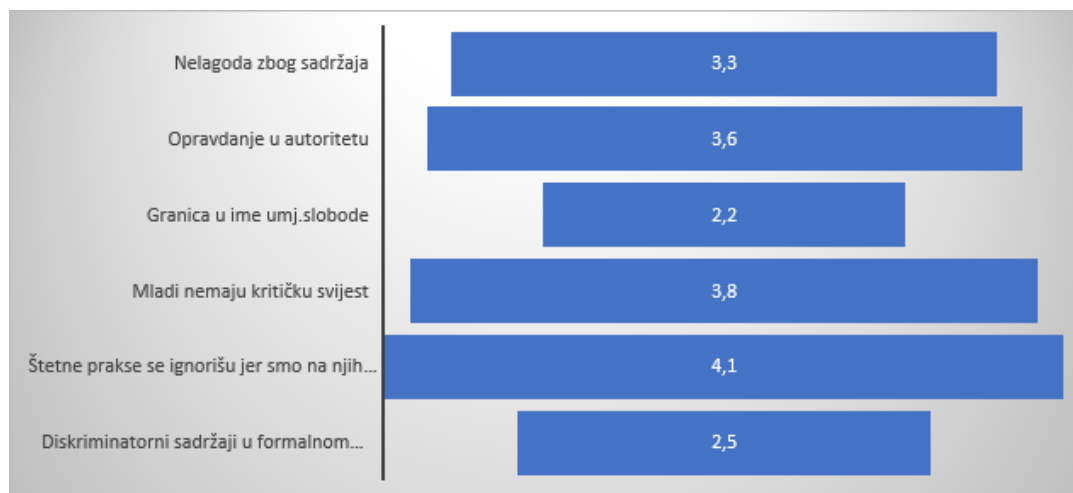


Chart 12. Influence of culture and art



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The highest rated statement is “Harmful practices and offensive content within popular culture and art are ignored because we are used to them” with an average score above 4, as well as the statement that “Young people do not have a sufficiently developed critical awareness in accessing popular culture and art content” with an average score of 3.8.

Also, the statements "I think my peers sometimes find justification and validation for harmful behaviour in the authority of celebrities" with an average rating of 3.6 and the statement "Sometimes I feel very uncomfortable because of the content of song lyrics and music videos I listen to" with 3.3 were also highly rated.

The lowest rated statements were “Artists have the right to cross the line in the name of freedom of artistic expression” with an average score of 2.2 and “Within formal education, we learn content within certain subjects that I consider harmful and discriminatory” with a slightly higher score than the previously mentioned statement, but still quite lowly rated with an average score of 2.5. The results lead to the conclusion that young people respect the authority of formal education and that they approach the content offered and imposed on them in schools less critically than the content of popular culture and art.

Of the previously mentioned statements, the results of the Mann -Whitney U test showed that there was a significant difference in the level of agreement between men and women in assessing the statement “Within formal education, we learn content within certain subjects that I consider harmful and discriminatory”, $U = 3087.5$, $Z = -2.295$, $p = 0.022$. Women had a lower level of agreement ($Mdn = 2$),



compared to men (Mdn =3). The other statements did not show significant differences in the impact of the gender variable.

During the workshops, when presenting the results, the aforementioned result caused a lot of discussion and comments among the participants. They were surprised by the fact that women are less critical of formal education, and therefore less likely to recognize discriminatory content within formal education compared to men. It was assumed in the workshops that possible reasons are that girls within the family, but also more widely through the dominant culture and education itself, are taught that it is feminine not to be a rebellious person, but on the contrary to respect and serve authority. In addition, it was discussed that a possible reason is that women recognize a significant emancipatory potential in education, as an opportunity to empower themselves and integrate into society on an equal footing, and therefore have greater respect for the process of formal education with all its challenges and shortcomings.

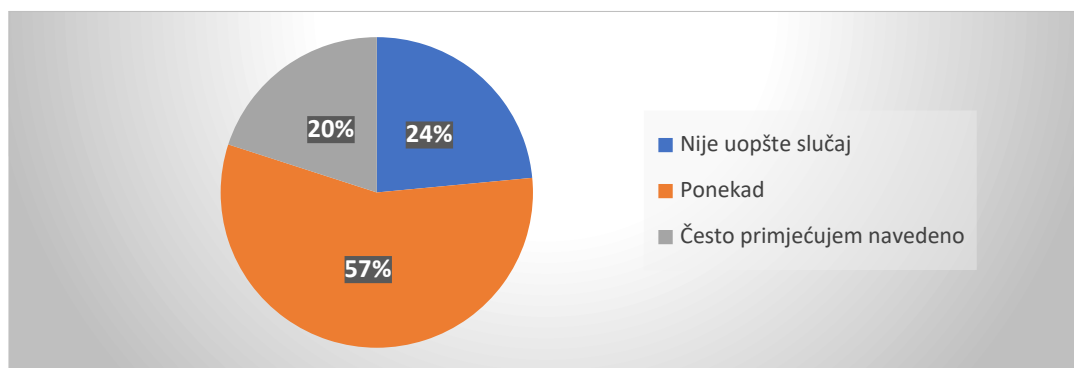


Chart 13. Teaching staff - inappropriate comments



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In addition to the aforementioned, a lot of polemics and comments during the presentation of the results were caused by answers to a group of questions concerning specific experiences with violence in the wider environment and within educational institutions. To the statement "Educational staff in schools or colleges make inappropriate comments and jokes at others' expense, which directly affects young people", 57% of respondents mark the option sometimes, and 20% that they often notice the above. There is no statistically significant difference by gender here and no major differences are noticeable, and it is interesting that both men and women equally notice such behaviours and events towards others or through personal experience.

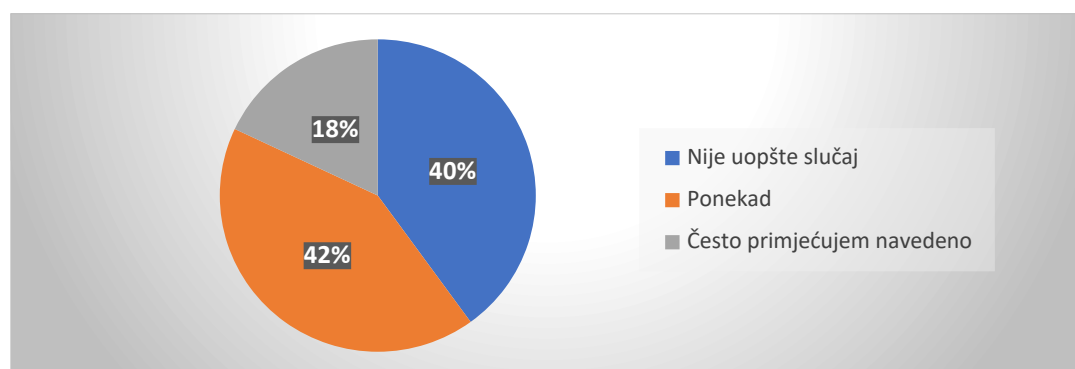
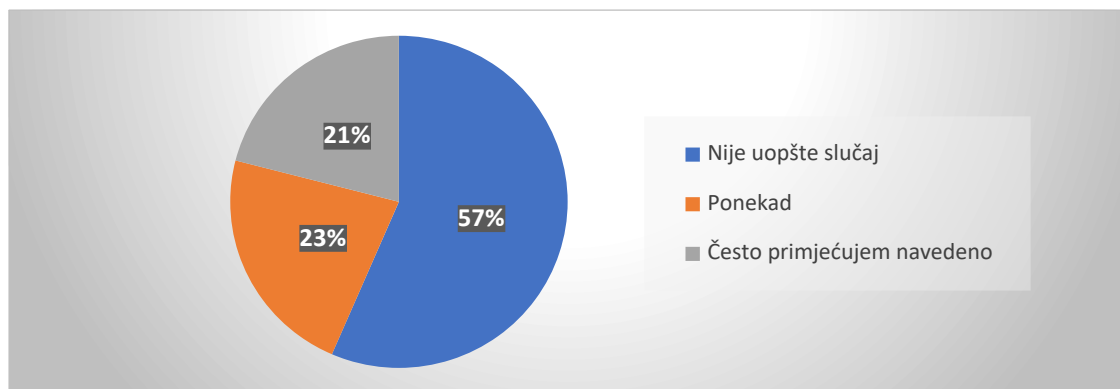


Chart 14. Teaching staff – comments on physical appearance

To the statement "Teaching staff in schools or colleges comment on the physical appearance or manner of dressing of other people, which normalizes such behaviour", the answer was sometimes chosen by 42% of respondents, while 18% of respondents in the sample stated that they often notice. There is no statistically significant difference here either, the only noticeable difference is that the percentage of women compared to men is higher. mark the option, I **often** notice the



above (twice as many: 21% of women, against 10% of men), but overall, a statistically significant difference was not confirmed.



Graph 15. Teaching staff: physical violence

Given the fact that violence is prohibited and sanctioned by law , and when it comes to teaching staff, it is additionally regulated and tightened by internal regulations and other legal documents, with a special emphasis on the problem of abuse of power and authority in the relationship between teachers and students , the devastating result is that when asked: “I know of specific cases of violence and/or sexual harassment by teaching staff,” 21% confirm that they often notice the above, while 23% indicate that they sometimes notice the above. There is no statistically significant difference, nor any major noticeable difference by gender.



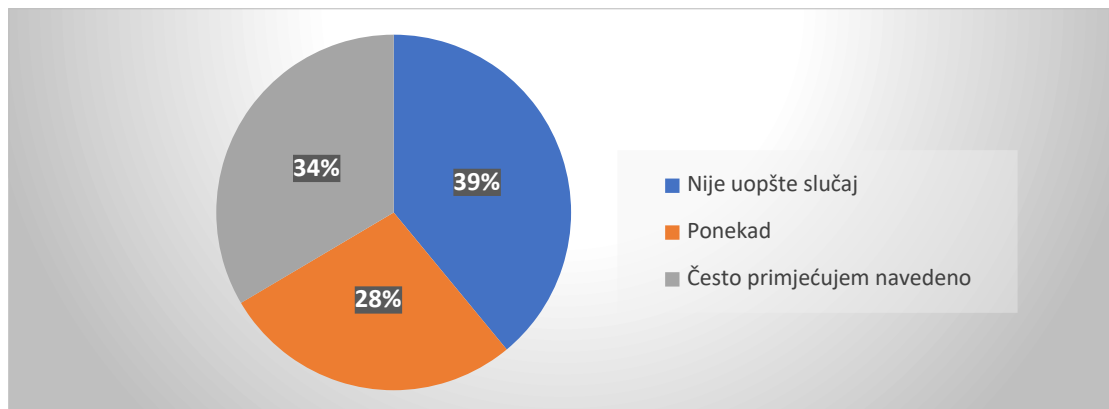
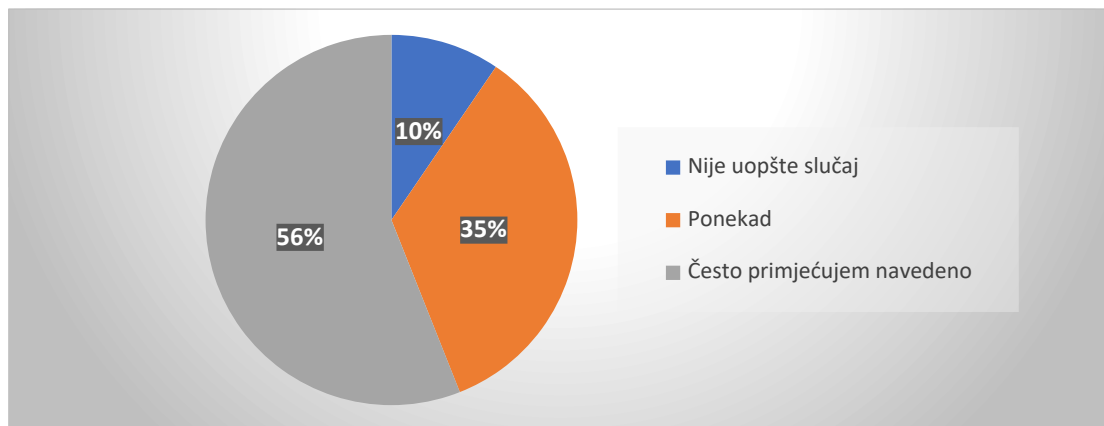


Chart 16. Peers: cases of violence

Specific cases of violence by peers are somewhat more frequent, and in 34% of the responses it is indicated that the above is often noticed, and 27% of respondents indicate that they sometimes notice the above. There is no statistically significant difference by gender, i.e. young women and men are equally exposed to violence by their peers.



Graph 17. Frequency of lack of adequate help within the family



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responses to the statement “Due to fear of social condemnation and/or lack of knowledge, etc., persons facing violence do not receive adequate help and support within the family” are worrying, with more than half, or more precisely 56% of respondents, indicating that they often notice the above. 35% of respondents sometimes notice the above, which means that in our sample only 9% declare that this is not the case at all, that is, that it is possible to receive adequate help and support within the family. A statistically significant difference by gender was confirmed for this statement, with women more often indicating that due to social condemnation they do not receive adequate help and support within the family in cases of violence.⁹

Equally concerning are the responses regarding help and support from peers, where 57% of respondents often noted the statement “People facing violence do not receive adequate help and support from peers”, and 37% sometimes, and therefore only 6% of respondents confirmed noticing adequate help and support. There is no confirmed statistically significant difference in responses by gender, which means that the topic of violence experienced by women among peers is less taboo than in the family. We can conclude that help and support within the family is gender-conditioned when a person faces violence, although in neither place is the help adequate.

⁹ Chi-square test $p = 0.037$



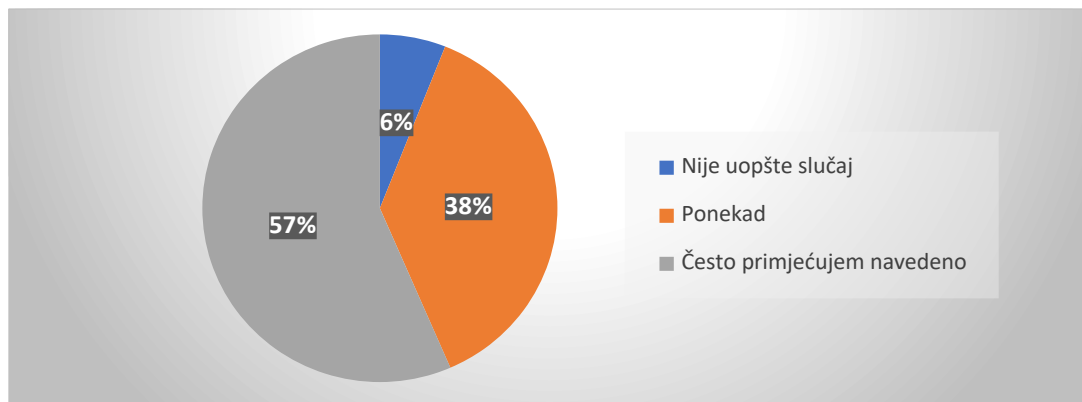


Chart 18. Frequency of lack of adequate help from peers

When asked “Which environment do you consider to be the riskiest when it comes to the possibility of abuse of authority over young people?”, the three riskiest categories according to the answers received are: “among peers” in first place, then in educational institutions (schools and universities), which is simultaneously associated with peers, teaching staff and institutional violence. Immediately behind that is “family and parental authority”, then sports and cultural groups.

Interestingly, “internet, media and social networks” were rarely marked as the riskiest environment, with a total of five respondents marking the item, which sparked discussion at the workshops when the results were presented. Young workshop participants assumed that a possible reason is that violence on the internet and social networks is experienced intensely, if real-life violence is transmitted and connected to the virtual world and therefore, with the help of the internet, it gains a larger dimension, an audience and thus remains permanently recorded. Violence



and exposure to violence on the internet is most often crossed with multiple external factors to be experienced as a direct and intense danger.

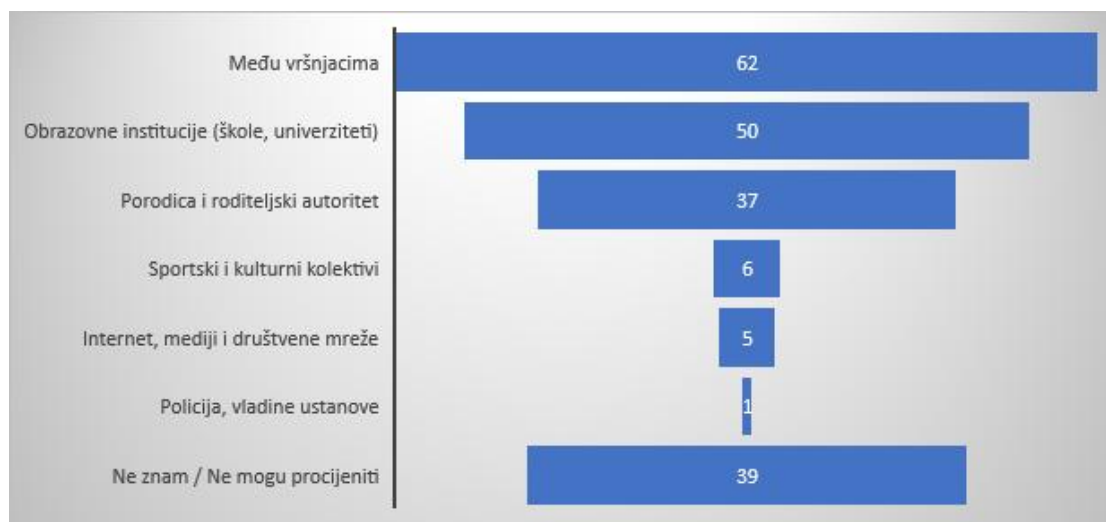


Chart 19. Assessment of the riskiest environment when it comes to the possibility of abuse of authority

When asked “Which of the following items worries you more or less when you think about the dangers of experiences with violence?” (1 indicates no concern at all – 5 indicates very strong concern), the highest rated item (with the most frequent rating of 4; $M=4$) was “I am afraid that employees in institutions (police, social work centres, school psychologists, etc.) are not adequately trained and sensitized to work with people who have survived violence”. Therefore, young people do not trust that they will receive adequate help and support from competent institutions and professionals.



Another highly rated item was “Fear of sexual harassment and violence”, with an average score of 3.5, indicating that respondents were concerned about this issue. The item “Fear of physical assault and confrontation” ($M=2.96$) was rated slightly higher than “Fear of verbal insults and belittling” ($M=2.95$), suggesting that both forms of violence are perceived as almost equally present.

Gender differences were observed in all statements examined, with women on average expressing higher levels of fear and concern than men. The smallest differences were observed in the perception of the statement “Employees in institutions do not respond adequately to violence”, while the largest differences were recorded in the selection of the answer: “Fear of sexual harassment and violence”.

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test confirm these differences. Women express concern to a significantly greater extent about physical attack and confrontation ($U = 2259.00$, $Z = -4.64$, $p < .001$), verbal insults and belittling ($U = 2582.00$, $Z = -3.72$, $p < .001$), as well as sexual violence and harassment ($U = 1689.50$, $Z = -6.41$, $p < .001$). Also, when it comes to the perception of an insufficiently adequate response of employees in institutions to violence, there is a statistically significant difference between the sexes ($U = 3167.50$, $Z = -2.10$, $p = .036$), whereby women express a higher level of concern.

These findings indicate a consistent pattern in which women perceive a greater risk of various forms of violence but also express greater suspicion regarding institutional responses to these problems.



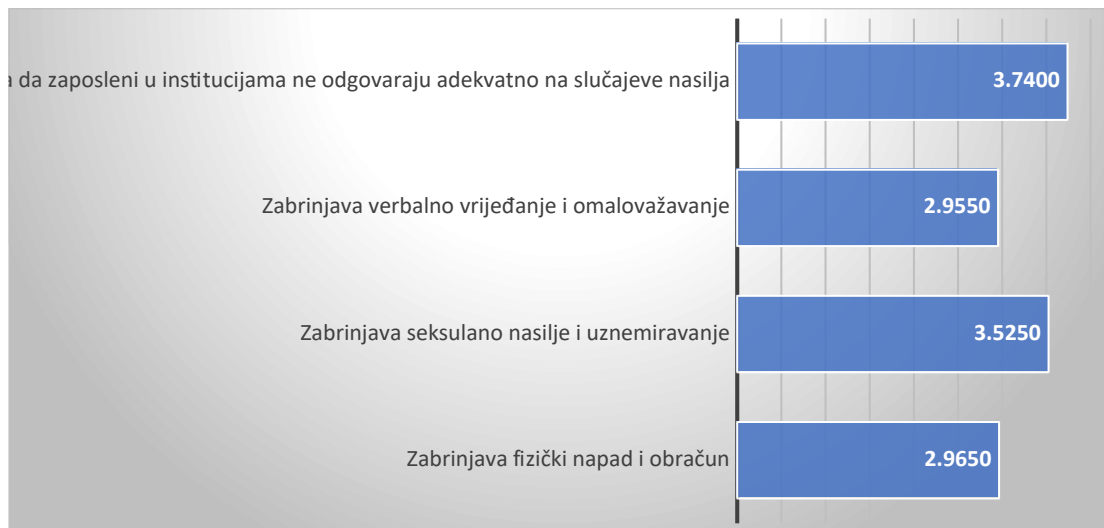


Chart 20. Assessment of subjective feeling of fear and concern

In the question about the subjective feeling of fear and concern, in addition to the previously mentioned offered answers, we also left room for adding something else that was not mentioned, and that the respondents consider important, which is presented in the rest of the text. The open answers of the respondents to the question: "Which of the following listed items worries you more or less when you think about the dangers of experiences with violence?", indicate the complexity of the perception of violence and the fact that young people do not experience it only through the prism of physical attacks, but place it in a wider social, institutional and cultural context.

One important dimension that emerges relates to appearance and dress as a potential trigger for violence. Respondents express concern that the way they dress can be interpreted as “challenge” or “provocation”, and that their environment and peers often adopt and reproduce narratives of the “she asked for it – she got



it” type. Such attitudes are recognized as a form of secondary victimization and social pressure, as the responsibility for violence is shifted to the victim.

A significant number of responses reflect both institutional and structural weaknesses. Violence is associated with systemic weaknesses and injustice. It was especially emphasized that institutions often hide the truth and that problems are not solved in a transparent manner, which further increases the feeling of insecurity. Also mentioned are "nepotism", "bringing suitable, but not capable" personnel into the professions, "corruption of authorities and concealment of the truth", all of which contribute to the feeling of insecurity and mistrust in institutions. Violence, in this sense, is not only perceived as an individual act, but as a consequence of broader social injustice and systemic dysfunctions.

Special emphasis is placed on the issue of mental health and the lack of adequate support. Respondents express concern about “unrecognized narcissistic personality disorders”, “ignoring the mental states of other people that are not sufficiently discussed in society”, and similar issues, highlighting the weaknesses of psychological and social protection. In this context, the work of social services is criticized, especially during divorce, where, according to respondents, manipulation and violence are not recognized, nor is the rights and well-being of children sufficiently taken into account. The paradox is also emphasized that “violent partners, despite evidence of violence, retain the right to contact children, which creates additional insecurity”.

In personal experiences and perceptions of fear, very concrete forms of violence are also recognized: psychological and emotional abuse, stalking, "vindictiveness



of the bully", misuse of photos and personal data to cause psychological damage, as well as violence by a romantic partner. The concern also relates to violence in partner relationships, but also to generalized mistrust towards men, which indicates a deep-rooted feeling of vulnerability.

Concerns, however, are not limited to the private and family sphere. Respondents also mention, very broadly, the fear of war, the inability to defend themselves or, more narrowly, the "inability to separate from the perpetrator", as well as the fear of the environment and institutions ignoring violence. Fear of psychological consequences, depression and psychological weakness further emphasize the dimension of long-term consequences of violence. In some responses, a religious perspective is also recognized, namely the fear "of Allah" is mentioned as one of the elements of concern, which indicates a complex combination of personal beliefs and security issues.

Of particular concern is the fact that the responses also mention tragic outcomes, such as "the suicide of a girl we knew who was being bullied," which the respondents link to the lack of education among parents, educators, and competent institutions. The statements point to the need for systemic measures of prevention and early recognition of problems, with a specific example cited that reinforces the perception that society is not responding adequately and that prevention is lacking.

Certain answers also indicate concern about the availability of pornography, which is seen as a factor of potential influence on the behaviour of young people and the formation of violent patterns. This element connects to broader issues of socialization, education and cultural norms.



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In summary, open-ended responses show that respondents understand violence as a multidimensional phenomenon. It encompasses personal and family relationships, institutional and legal weaknesses, cultural and social norms, but also more global threats such as war or corruption. This perception suggests that young people recognize that violence is not an isolated problem, but part of a broader structure of social relations and value systems. Prevention strategies must encompass both the individual and systemic levels, because it is precisely in their interconnectedness that the most important sources of concern for respondents are recognized.

The respondents mostly know who to report violence to. However, there is a significant percentage of those who do not know who to turn to and report when they suffer or witness violence (21%). Young people believe that their peers are either not sufficiently informed about their rights and obligations when it comes to protection from violence (46%) or that they are only partially informed (45%), and only a very small percentage (5%) of respondents believe that they are. In the two previously mentioned questions, the gender variable has no influence on the answers.



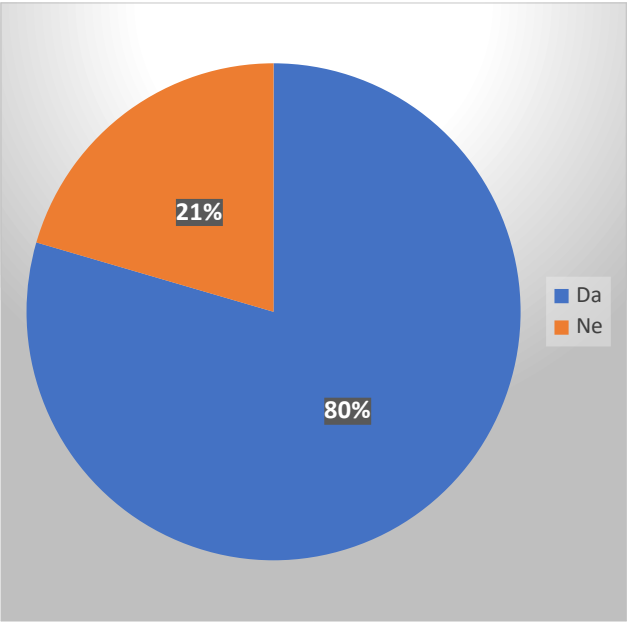


Chart 21. Knowledge of opportunities applications violence

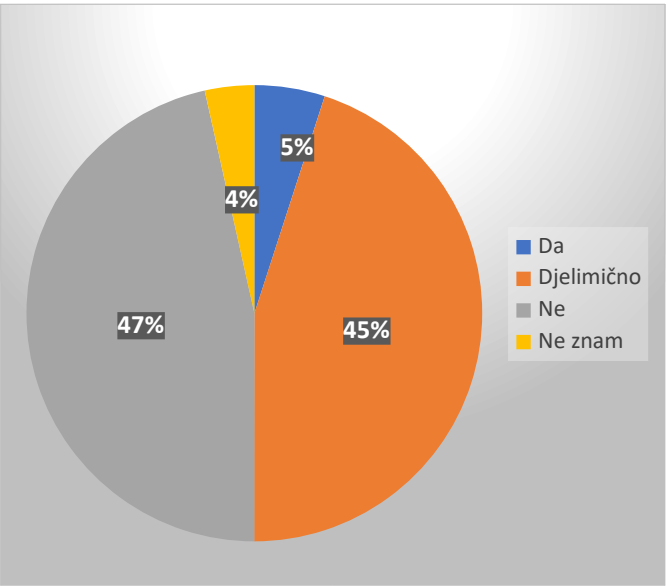


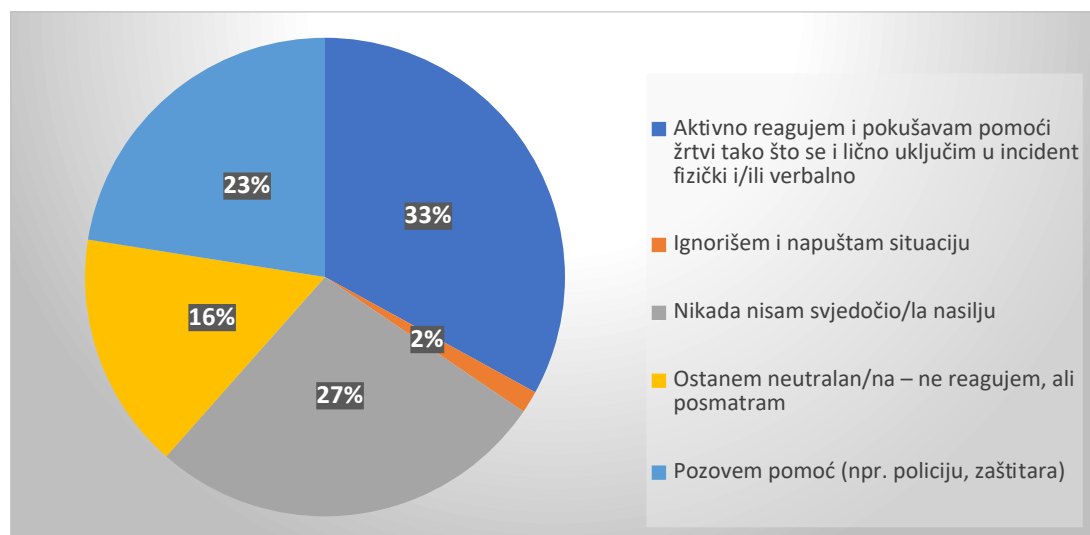
Chart 22. Awareness of rights and obligations



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In contrast, the answers to the question “When you witness violence (live or online), how do you most often react (mark the answer that applies to you)?”, according to the data analysis, are statistically significantly gender-dependent,¹⁰ and therefore we can detect the way of reacting that on average is more often taken by men or women. A higher percentage of women mark the option “I have never witnessed violence”, as opposed to 18% of men in the sample, and we can conclude that men are more often exposed to and confronted with scenes of violence in their everyday environment.



Graph 23. Reactions to violence

When we exclude those respondents who did not witness violence and analyse only the reactions of those who did, we get the following difference in responses by gender (see Table 1 below). Exactly half of the men in the sample (50%) mark

¹⁰ Pearson Chi-Square= 0.001



the option "I actively react and try to help the victim by personally getting involved in the incident physically and/or verbally", against 43% of women who mark the mentioned option, also close to half.

For men, the next most frequently answered option is "I remain neutral – I do not react, but I observe", which is chosen by 34% of men, and half the percentage of women who mark this option (17%). The reasons for the high percentage of "passive observers" among men can be clarified through the answers to the question about the reasons that prevent them from reacting in situations of violence, which are also gender-based.

"I ignore and leave the situation", although overall a less frequent reaction in terms of percentage of responses, can also be stated as a more frequent reaction among men, namely 5% among-men, and only 1% in women.

Women are significantly more likely to choose the option "Call for help (e.g. police, security guard)", more than three times more often, or in 39% of cases, compared to 11% of men's responses.

	I actively react and try to help the victim by personally getting involved in the incident physically and/or verbally.	I ignore and leave the situation.	I remain neutral – I don't react, but I observe.	I call for help (e.g. police, security guard)
Female	43%	1%	17%	39%
Male	50%	5%	34%	11%

Table 1: Reactions of men and women to witnessing violence

The most common reasons for not reacting in situations of violence are "fear for one's own safety", in more than half of the total sample (54%), and not knowing



exactly what to do in situations of violence (30%). A small percentage of the sample (4%) cite as the reason that they believe it is "not my responsibility", so we can say that among young people we have a prevailing perspective of recognizing violence as a general social problem.

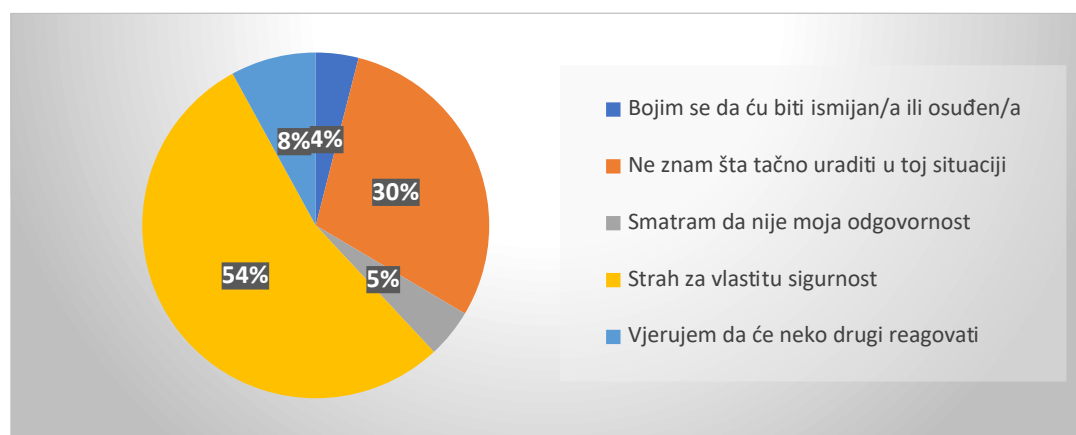


Chart 24. Reasons for passivity

The reasons given, as with the previous question, are also gender-specific ¹¹(Table 2). Women are the most likely to indicate "Fear for one's own safety" as the reason, with more than half (55%) of women in the sample, compared to 28% of men. The highest percentage of men indicate that they do not react when they witness violence because "I don't know what to do in that situation", namely 35%, although this answer is followed by a large percentage and the second most frequent among women (22%).

A significantly noticeable difference in the answers according to gender is in the two answers offered. The response "I consider it not my responsibility" is more

¹¹ Pearson Chi-Square= 0.001



than four times more frequent among men (9%), compared to women (2%). The biggest difference is in the marking of the answer "I am afraid that I will be ridiculed or condemned", and that in terms of frequency in less than one percent of women (0.7%), against 11% of men, and we can point out that according to the answers, men have more peer pressure, which increases possibility of passive reaction in cases of violence.

Which of the following reasons most prevents you from reacting in a situation of violence?						
	I am afraid of being ridiculed or judged	I don't know exactly what to do in that situation.	I don't think it's my responsibility	Fear for one's own safety	I believe someone else will respond.	No answer
Female	1%	22%	2%	<u>55%</u>	7%	13%
Male	11%	35%	9%	28%	7%	9%

Table 2: Reasons for passivity among men and women

Reactions to scenes of violence depend mostly on the number of people present, according to the responses received (see Chart 26 for more details). There are no differences in responses by gender.





Chart 25. Number of attendees and reactions

The feeling of low trust and a sense of security among young people in meeting with the competent institutions was also confirmed in another question, where more than half of the respondents indicated that they would either not feel safe at all or only slightly if they turned to the competent institutions. Regarding the question "How safe and protected would you feel if you turned to one of the competent institutions for help (e.g. school, police, healthcare, centre for social work)?", there is no statistically significant difference by gender, and young men and women feel equally insecure in accessing institutions.



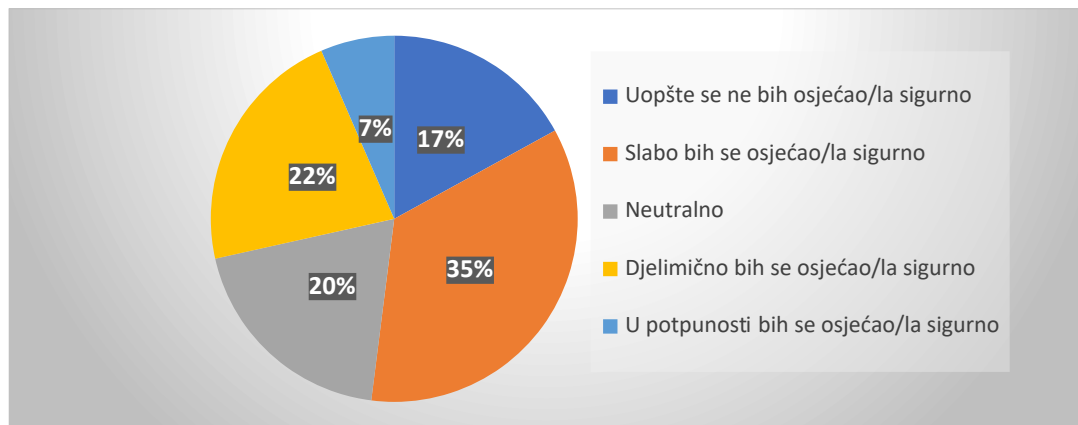


Chart 26. Trust in competent institutions

According to young people, cooperation between institutions in cases of violence was assessed as unsatisfactory, and when asked “In your opinion, how well do different institutions (e.g. school, police, health care, social work centre) cooperate when it comes to protecting persons exposed to violence?” 67% of young people marked the option “insufficient”. The above may be one of the reasons for the great distrust among young people in the competent institutions when it comes to violence and protection from violence.



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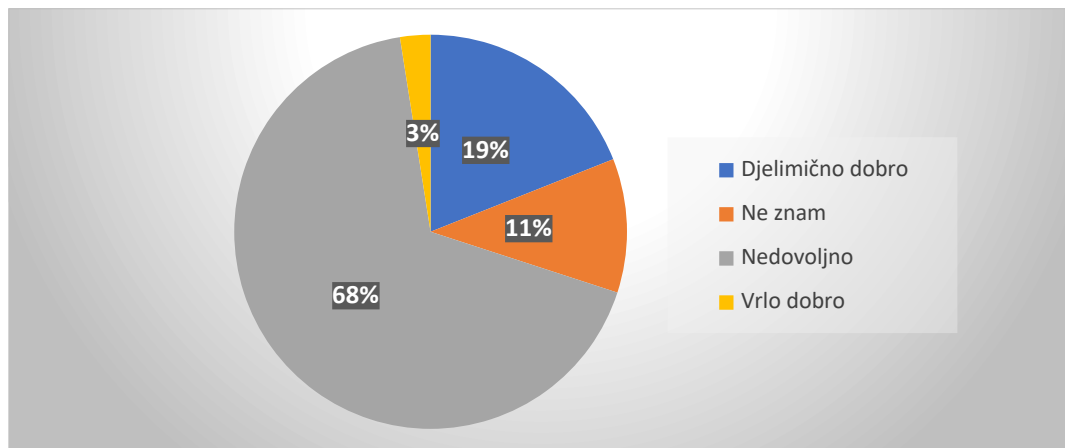


Chart 27. Cooperation of competent institutions

organized and implemented often enough, and thus a total of 45% of respondents either answered that they had never noticed the above or that they did not know how to answer, which indicates, just like the previous answer, low visibility and lack of knowledge of such content, if any.

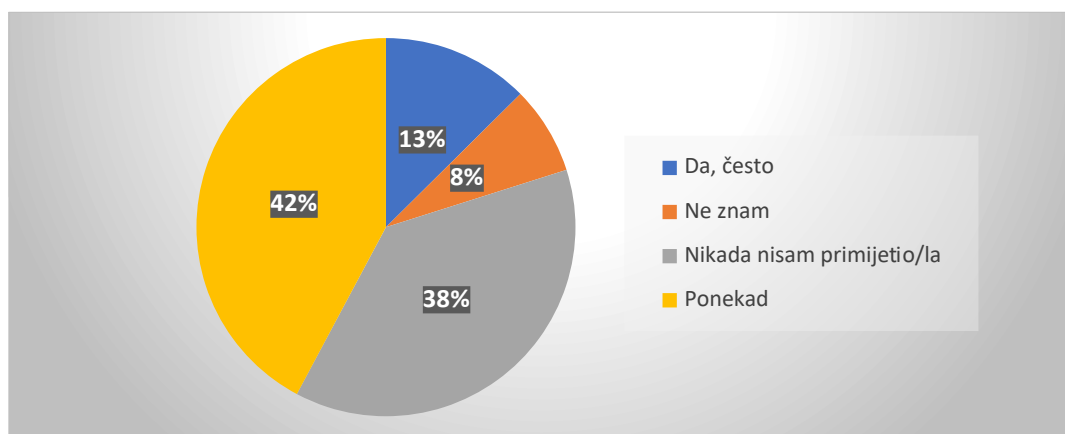


Chart 28. Educational content – violence prevention and how to report violence



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The next two blocks of questions concern social networks, digital technologies and violence. The first block of questions aimed to provide insight into personal experiences with violence on the Internet among young people. To the question “Have you encountered the following phenomena on social networks?”, the highest average score, with a rating ranging from 1 minimum and 5 maximum, was given to the offered answer “Discrimination based on ethnicity, gender or religion” with a score of 4.1 and the offered answer “Sexist comments and posts” with an average score of 4. The lowest average score was given to the offered answer “Using social networks to report violence and seek help” with a score of 3.3. There is no gender bias in the assessment of the offered answers to the above question, except for the answer “Sexist comments and posts”, which women experience more often according to the answers received.¹²

¹² (p=0.21)



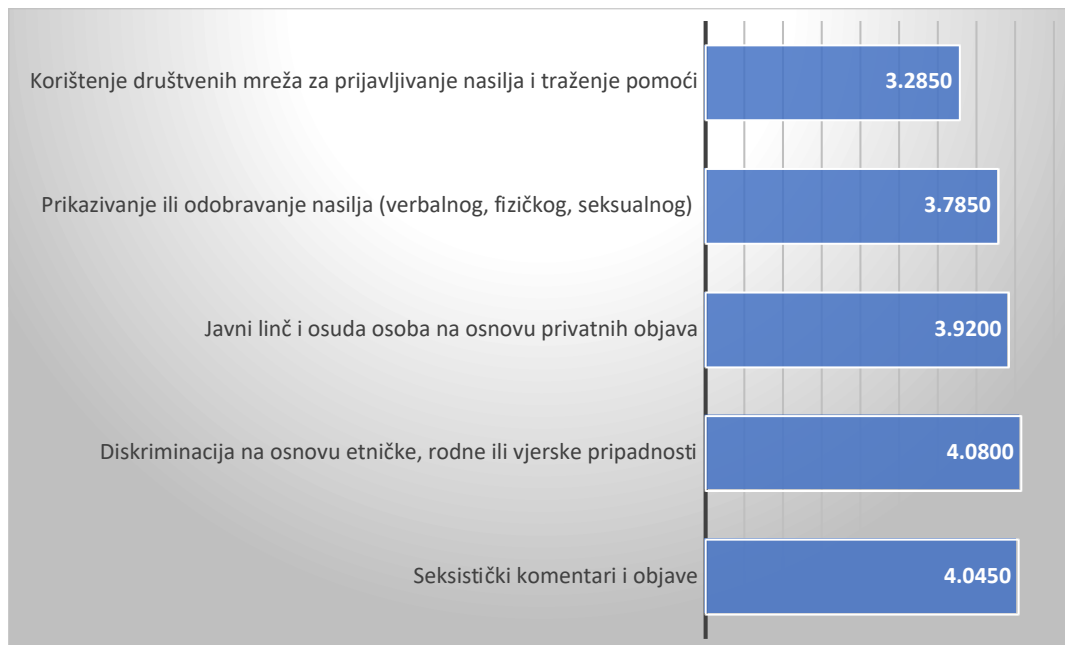
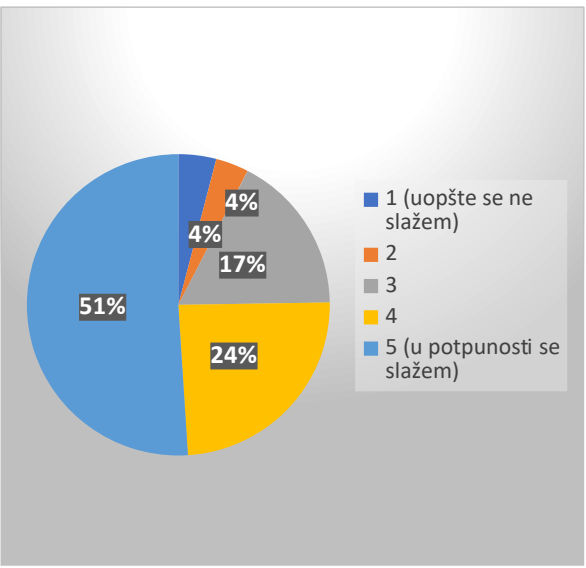


Chart 29. Social networks and violence – personal experiences

The second block of questions on the topics of social networks, digital technologies and violence aimed to provide insight into opinions and attitudes related to the experience of violence and the possibility of preventing violence that occurs on the Internet among young people. To the question "To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (circle the score from 1 to 5, where 1 means "I do not agree at all" and 5 "I completely agree")", the following results were obtained: more than half of young people (51%) mark the option I completely agree with the statement "Social networks have become a space where violence is often normalized". And for the statement "On social networks, the consequences of violence are often ignored or downplayed" almost half rate it with the maximum rating (48%).





Graph 30. Social networks as a space for the normalization of violence

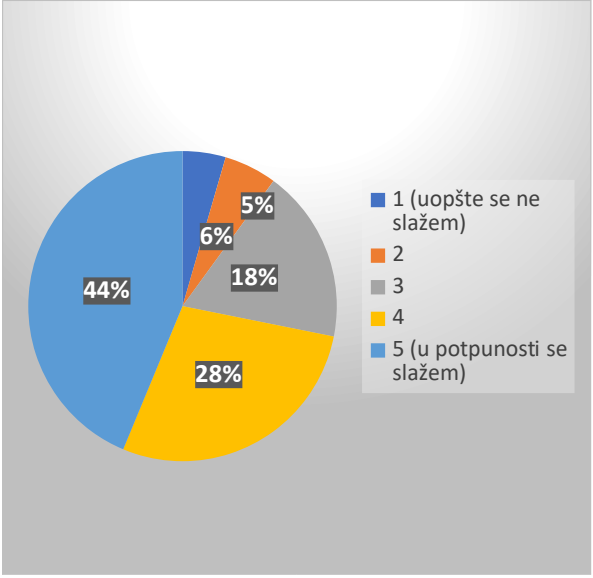


Chart 31. Social networks as a space for ignoring or minimizing the consequences of violence



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The analysis of the influence of gender on attitudes towards violence in online space showed certain differences between male and female respondents. The results of the Mann-Whitney test indicate that gender has a statistically significant effect on three out of four statements examined. In relation to the statement that “social networks have become a space in which violence is often normalized”, high statistical significance was obtained ($U = 2619.5$; $Z = -3.609$; $p < 0.001$). Similarly, the statement that “social networks often ignore or minimize the consequences of violence” shows a significant difference between the sexes ($U = 2925.0$; $Z = -2.785$; $p = 0.005$), while the statement that “social networks encourage critical discussion about violence and discrimination” also showed a significant association with gender ($U = 3018.5$; $Z = -2.491$; $p = 0.013$). Only in relation to the statement “I believe I have the capacity to recognize and respond to violence in the online space” were the differences not statistically significant ($p = 0.060$).

When looking at the distribution of responses by gender, it is evident that female respondents are more likely to express the view that violence on social media is normalized. Namely, as many as 58.7% of women fully agreed with this statement, while among men this percentage is significantly lower (32.1%). Men more often occupy neutral or lower positions on the scale, and 9.4% of them completely deny the statement, while among women this percentage is only 2.1%.

A similar pattern is observed with the statement that the consequences of online violence are often ignored or minimized. Almost half of women (48.3%) completely agree with the statement, while this is true for only a third of men (33.3%). Men



more often chose answers in the middle of the scale, especially option 3 (25.9%), which indicates a more pronounced reluctance to recognize this problem.

When it comes to the role of social networks in encouraging critical discussion about violence and discrimination, the results also show gender differences. Women's answers are distributed along the entire scale, but with a greater representation of higher grades, and 28.5% completely agree with the statement, while for men it is only 20.4%. At the same time, men more often choose neutral or lower ratings (eg answer 2 is chosen by 24.1% of men against 9% of women).

These findings suggest that women are more likely to recognize and emphasize the presence of violence and its consequences in the online space, as well as to have a stronger expectation of social networks to contribute to a critical discussion on these topics. Men, on the other hand, tend to take a more neutral or detached stance, which may indicate a less pronounced perception of the seriousness of the problem.



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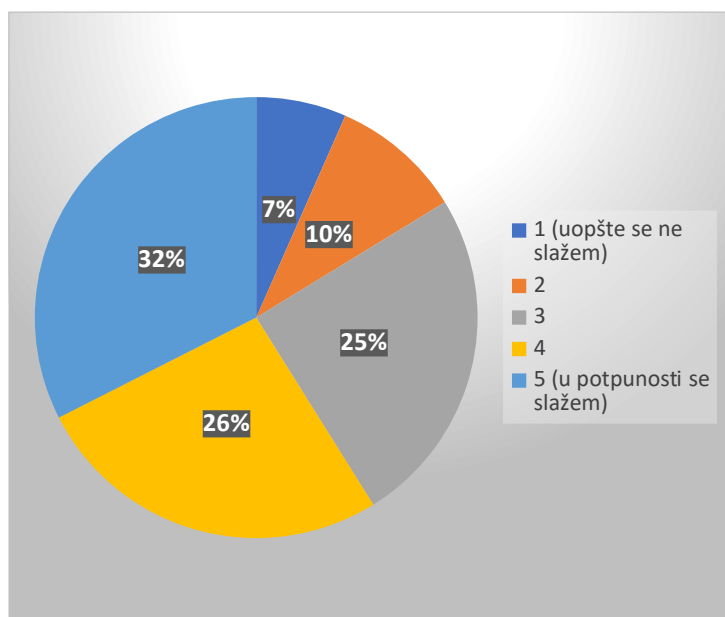


Chart 32. Assessment of personal capacities for recognizing violence



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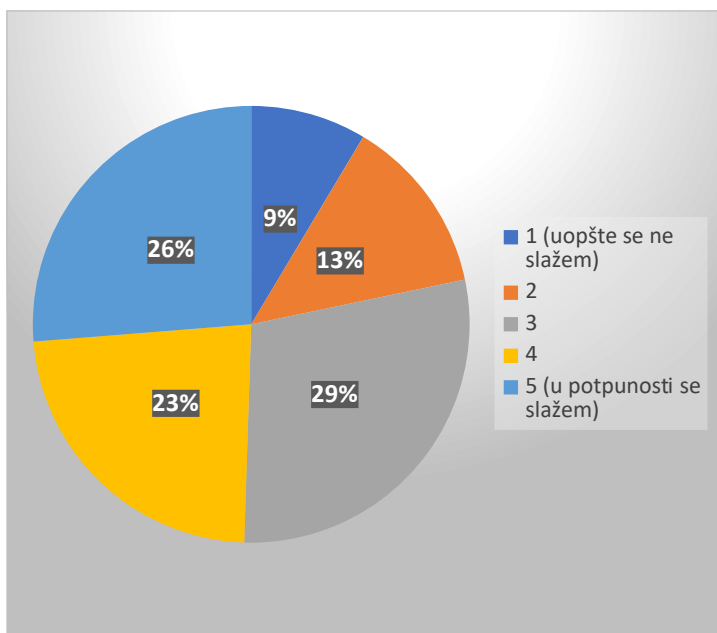


Chart 33. Social networks as a space for critical discussion

Social networks, although widely used among young people, remain a hidden and very unclear space when it comes to responsibility and regulation, and it seems that even among young people, the issue of regulation in the social media space is not something that is considered a priority. When asked “To what extent do you think that social media platforms effectively resolve cases of blackmail that occur through their services?” 34% of respondents in the sample rated it with the lowest score as completely ineffective, and as many as 30% pointed out that they do not have enough information to assess this.



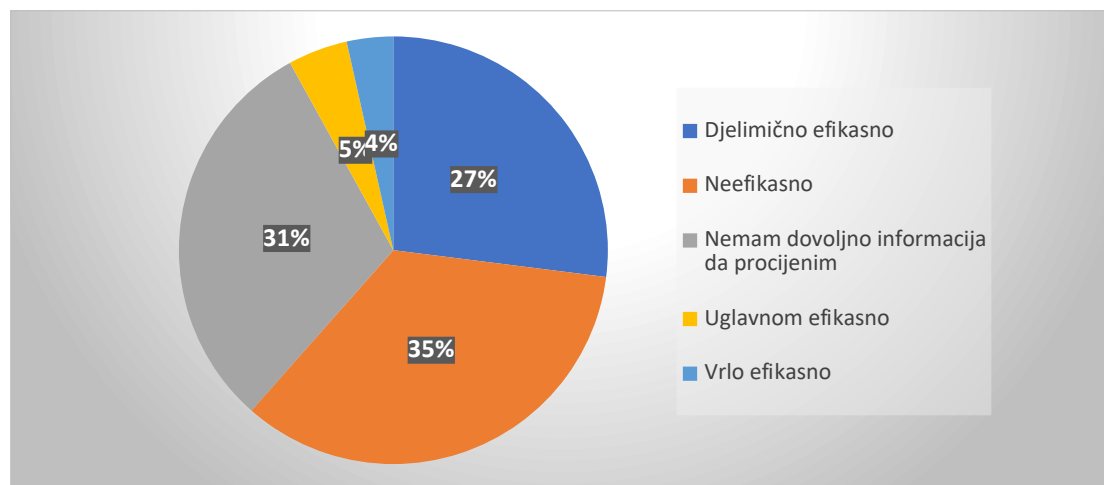


Chart 34. Responsibility of internet platforms

YOUNG PEOPLE TALK TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE (NON)GOVERNMENTAL SECTOR

The interview with representatives of the CURE Foundation was conducted as part of the qualitative part of the research, where representatives of the Cure Foundation were recognized as experts from the non-governmental sector within the scope of the research interest. **CURE Foundation from Sarajevo** is a feminist non-governmental organization that has been active in the field of human rights protection, gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina for more than two decades. Through educational programs, research, public campaigns and direct support to women and youth, the CURE Foundation continuously works to empower marginalized groups, advocate for institutional



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changes and develop violence prevention mechanisms, with a special focus on participatory, feminist and intersectional approaches.

The discussions were very dynamic, with young people asking questions, expressing doubts and sharing their own experiences, while experts from the non-governmental sector offered practical examples and the wider social framework. This discussion was not a one-sided presentation of the Foundation's activities, but an interactive dialogue in which the perspectives of young people and experts from the non-governmental sector intertwined.

The students were most interested in the role of social media. When the students raised the issue of violence in virtual reality, the representatives emphasized that it has equally serious consequences as events in *offline* life. This exchange increased awareness that digital violence is not “less real” but has long-lasting psychological and social consequences. While some pointed out that TikTok and Instagram often spread misogynistic messages, the representatives of the Foundation emphasized the dual nature of the digital space. The CURE Foundation emphasizes that social media has a dual role. On the one hand, they represent a powerful platform for spreading messages about equality and human rights and for empowering young people to speak out about violence. On the other hand, digital space often becomes a place for the normalization of discrimination and violence, including hate speech and attacks on activists and minority communities.

Through campaigns such as "Voice of Youth Against Violence" (2024), "Speak About Violence" (2021-2022), "No Back" (16 Days of Activism) and "Women Vote - Women Win!" (2024), the Foundation showed how social networks can serve for



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continuous education, political empowerment and the creation of a culture of non-violence. Their messages were clear: violence must be recognized and prevented, and young people have the power to become agents of change.

According to the Foundation's experience, social media is particularly useful when used to break taboos and bring complex topics closer to young people. Infographics, illustrations, short videos and *live* discussions explain concepts such as consent, *gaslighting*, victimization or femicide. This contributes to the normalization of conversations about violence, but also to strengthening the digital literacy of young people, which is crucial in the era of disinformation and "fake news".

The CURE Foundation also uses social media as a channel for rapid response and support for women and girls. They regularly receive messages from people seeking help – whether for themselves or for others. They respond as quickly as possible via Facebook and Instagram, directing users to SOS lines, safe houses, legal and psychological support. In this way, social media is not only a channel for information, but also a bridge to safety and institutional forms of protection.

One important topic is the engagement of influencers in the fight against violence. According to the CURE Foundation, many influencers only get involved when the topic is popular, which calls into question their consistency. However, there are also those who continuously and authentically deal with social issues, such as the "Kritički" profile, whose content stands out for its quality and responsibility. Their role in mobilizing young people and shaping social awareness is considered significant.



In promoting women's rights and equality on social media, the biggest challenge is sexist comments, hate speech, and the relativization of violence. The CURE Foundation addresses this through active moderation and reporting of problematic content, while protecting the online space as a safe place for women and young people.

The Foundation places special focus on the safety of women and marginalized groups on the Internet. Through workshops and trainings, young people are educated about the protection of personal data, recognition of online violence and digital rights. The Foundation actively cooperates with the Federal Police Administration, the Safer Internet Centre, as well as regional digital security networks. Despite these efforts, they believe that the platforms themselves still do not offer sufficient protection mechanisms, so broader cooperation between civil society, legislators and technology companies is necessary.

Despite the previously mentioned examples of good cooperation with institutions, when asked by students about the role of institutions in the fight against violence, the Foundation representatives were clear: institutions often do not do their job. They cited the example of the two recent cases of femicide in BiH where, despite great public pressure, the competent institutions did not provide an adequate response. This also started a discussion about the inadequate reaction of the media, which continues to present femicide through sensationalist narratives such as “crimes of passion” and whose reaction is short-lived, conditioned by the question of whether the mentioned news is still a sensation or not. In addition, the representatives shared worrying examples of schools covering up violence among young



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people, which caused a strong reaction from students and the question of who young people can really trust.

The CURE Foundation regularly analyses the way the media reports on violence, responds to unethical content, and offers recommendations for gender-sensitive reporting. In collaboration with journalists, it works to prevent the romanticization of violence, such as portraying femicide as a “crime of passion,” and insists on respecting ethical standards.

Experience shows that social media algorithms can simultaneously spread progressive messages but also reinforce stereotypes and discrimination. Organizations have no direct influence on this process, but they can react to harmful content and raise awareness of its consequences.

The foundation emphasizes the important role of observers in the prevention of violence. Young people who witness violence often feel fear, powerlessness or remorse, but if they join together, they can significantly contribute to the protection of the victim. Through direct work with students, the organization transfers knowledge and tools on how to recognize violence and respond appropriately. Examples include public actions, film screenings and workshops where young people share their experiences and build resilience against violence together.

The representatives of the Foundation noticed that after years of relative progress, the social climate is deteriorating. An illustrative example is that for the first time in more than a decade, they were not allowed to enter secondary schools for workshops. Young people perceived this example as a signal of weakening institutional support for equality issues. This statement caused concern and discussion among



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male and female students about the role played by institutions in (not) supporting the education of young people about equality.

The Foundation representatives strongly emphasized the principle of identity without hierarchies and emphasized that all struggles and identities are equally important within the framework of equality issues. This perspective opened up a discussion among young people about how marginalization can manifest itself through multiple dimensions simultaneously, including gender, age, appearance, or social status.

A conversation with the CURE Foundation clearly shows that the non-governmental sector plays a key role in connecting young people, institutions and digital tools in the fight against violence. Through online campaigns, education and direct support, the organization not only raises awareness about the problem of gender-based violence but also builds a safe space in which young people can become active actors of change. Despite challenges such as hate speech and insufficient protection mechanisms, the CURE Foundation confirms through its work that violence prevention requires constant cooperation, solidarity and innovative approaches.

The Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina was established within the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the aim of improving, promoting and monitoring gender equality policy in the country. The Agency is tasked with developing and implementing the Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina, making recommendations to institutions, initiating legislative amendments, monitoring the compliance of domestic legislation with international standards (in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of



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Discrimination against Women – CEDAW), as well as coordinating cooperation between different levels of government and civil society.

Although formally it has an important role in the field of gender equality, the discussions highlighted that in practice the Agency has limited capacities, both in terms of human resources and financial means. It was particularly emphasized that its role remains predominantly advisory, meaning that the recommendations and analyses it produces are not binding on other institutions.

The youth's conversation with the Agency's representatives showed a clear tension between the formal obligations of the state and real institutional possibilities. Students noted that the lack of resources, marginalized advisory role and ignoring recommendations indicate that the commitment of institutions for gender equality in BiH is often reduced to a form, i.e. to fulfilling international obligations, without substantive political and social engagement.

In the conversation of male and female students with representatives of the BiH Agency for Gender Equality, a whole series of challenges that this institution faces in its work were openly discussed. The representatives emphasized at the beginning that the Agency is seriously under-capacitated, which means that it does not have a sufficient number of employees or adequate resources to perform all the tasks expected of it. The lack of personnel and resources makes it particularly difficult to carry out gender analyses, ensure practice and assistance, as well as systematically monitor the implementation of legal frameworks in the field of gender equality. An additional problem is the fact that the Agency has only an advisory



role, which often leads to the fact that the recommendations and analyses it makes are not taken seriously enough within the government sector.

In response to questions from young people about the role of new technologies and virtual reality, representatives of the Agency pointed out that the Gender Action Plan of BiH has since been expanded to include the topics of gender and artificial intelligence. In this way, an institutional response is being attempted to address the new challenges of discrimination and violence that arise in the digital space and that are increasingly shaping social relations.

The discussion then opened on the role of observers and the obligation to report violence. It was emphasized that the Law stipulates that every third party has the obligation to report violence, but in practice this phenomenon is very rare. The representatives emphasized that the Agency continuously promotes the culture of reporting, but that the issue of the role of observers is still not explicitly included in the action plans. Precisely because of the insufficiently efficient and adequate reactions of the institutions, as they emphasized, it is even more important that the community and the environment recognize their responsibility in protecting victims and not turn a blind eye to violence.

The issue of romanticizing violence in media reporting attracted special attention from male and female students, especially after the last two cases of femicide in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Representatives of the Agency emphasized that the institution responds to current events by providing recommendations to digital and public media on avoiding sexism and stereotypical representation. The Agency also



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participates in training courses for male and female journalists with the aim of increasing gender sensitivity in media editorial offices. However, it was emphasized that these recommendations are not binding, and their implementation depends solely on the goodwill of media owners and editors, which greatly limits their effect.

Another issue related to the regulation of media and internet content. The Agency is involved in the process of harmonizing domestic laws and the Press Code of BiH, but faces serious limitations, as the Communications Regulatory Agency (CRA) does not have the ability to regulate internet content. Given that digital media dominate the formation of public opinion today, this lack of regulation represents one of the greatest challenges in terms of public information ethics and protection against discrimination.

During the conversation, one of the students expressed her personal impression that the Agency remains insufficiently visible and that the public, as well as institutions, the media and the private sector, do not take it seriously enough. The representatives responded by confirming that their role is often reduced to a mere compliance with form and protocol. Although they are expected to be present in various processes and events, this is often done without a sincere intention to incorporate their recommendations into practice. In this way, according to them, their work remains in the shadow of a formal advisory function, while real advocacy for gender equality in institutions still too often remains only at the level of *pro forma* and fulfilment of obligations imposed by international actors such as the European Commission.



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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research conducted within the framework of the *Living Peace project Lab : Developing Peer Education Initiatives* confirmed that violence among young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a complex, multidimensional and structurally determined social problem, which cannot be understood or addressed solely through individual behaviours. On the contrary, violence is reproduced within a wider set of social norms, cultural patterns, institutional practices and power relations. In particular, it has been shown that gender-based violence is deeply rooted in normalized patterns of behaviour and stereotypes, which is why it often remains unrecognized or is placed in the so-called the "grey zone" between socially acceptable behaviour and violence.

The results of the research indicate that young people have a significant potential to recognize violence in their environment, but that this potential remains insufficiently activated. Fear of judgment, distrust in institutions, unclear reporting mechanisms and strongly internalized social norms discourage response, resulting in a pronounced passive role of bystander. This pattern is particularly visible among young men, who, according to the results, have a greater fear of ridicule and peer judgment, which indicates a strong pressure of masculinity and norms of male behaviour that further complicate intervention in situations of violence.

One of the particularly significant findings relates to the limited reach of informal and non-governmental educational programmes. Although participants recognise



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the existence of numerous projects aimed at working with young people, most respondents have not had the opportunity to participate in them. This finding points to the problem of “closed circles” within the non-governmental sector, where activities are often repeated with the same or similar groups of young people, without reaching the wider population. In this context, the research results strongly suggest that the topics of gender-based violence and violence prevention must be systematically integrated into formal education. This conclusion is further reinforced by previous research on curricula, which shows that the phenomena of gender-based violence are almost never addressed within the teaching content (e.g. Osmić et al. 2022).

Analysis of young people's attitudes towards formal education, culture and art has shown a strong respect for the authority of the school and teaching content. Young people are significantly less inclined to critically examine the content offered through formal education, even when they perceive it as potentially harmful or discriminatory. In contrast, they express a greater degree of criticism towards popular culture and art. This finding indicates the need to strengthen critical pedagogy within formal education, in order to empower young people to recognize and problematize violent and discriminatory narratives, regardless of their source.

Particularly worrying are the findings related to the lack of support for people facing violence, both within the family and among peers. More than half of the respondents stated that people who suffer violence often do not receive adequate help and support in the family, with women recognizing this problem significantly



more often, which indicates gender-based patterns of silence and stigmatization. Similar patterns were also identified in the peer environment, where violence is often recognized, but without specific support and intervention.

Distrust in institutions emerged as one of the central findings of the research. Young people express strong concerns about the lack of training and awareness among professionals in institutions such as the police, social work centres, schools, and health care facilities. This perception is further reinforced by the assessment of extremely poor inter-institutional cooperation, which leads young people to conclude that the protection system does not function as a whole, but rather fragmented and inefficient.

The open-ended responses of the respondents further pointed to serious systemic weaknesses in the areas of mental health, social protection and family relations. Violence is often associated with unrecognized mental disorders, lack of adequate support during divorce, neglect of the rights and well-being of children, as well as paradoxical situations in which violent partners maintain contact with children despite evidence of violence. Particularly shocking allegations of tragic outcomes, including suicides of young people exposed to long-term violence, strongly indicate a lack of prevention, early recognition and systemic response.

The research findings clearly show that young people understand violence as a multi-layered social phenomenon, which is not limited to individual deviations, but is deeply connected to institutional failures, cultural norms and the wider social



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context. Such a perception confirms that prevention strategies must simultaneously operate at the individual, educational, institutional and societal levels.

Recommendations

Based on the research results and experiences gathered during the project implementation, the following recommendations are formulated, which need to be further developed in a strategic and planned manner, in order to: clearer connection with possible mechanisms of implementation and evaluation:

- Systematic integration of violence topics into formal education

It is necessary to introduce content on gender-based violence, violence prevention, mental health and human rights into the curricula of primary, secondary and higher education, so that these topics become accessible to a wider population of young people.

- Institutionalization of peer education

It is recommended to permanently and systematically introduce *peer-to-peer* programs within educational institutions, with formal recognition and support for such initiatives, given the proven effectiveness of the participatory and peer approach.

- Strengthening the capacities of educational and social institutions



Continuous education of teaching and professional staff on violence, trauma, gender sensitivity and intersectionality must become standard, with clearly defined, transparent and applicable protocols of action.

- Development of safe and confidential mechanisms for reporting violence

It is necessary to ensure anonymous, accessible and reliable channels for reporting violence to young people, with a guarantee of protection from secondary victimization and institutional neglect.

- Applying an intersectional approach to prevention policies

Prevention programs and measures must recognize multiple forms of discrimination and provide additional support to young people from marginalized and vulnerable groups.

- Improving inter-institutional cooperation

It is necessary to establish efficient coordination mechanisms between educational institutions, social services, health care, police and judiciary, so that the protection of persons exposed to violence is rapid, consistent and effective.

- Using culture, art and media as prevention tools



It is recommended to develop educational programs that encourage critical reading of media and cultural content, as well as the active involvement of young people in the creation of artistic and media initiatives aimed at deconstructing violent and discriminatory patterns.

- Strengthening the mental health and psychosocial support system

It is necessary to improve the availability and quality of psychological and counseling support, with a special focus on early risk detection and prevention of tragic outcomes.

- Further research and a longitudinal approach

It is recommended to continue empirical research, including longitudinal studies, which would enable monitoring changes in attitudes, behaviour, and effects of prevention programs over a longer period of time.

In conclusion, the research confirms that the prevention of violence among youth cannot be fragmented, *ad hoc* or exclusively repressive. It must be systemic, participatory, educational and focused on empowering young people as active actors of social change. In this sense, the project *The EUPeace Living Lab* represents a valuable example of good practice that can serve as a model for the development of sustainable violence prevention policies and programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond.



RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA¹³

Violence, in addition to being a serious social problem, is also a serious violation of human rights. It is crucial that every person knows their rights and the procedures they can use to protect themselves, as well as the resources and institutions they can rely on. This appendix aims to provide a clear overview of legal protection mechanisms, available institutions and safe places, while at the same time sending a message of encouragement to all people who struggle with the fear of speaking out.

The first step towards safety is to report violence. Any woman who experiences any form of violence can contact the competent police station; in addition to the police, the prosecutor's office, the Centre for Social Work, the SOS line for victims of violence and the SOS red line are also available. In this context, we believe it is important to emphasize that the adoption of the new law **on Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence against Women in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina** introduced stricter measures to protect victims, as well as stricter sanctions for perpetrators. According to the new law, the police can immediately order protective measures and inform the prosecutor's office about them; violation of the aforementioned measures can result in a prison sentence of up to 3 years.

¹³ Written by **Mija Vukšić**.



In providing protection to victims of violence, it is very important to highlight safe houses. There are eight safe houses in Bosnia and Herzegovina; the procedure for entering a safe house implies a report to the police and the Centre for Social Work, which is responsible for the area of the municipality where the victim resides. However, there are cases when the victim reports to the safe house on her own, and she necessarily informs the Centre for Social Work about it. Also, there are situations when the victim is placed in a safe house through the prosecution.

SOS telephone number for victims of violence in FBiH – 1265

SOS telephone number for victims of violence in the RS - 1264

SOS red line – 033 222 000

The digital age has opened up new forms of violence against women: threats, blackmail, publication of intimate photos or recordings. In relation to the above, it is very important to highlight the latest amendments to the Criminal Code of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Namely, the **Article 189a states the following: Abuse of a recording of sexually explicit content** (1) Whoever abuses the relationship of trust and, without the consent of the person being recorded, makes available to a third person a recording of sexually explicit content that was recorded with the consent of that person for personal use, and thus violates the privacy of that person, shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of up to three years. (2) Whoever, using a computer system or in another manner, creates a new or modifies an existing recording of sexually explicit content and uses that recording as the rightful one, thereby violating the privacy of the person in that recording, shall be punished by the punishment referred to in paragraph (1) of this Article. (3)



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Whoever commits the criminal offense referred to in paragraphs (1) and (2) of this Article through a computer system or network or in another manner due to which the recording became available to a larger number of persons, shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of six months to five years. (4) The recordings and special devices with which the criminal offense referred to in this Article was committed shall be confiscated. ¹⁴We believe it is very important to note that the above also applies in the Republika Srpska, which is evident from the latest amendments to the Criminal Code of the Republika Srpska, namely Article 170a states the following : **Misuse of photographs and videos of sexually explicit content** : (1) Whoever abuses a relationship of trust and, without the consent of the other person, makes available to a third person a photograph or recording of sexually explicit content that was made with the consent of that person for personal use, thereby violating the privacy of that person, shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of up to two years. (2) Whoever creates a new or alters an existing photograph or recording of sexually explicit content of another person and uses that recording as genuine, thereby violating the privacy of another person, shall also be punished by the punishment referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article. (3) If the criminal offence referred to in paragraphs 1 and 2 of this Article is committed via a computer system or computer network or in another manner that enables the photograph or recording to become available to a larger number of persons, the perpetrator shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of one to three years. (4) Photographs and

¹⁴Criminal Code of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Official Gazette of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina* No. 36/2003, 21/2004 - corrected, 69/2004, 18/2005, 42/2010, 42/2011, 59/2014, 76/2014, 46/2016, 75/2017, 31/2023 and 58/2025.



recordings or the means used to commit the criminal offence referred to in this Article shall be confiscated.¹⁵ In cases of digital violence and abuse of intimate recordings, victims have at their disposal specialized institutions and mechanisms, including The Department for Combating Computer and High-Tech Crime of the Ministry of Interior of the Sarajevo Canton, the High-Tech Crime Unit of the Ministry of Interior of the Republika Srpska, the Federal Police Administration, competent prosecutors' offices and numerous non-governmental organizations.

Victims of digital violence are advised to:

- They do not delete messages, recordings, e-mails or posts that can be used as evidence, but take photos of them, if you receive threats via voice messages, save the original files.
- Contact the police or prosecutor's office and file a report. As you can see from the previous text, digital violence is a criminal offense, and the competent institutions have an obligation to respond.
- Block and report accounts on platforms, report published content to platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, WhatsApp ...).
- Protect your online profiles and privacy, change passwords, set up two-factor authentication, and check your social media privacy settings.
- Reduce the availability of personal information on the Internet.

¹⁵ Krivični zakonik Republike srpske, *Službeni glasnik RS* br. 64/2017, 104/2018 – odluka US, 15/2021, 89/2021, 73/2023, *Sl. glasnik BiH*, br. 9/2024 – odluka US BiH, *Sl. glasnik RS* 105/2024 – odluka US, 19/2025, *Sl. glasnik BiH*, br. 14/2025 – odluka US BiH, *Sl. glasnik RS*, br. 31/2025 i 85/2025 – odluka US.



- Once sent content is no longer under your control, very often "only for me" becomes "for everyone". You don't have to send anything, neither out of love, nor out of fear of losing him.

We think it is important to draw attention to the fact that in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are five women's non-governmental organizations that provide women and children who find themselves in trouble, first of all, security, a safe place to stay, then professional help and warmth. Psychotherapists, social pedagogues, medical staff, social workers, educators and numerous volunteers are available to the victims.

- Lara Bijeljina Foundation – manages a Safe House for women and children victims of violence, runs a volunteer SOS hotline for reporting violence, and provides legal and psychosocial assistance to survivors of violence. Phones: 055 290 570 and 055 251 696. 24-hour hotline: 066 810 800.
- Local Democracy Foundation - the primary focus of the organization is the protection and improvement of the human rights of victims of gender-based violence. Through numerous legal initiatives, social, economic and educational programs empower women for equal participation in the public and private sectors. They can be contacted at the following numbers: 033 237 240 and 033 236 899.
- Vive žene Tuzla - Centre for Therapy and Rehabilitation of Survivors of All Forms of Violence and Torture, through comprehensive and professional psychosocial support, education and public advocacy, works to build a non-



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violent, tolerant and safe society, respecting the principles of equality and confidentiality. They can be contacted at: 035 224 310 and 035 224 311.

- Association "Medica" Zenica - has been providing support to women and children throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina who have survived rape, sexual violence or domestic violence for 30 years. Through a multidisciplinary approach based on feminist principles and international standards, they help those who need it most. They can be contacted at the following numbers: + 387 32 463 920 and +387 32 463 924.
- Association of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mostar – their vision is to create a society in which women are fully affirmed in the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina and protected. They place special focus on the protection of women and children who are victims of violence. They can be contacted at the following numbers: 036 550 339, 036 558 525, 036 558 526 and 036 550 023.
- Association of Women from Una Bihać - provides support to the most vulnerable categories, women and children victims of domestic violence, victims of human trafficking and socially excluded persons. Their vision is to create a society of equal opportunities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They can be contacted at the following numbers: 037 220 855 and 037 220 855.

At the very end, we want to tell you that no woman deserves violence, never under any circumstances. It is not your fault, you did not provoke them, you are not alone and you do not have to remain silent. We often hear that procedures are slow, that



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institutions know how to schedule, that the system is not perfect, but your voice has weight and there is always someone who will hear it, understand and help you. There are people, organizations and laws to protect you, because your dignity is priceless. In a time where intimate content is increasingly shared and abused, remember that it's not a private matter, it's violence. Any such act is a criminal offense, as we have previously stated, there are numerous protection mechanisms, there is support and there is a path to justice, you just need to be brave enough to start it. Be brave. Speak up and get help. Your "enough is enough" can change everything, both for you and for those who are just gathering the strength to speak up.



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KEY TERMS

Youth violence – a set of behaviours that involve physical, psychological, sexual, economic, digital or symbolic violation of the integrity of another person or group, and that occur in the peer, educational, family or digital environment of young people.

Gender-based violence (GBV) – a form of violence directed against a person based on their sex, gender identity or gender expression, rooted in unequal social power relations and gender stereotypes, which can manifest as physical, psychological, sexual, economic, institutional or symbolic violence.

Peer education) – a participatory educational approach in which young people learn from each other, exchange experiences and knowledge, and jointly develop competences for violence prevention and socially responsible action.

Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) – an educational and research methodology focused on solving real social problems through active participant participation, critical thinking, collaboration, and creating concrete solutions.

The role of bystanders – the position of people who witness violence, but are not initially directly involved, where their reaction (or lack of reaction) can play a key role in the escalation or prevention of violence.



Intersectionality – a theoretical and analytical approach that suggests that different forms of discrimination and inequality (e.g. gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability) intersect and reinforce each other, shaping specific experiences of violence.

Multiple discrimination – a situation in which a person is simultaneously exposed to discrimination on multiple grounds, either cumulatively (added) or intersectionally, when the discriminatory grounds cannot be separated.

Cyberbullying – a form of violence that takes place through digital technologies and social networks, including harassment, threats, hate speech, the dissemination of private content and other forms of online aggression.

Institutional and structural violence – forms of violence that arise from the practices, policies and failures of institutions and social structures, which systematically produce or maintain inequalities, discrimination and exclusion.

Prevention of violence - a set of educational, social, institutional and cultural strategies aimed at preventing the occurrence of violence, early recognition of risky behaviours and empowering individuals and communities for non-violent action.



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ANNEX 1

Youth questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of the EUPeace Living Lab project, which investigates how young people experience and recognize different forms of violence in their environment. The goal is to understand your experience and attitudes so that together we can develop better ways to prevent violence.

Your answers are anonymous and will be used exclusively for research purposes. Answering takes 15–20 minutes.

Thank you for your participation in contributing to creating a safer and more just society!

1. How old are you (check the answer that applies to you)?

☐ 18–21

☐ 22–25

☐ 26–29

2. Are you currently in the process of education?

☐ I am not in the process of education

☐ Yes, I am currently attending high school

☐ Yes, I am currently studying in the first cycle of studies

☐ Yes, I am currently studying in the second cycle of studies

☐ Yes, I am currently studying in the third cycle of studies

3. Do you live in?

☐ In a city

☐ In a smaller local community

☐ In the countryside



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4. Have you participated in courses, workshops, professional training or anything similar related to the issue of violence prevention and/or peacebuilding in the last 2 years?

- ☐ Yes, within regular formal education (e.g. within activities in secondary schools or at the faculty)
- ☐ Yes, within the framework of the activities of non-governmental organizations and non-formal education
- ☐ No, I didn't have the opportunity to participate

5. What is your gender?

- ☐ female
- ☐ male
- ☐ I prefer not to answer



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6. Evaluate whether the following forms of behaviour can be characterized as violence:	
1. Any application of physical force that endangers the body of another person, regardless of whether physical injury has occurred	☐ Yes, it is a form of violence ☐ No, I don't consider that violence ☐ I don't know
2. Exposing a person to excessive jealousy, accusations and controlling behaviour in order to limit contact with others	☐ Yes, it is a form of violence ☐ No, I don't consider that violence ☐ I don't know
3. Making fun of someone else's sexuality or body, making offensive statements, insulting or addressing a person in derogatory manner	☐ Yes, it is a form of violence ☐ No, I don't consider that violence ☐ I don't know
4. Limiting freedom of choice in terms of clothing or hairstyle, forcing a person to dress in a specific way	☐ Yes, it is a form of violence ☐ No, I don't consider that violence ☐ I don't know
5. Telling a person that they are mentally unstable or incompetent	☐ Yes, it is a form of violence ☐ No, I don't consider that violence ☐ I don't know
6. Blackmailing a person with financial means and denying the right to education	☐ Yes, it is a form of violence ☐ No, I don't consider that violence ☐ I don't know



7. Please rate the degree of agreement or disagreement with the stated statements on a scale from 1 to 5, whereby 1 means I do not agree with the stated statement at all, and 5 means I completely agree with the stated statement.

a. Sometimes I feel very uncomfortable about the content of song lyrics and music videos that I listen to	1 2 3 4 5
b. I think my peers sometimes find justification and validation for harmful behaviour in the authority of celebrities.	1 2 3 4 5
c. Artists have the right to cross borders in the name of freedom of artistic expression	1 2 3 4 5
d. Young people do not have a sufficiently developed critical awareness in accessing the contents of popular culture and art	1 2 3 4 5
e. Harmful practices and offensive content within popular culture and art are ignored because we are used to them	1 2 3 4 5
f. Within formal education, we learn content within certain subjects that I consider harmful and discriminatory.	1 2 3 4 5

8. How frequent are the following listed phenomena in your environment, through your personal experience or the experiences of friends you know about?

a. Teaching staff in schools or colleges make inappropriate comments and jokes at someone else's expense, which directly affects young people	☐ I often notice the above ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not at all the case
b. Teaching staff in schools or colleges comment on physical appearance or manner of dressing	☐ I often notice the above ☐ Sometimes



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of other persons, which normalizes such behaviour	☐ Not at all the case
c. I know of specific cases of violence and/or sexual harassment by teaching staff	☐ I often notice the above ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not at all the case
d. I know of specific cases of violence and/or sexual harassment by peers	☐ I often notice the above ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not at all the case
e. Due to fear of judgment from the environment and/or lack of knowledge, etc., people facing violence do not receive adequate help and <u>support within the family.</u>	☐ I often notice the above ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not at all the case
f. People facing violence do not receive adequate help and <u>support from their peers</u>	☐ I often notice the above ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not at all the case

9. Which environment do you consider to be the riskiest when it comes to the possibility of abuse of authority over young people?

☐ Educational institutions (schools, universities)

☐ Family and parental authority

☐ Sports and cultural teams

☐ Among peers

☐ Something else: _____

☐ I don't know / I can't estimate



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10. Which of the following items worries you when you think about the dangers of experiences with violence? Rate from 1, which indicates no worries at all, to 5, which indicates very strong worries.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fear of physical attack and confrontation	1 2 3 4 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fear of sexual harassment and violence	1 2 3 4 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fear of verbal abuse and belittling	1 2 3 4 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am afraid that employees in institutions (police, social work centres, school psychologists, etc.) are not adequately trained and sensitized to work with survivors of violence?	1 2 3 4 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Something else that is not mentioned that causes you fear (specify what below) _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	1 2 3 4 5

11. Do you know who you can report violence to if you experience it or witness it?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

12. Do you think that young people have enough information about their rights and obligations when it comes to protection from violence?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Partially
- ☐ I don't know



13. When you witness violence (live or online), how do you usually react (mark the answer that applies to you)?

- ☐ I actively react and try to help the victim by personally getting involved in the incident physically and/or verbally.
- ☐ Call for help (e.g. police, security guard)
- ☐ I remain neutral – I do not react, but I observe
- ☐ I ignore and leave the situation
- ☐ I have never witnessed violence

14. If there were situations in which you were blocked from reacting, which of the following reasons prevents you the most from reacting in a situation of violence?

- ☐ I consider it not my responsibility
- ☐ I believe someone else will react
- ☐ I am afraid of being ridiculed or judged
- ☐ Fear for your own safety
- ☐ I don't know exactly what to do in that situation

15. If you were to face violence or witness violence, how safe and protected would you feel if you turned to one of the competent institutions for help (e.g. school, police, health, centre for social work)?

- ☐ I would not feel safe at all
- ☐ I would feel weak for sure
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ I would feel partially safe.
- ☐ I would feel completely safe

16. In your opinion, how well do different institutions (e.g. school, police, health, social work centre) cooperate when it comes to protecting persons exposed to violence?

- ☐ Very good
- ☐ Partially good



☐ Insufficient

☐ I don't know

17. Do you think the number of people present affects your willingness to react?

☐ Yes – I am less likely to react if there are many other people around

☐ Yes – I am more likely to react if there are more of us

☐ No - the number of people does not affect my decision

☐ I'm not sure

18. Does your school/faculty/institution organize and implement visible educational content (lectures, workshops, campaigns) that deals with the topic of violence prevention and how to report violence?

☐ Yes, often

☐ Sometimes

☐ I never noticed

☐ I don't know

19. Have you encountered the following phenomena on social networks?	
a. Sexist comments and posts	☐ Always / Almost always ☐ Often ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never
b. Discrimination based on ethnicity, gender or religion	☐ Always / Almost always ☐ Often ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never
c. Public lynching and condemnation of individuals based on private posts	☐ Always / Almost always ☐ Often ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never



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d. Displaying or endorsing violence (verbal, physical, sexual)	☐ Always / Almost always ☐ Often ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never
e. Using social media to report bullying and seek help:	☐ Always / Almost always ☐ Often ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

20. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Check a number from 1 to 5, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree")	
a. Social networks have become a space where violence is often normalized.	1 2 3 4 5
ignored or minimized on social media.	1 2 3 4 5
c. Social networks encourage critical discussion about violence and discrimination.	1 2 3 4 5
d. I believe I have the capacity to recognize and respond to violence in the online space.	1 2 3 4 5

21. To what extent do you think social media platforms effectively address blackmail cases that occur through their services?

- ☐ Very efficient
- ☐ Mostly effective
- ☐ Partially effective
- ☐ Inefficient
- ☐ I don't have enough information to judge



EXCERPTS FROM REVIEWS

“The special value of this publication, which I would like to emphasize, is that it is the product of a collaborative learning process in which students actively participated in the design and implementation of the study. It should be noted that such a process, which combines a research and pedagogical dimension, requires additional work from professors as well. Based on insights from relevant literature and inspired by conversations with experts and practitioners, the research team identified relevant problems surrounding violence in BiH today and considered possible interventions. Students prepared analyses of scientific papers on relevant topics, which are included in this publication, and participated in the development of the questionnaire.

This interactive, collaborative pedagogical approach seems particularly appropriate for research on gender-based violence among youth, in which, as we see in this study, the peer environment plays a large, often negative, role. The decision not to treat young people only as a target audience or as respondents, but to include them as participants in the very process of knowledge production with an original empirical contribution, is commendable. Perhaps this is precisely how the sharing of a critical and proactive non-violent approach among their peers can be maximally encouraged. The publication *Study on the Experience and Prevention of Violence among Youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Challenges and Perspectives in Creating an Inclusive and Safe Environment with a Focus on Gender-Based Violence* represents a valuable contribution to this process.”

Prof. Dr. Stefaan Jansen

“The theoretical framework of the Study adequately problematizes the role of young people in the prevention, identification and de-escalation of violence, with particular emphasis on the importance of transforming their role from observers to active actors in the community. The authors clearly emphasize the necessity of systemic development of youth competencies in this area. In this context, students are empowered through workshops, research on the topic and analysis of findings to recognize different forms of violence, react in situations of violence, provide support to persons exposed to violence and critically reflect on the phenomenon of violence in a broader social context.

A special value of the manuscript is represented by a set of four workshops, which can be seen as an applicable model for developing youth competences in the field of violence prevention and active social action. This approach gains importance given the limited possibilities of in-



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volving youth in similar programs, especially in the field of gender-based violence. The application of the peer-to-peer approach is in line with modern pedagogical practices since it enables joint learning, exchange of experiences and building mutual trust. Additionally, involving youth in the discussion of research results within the workshops contributes to their relevance and strengthens the critical thinking of youth.

The results of the research confirm the worrying level of exposure of young people to violence, as well as the presence of the normalization of certain forms of violent behavior. Although the results are not surprising, given the wider social context, they show that violence among young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a complex and multi-layered social challenge. It is particularly important that the Study identifies the reasons why young people, for the most part, do not actively react to violence, and in this sense fear of consequences, social pressures and expressed mistrust in protection mechanisms are highlighted. These findings represent a relevant basis for further scientific analysis and creation of public policies."

Prof. Dr. Lejla Kafedžić



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