




SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS



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AWEN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT	10
1.2. OBJECTIVES	11
1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS	11
2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK	12
3. POLICY FRAMEWORK	16
4. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK	17
4.1. CENTRAL LEVEL	17
4.2. LOCAL LEVEL	18
4.3. PROVISION OF SERVICES BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS	19
5. METHODOLOGY	20
5.1. APPROACH	20
5.2. DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND SAMPLING	20
5.3. DATA ANALYSIS	21
5.4. ETHICAL ISSUES AND LIMITATIONS	21
6. FINDINGS	22
6.1. UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT	22
6.2. FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT	23
6.3. HOW IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT EXPERIENCED AND WHAT ARE THEIR CONSEQUENCES?	23
6.4. RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS	26
6.5. SEEKING HELP: DRIVERS AND BARRIERS AND THE ROLE OF VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS	31
7. CONCLUSIONS	37
8. RECOMMENDATIONS	39
9. REFERENCES	42
ANNEX - SURVEY STUDY TOOLS	44
INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE	44
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION	46
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION	48

ACRONYMS

AWEN	Albanian Women's Empowerment Network
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics
CC	Criminal Code
CPC	Criminal Procedure Code
CRM	Coordinated Referral Mechanism
MoHSP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
CPU	Child Protection Unit
NARU	Needs Assessment and Referral Unit
NPO	Non-profit Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
CPO	Child Protection Officer
DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers

GLOSSARY

Pursuant to Article 3 of the Law 9669/2006 “On measures against violence in family relations”, as amended by Law 47/2018, **violence** is defined as: “any act or failure to act of a person against another person, resulting in a violation of physical, moral, psychological, sexual, social, economic integrity”.

Pursuant to the same law above, a **victim** is defined as “the person affected by any act or failure to act of another person, resulting in a violation of physical, moral, psychological, sexual, social, economic integrity”.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE means “Any act of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occurs within the family or household unit, or between the spouses or partners, or between former spouses or former partners, regardless of whether the perpetrator shares or used to share the same dwelling with the victim”. The Albanian Law “On measures against violence in family relations” defines violence as “any act of violence defined under paragraph 1 hereof that occurs within a family or a household unit, exercised between family members as defined under paragraph 7 hereof, that are or have been in family relationships, regardless of whether the perpetrator shares or used to share the same dwelling with the victim” (amended in 2018). Article 130/a of the Criminal Code of Albania defines domestic violence as “beating and any other act of violence against the person who is spouse, former-spouse, cohabitant or former cohabitant, next to kin or relatives by marriage with the author of the criminal offence, with the consequence of attacking his/her physical, psycho-social and economical integrity”.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE is defined as “the use of physical force against another person that results in injuries and damages to that person or that endangers the latter. Physical violence involves a wide range of behaviours such as scratches, pushing, shoving, physical restraining, biting, strangulation, pinching, poking, pulling hair, arm-twisting, slapping, coercion, hitting, beating, kicking, burning, stabbing, choking. Physical violence may also include a person using body size and strength, means for deprivation of liberty and/or weapons (e.g. a firearm, knife or any other object) to gain or maintain control over another person”.

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE includes “A range of behaviours that aim to criticize, humiliate, control, isolate, intimidate, cause fear and attack the character of someone and thus destroying this individual’s self-esteem, confidence and security. Insults, humiliations, verbal aggression, causing fear by means of threats to physically hurt an individual and/or other relatives of him/her, and/or to destroy something that is meaningful to that person, are some of the types of verbal violence, psychological attack and emotional violence included in psychological violence.

ECONOMIC VIOLENCE: “Controlling money and finances, regardless of whether those are his/her earnings or not, exercising control and monitoring how an individual uses and allocates money, including earnings from employment of the latter, spending money for personal pleasure, especially money required to provide for a basic living of family members, constant threat to cut economic resources, obliging an individual to provide for all the basic needs of family members within a definite period (e.g. on a monthly basis) at a quota that is below the minimum level of what is normally required for such purpose, etc.”.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE: “Any unwanted sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. Such setting might include, but without limitation, the home or workplace. Coercion may include a wide range of methods to compel it. Apart from physical strength, it may include psychological threats, pressure or other threats, such as threatening to cause physical damage, dismiss someone or failing to be hired for a required job. It may occur even when the person attacked is unable to consent. This might be the case when the latter is drunk, drugged, asleep or intellectually disabled to understand the situation. Sexual violence includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration, however slightly, of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object. The attempt to commit this is known as an attempted rape. The rape of a single person by two or more violators is known as gang rape. Sexual violence may include other forms of assault on a sexual organ, including

forced contacts between the mouth and the penis, vulva, or anus. The terms sexual assault, rape, sexual abuse and sexual violence are often used interchangeably”.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: “Is a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and means all acts of gender-based violence that result or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Violence against women includes different types of violence that women, young women and girls go through, such as domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence from a non-intimate partner, sexual harassment, forced marriage, abortion and coerced sterilization, stalking, shame killing, trafficking and harmful practices like female genital mutilation”.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: “Means violence directed at a woman simply because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately”. It constitutes a violation of the fundamental right to life, freedom, security, dignity, equality between women and men, non-discrimination, and physical and mental integrity.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT: means “Any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviour of a sexual nature, with the purpose of or resulting in violating someone’s dignity, especially under a threatening, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment”. Sexual harassment is also a criminal offence provided for under Article 108/a of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania: “Actions of a sexual nature which violate the dignity of a person, by any means or form, through creating a threatening, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, shall constitute a criminal offence and is punishable with one to five years imprisonment. When this offence is committed in collaboration, against several persons, more than once, or against children, it shall be punishable by three to seven years imprisonment”.

STALKING: as a criminal offence is provided for under Article 121/a of the Criminal Code which stipulates: “Threatening or provoking the person by repeated actions, aiming to cause him a hard and continuous state of anguish and fear for personal security, for the security of relatives or of a person with whom has spiritual relations, or to force him to change his mode of life, is sentenced by

imprisonment from six months up to four years. When this offence is committed by the former husband, by the former cohabitant or by the person that has had spiritual relations with the victim, the punishment is increased with one third of the given sentence. When this offence is committed against minors, pregnant women or against a person unable to be defended, and also when it is carried out by a masked person or is accompanied with the bearing or use of arms, the sentence is increased by half of the given punishment”.

Pursuant to Article 3 of the Law 9669/2006 “On measures against violence in family relations”, as amended by Law 47/2018, an **intimate relationship** is defined as “an interpersonal relationship that involves physical or emotional intimacy”.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: “Any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours”.

DATING VIOLENCE: “Abusive behaviour models, including emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse used to exert power and control over the romantic partner”. Similarly, the European Institute for Gender Equality defines dating violence as “that type of violence by the intimate partner that occurs between two people in a close relationship”.

SEXUAL ASSAULT: “A sexual act that either involves physical contact or not, committed by an individual without the victim’s consent or, sometimes and especially when children are involved, through emotional manipulation or blackmailing. It is an act that coerces a person to subject to the desires of another person by means of abuse of power, use of strength, coercion or threats. A sexual assault is a violation of the fundamental rights of a victim, including the right to physical and psychological integrity and someone’s safety. “Sexual act involving physical contact” includes: rape/penetrative intercourse, attempts to have penetrative intercourse/attempts of rape, touching/sexual contact. “Sexual act without physical contact” includes: sexual harassment, coerced exposure to sexual acts (pornography or an on-going sexual act), exposure or showing of one’s genitals, encouraging a child to touch his/her own body or to masturbate, making visual recordings of a sexual nature to a child.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: Any sexual activity between a child and close family member (incest) or between a child and an adult, or a child and an older child, that is not a family member. It includes cases of coercion or force, as well as cases when the victim is unable to consent due to his/her age.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Violence against women and girls is an early disturbing phenomenon in the Albanian context and globally. It refers to physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence (including intimidation, suffering, deprivation of liberty within the family or in the wider community, sexual harassment, etc.)¹. The Survey on Violence against Women and Girls in Albania indicated that 1 in 2 women, or 52.9 per cent of the respondents, stated that they had experienced violence at least once during their lifetime and 36.6 per cent of them were currently experiencing violence. The most frequent types of violence have been experienced or are experienced during dating or in the family and exerted by the intimate partner. The most frequent type of intimate partner domestic violence is coercive control, followed by psychological violence and physical violence and/or sexual one. Domestic intimate partner economic violence is the only invariable indicator in time.²

At a global level, one in three girls throughout the world have been sexually abused by their partners or former partners. Survivors of sexual violence suffer from serious consequences in their physical and mental health, reproductive and sexual health, which might be long-term even after abuse and violence has finished.³

There are numerous studies that indicate the spread and severity of sexual violence against women and girls in Albania. A study conducted by AWEN in 2020 has indicated that the majority of respondents think that sexual violence is a spread phenomenon in Albania (80 per cent), exerted by partners, trusted or unknown persons, regardless the fact that there still were ambiguities regarding

the definition of sexual violence. The same study indicated that 1 in 10 interviewed girls/women were forced into their first experience of sex. The girls were 3 times more likely to be afraid of involving in sexual relations due to fear from the partner/former partner. At least 15 per cent of the respondents said that they did not leave their house or other places due to fear and that they feared being alone with another person due to insecurity and fear from a sexual assault⁴. A previous study from the same organization sustains this finding. Based on the latter, there is a poor level of awareness on the various types of sexual violence in Albania and a high fear from prejudices and victim's blaming (girls and women) on the occurrence.⁵ Another study indicated that 22 per cent of teenagers aged 16-19 years old have experienced violence at least once in their intimate relations. Girls reported more violence (28 per cent) compared to boys (20 per cent).⁶

Two previous studies of 2019 follow the same line, therefore indicating that the phenomenon has existed and is still concerning. The national survey on violence against women and girls, including adult women aged 18-74 years old (2019), has shown that half of the interviewed women had experienced domestic violence. Additionally, this survey found that women experiencing sexual abuse in their childhood were one and a half more likely to experience gender-based violence in adulthood. Approximately 3 per cent of women reported to have been sexually abused in their childhood.⁷ In 2019, OSCE led a study on the well-being and safety of women in Albania. It showed that 53 per cent of sexually harassed women had

- 1 IDRA and UNWOMEN (2018). Sexual harassment and other forms of gender based violence in public spaces in Albania. Available at: <https://www.idracompany.com/en/news-publications/news/un-WOMEN2019> accessed in September 2022
- 2 INSTAT (2019). Violence against Women and Girls in Albania. National Population Survey, 2018. INSTAT: Tirana
- 3 "Ending violence against WOMEN" (no date). UNWOMEN, available at: <https://www.unWOMEN.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-WOMEN>, accessed in September 2022
- 4 Dhëmbo E., Duci V., (2021) "Intimate partner violence and sexual violence among young people in Albania", AWEN, 2021.
- 5 IDRA and UNWOMEN (2018). Sexual harassment and other forms of gender based violence in public spaces in Albania. Available at: <https://www.idracompany.com/en/news-publications/news/un-WOMEN2019> accessed in February 2022
- 6 Dhëmbo E., Duci V., (2021) "Intimate partner violence and sexual violence among young people in Albania", AWEN, 2021. https://awenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/AWEN-Dhuna-AL-pages-web_compressed.pdf
- 7 INSTAT (2019). Violence against Women and Girls in Albania. National Population Survey, 2018. INSTAT: Tirana

not spoken to anybody on their experience. When they had chosen to speak about experienced sexual harassments, they had quite frequently done so with their friends or family members⁸. 34 per cent said that they had experienced sexual harassments from the age of 15 and 17 per cent affirmed that they had been sexually harassed in the last 12 months preceding the interview. Women in unpaid work were more prone to affirm that they had suffered sexual harassments in their life as well as in the last 12 months preceding the interview⁹.

The General Attorney's report for 2021 indicated that there is an increase by 16 per cent in the number of criminal proceedings at national level related to sexual crimes, whereas judicial proceedings have increased by 48 per cent. The majority of defendants are men (97 per cent), of which 5.7 per cent are under the age of 18 years old.¹⁰

Some sexual violence acts can be concealed or ambiguous, which makes it difficult to accurately understand whether it is sexual violence or not. Definitions of sexual violence or coercive behaviour can vary widely in studying the phenomenon. Wilson and Miller (2016) concluded that 60 per cent of young girls who were victims of sexual violence did not consider their experience as rape and did not think they were victims of sexual violence. They used the term "bad sex" or "misunderstanding/miscommunication" to describe their experiences. The rate of "unacknowledged" rape was higher among young girls.¹¹ Another study concluded that the closer the victim is to the abuser, the less likely she is to consider an act as sexual violence.¹²

In the recent years there have been some improvements to the policy and legal framework on sexual violence against women and girls. However, there are still areas where the legislation is deficient, such as in cases not involving domestic violence, including forms of sexual violence, and is not in line with international standards governing cases of rape.¹³ As for service provision, Lilium centre opened its doors in 2018, which is a centre

in charge of managing crisis in cases of sexual violence by providing various services to the victims, such as health services, medical examination, data collection and psychological services.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

- » To conduct an analysis of the legal and policy framework, as well as of service delivery;
- » To explore the phenomenon of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and their forms;
- » To analyse the factors that shape various types of sexual harassment and sexual violence from the perspective of survivors;
- » To understand the factors that push and impede someone to report sexual harassment and sexual violence, as well as to seek help;
- » To provide recommendations to address barriers related to cases of sexual harassment and sexual violence.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research questions for this study are:

- » Which is the perception and understanding of sexual harassment and sexual violence, as well as experience with the latter? What are the wrong perceptions regarding sexual violence, abuse and sexual harassment?
- » Which are the factors that push and impede someone to report sexual violence and to seek help?
- » How can the policy/legal framework and the service delivery be improved to increase reporting and help-seeking?

8 OSCE (2019). *Well-being and safety of women in Albania*. OSCE: Tirana

9 *ibid*

10 General Attorney's Office (2021). *The General Attorney's Report on the situation of criminality for 2021*. General Attorney's Office: Tirana

11 Wilson, L. C., Miller, K. E. (2016). Meta-analysis of the prevalence of unacknowledged rape. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 17, 149-159.

12 Orchowski, L. M., Untied, A. S., Gidycz, C. A. (2013). Social reactions to disclosure of sexual victimization and adjustment among survivors of sexual assault. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 28, 2005-2023

13 INSTAT (2019). *Violence against Women and Girls in Albania. National Population Survey, 2018*. INSTAT: Tirana.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The two most important documents in addressing stereotypes, discrimination and various forms of violence against women are the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (hereafter CEDAW) and the Convention of the Council of Europe on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (otherwise known as the Istanbul Convention). Albania has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by Law no. 7767, dated 09/11/1993 and the Additional Protocol to this convention by Law no. 9052, dated 17/04/2003, thus showing its will to fulfil the obligations arising from this convention. It also approved the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) on 1 August 2014. Albania signed the Convention on 19 December 2011 and ratified it on 4 February 2013. Regarding sexual violence against children, a crucial step was the ratification of the Lanzarote Convention by Law no. 10071, dated 09/02/2009, a process which enabled the country to align its legal framework with the provisions of the convention. Such processes include primarily amendments to the Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code¹⁴

CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention address sexual violence and sexual harassment at various levels. CEDAW includes gender-based violence, but without detailed definitions of different forms of violence. It refers to domestic violence and abuse, forced marriage, dowry deaths, acid attacks, female circumcision or female genital mutilation, sexual trafficking and exploitation, sexual assault, incest, sexual harassment, forced sterilization and abortion, beating, and coercion. In CEDAW, violence against women is restrained to “domestic violence” or situations where women are in violent

relationships. It also gives a definition of “sexual harassment” (paragraph 18) but connecting it only to the workplace.

The Istanbul Convention has a greater focus on violence against women and includes all forms of violence. It clearly refers to different forms of violence against women: psychological violence (Article 33), stalking (Article 34), physical violence (Article 35), sexual violence, including rape (Article 36), forced marriage (Article 37), female genital mutilation (Article 38), forced abortion and forced sterilisation (Article 39), sexual harassment (Article 40), and aiding and abetting the commission of these offences (Article 41). Although it does not define crimes called “crimes of honour”, they are included in Article 42. Also, the Convention provides a broader definition of sexual harassment beyond the area of employment (Article 40) and acknowledges that this phenomenon can occur in formal and informal educational or recreational settings.¹⁵

Convention of the Council of Europe. “On the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse” (known as the Lanzarote Convention) is a leap forward in preventing sexual crimes against children, prosecuting criminals and protecting child victims. Building on current international and regional standards, the Convention expands them to cover and criminalize all sexual crimes against children, regardless of whether they are committed for commercial profit or not. The protection of the rights of the child is at the heart of this Convention. It focuses on respecting the rights of the child, ensuring their well-being, responding to their thoughts, needs and concerns at all times in their best interests¹⁶. The Convention requires states to develop a legal and institutional framework to prevent the phenomenon and to provide services to

14 Burazeri, G., Qirjako, G., and Tahsini, I. (2015). *Sexual Abuse of Children in the Circle of Trust in Albania: A Qualitative Study of the Perspectives and Perceptions of Professionals, Parents and Children*. Terre des Hommes: Tirana

15 Council of Europe (no date). *The Istanbul Convention and the CEDAW framework: working paper*. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/168059aa28>, accessed in September 2022

16 Council of Europe (no date). *Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of the Council of Europe (abridged version)*. Available at <https://rm.coe.int/prems-102819-alb-2576-protection-children-a5/168098bd14>, accessed in September 2022

children, and to punish criminals involved in sexual crimes against children.

Recently, Albania has ratified the International Labour Organization Convention on “Violence and Harassment” 2019 (No. 190), which applies to violence and harassment in the world of work that occur during, in connection with or arising from work and is engaged in improving the legislation and aligning it with that of the EU, promoting cooperation between organizations of employers and employees and increasing awareness, professional training and effective protection of victims affected by violence and harassment in the world of work, affecting safety, health and effectiveness at work.

The Albanian legislation has progressed sufficiently during the last decades to align with the requirements of the aforementioned conventions and other international documents. Thus, the issues of sexual violence and abuse and sexual harassment are addressed in a series of laws and by-laws, which will be briefly presented below:

- » **CRIMINAL CODE.** Sexual violence is provided for as a criminal offence. Article 100 states “Having sexual or homosexual relations with children that are less than 14 years old, or with a female child, who is not sexually matured, is punished by imprisonment from seven to fifteen years”. Also, the Criminal Code makes a number of other provisions regarding sexual violence. These are presented in: Article 101 “Sexual or homosexual intercourse by violence with a minor who is fourteen-eighteen years old”; Article 102 “Non-consensual sexual intercourse with mature/adult women”; Article 102/a “Homosexual intercourse by violence with adults”; Article 103 on “Sexual or homosexual intercourse with persons who are unable to defend themselves”; Article 104 “Sexual or homosexual intercourse by intimidation of using a weapon”; Article 105 “Sexual or homosexual relations by abuse of power job/position misappropriation”; Article 106 “Sexual or homosexual intercourse with persons that are related (of the same blood) or persons under custody”; Article 107 “Sexual or homosexual intercourse in public places”.

Law no. 35/2020 “On an amendment to Law no. 7895, dated 27/01/1995, “Criminal Code

of the Republic of Albania”, as amended, clarified the concepts of forms of violence by criminalizing any form and harmonizing the content of this article with Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention and the amendments to the law on domestic violence.

Article 107/a of the Criminal Code notes that: “Exercising sexual violence by performing actions of a sexual nature on the body of another person through the use of objects shall constitute a criminal offence and is punishable by imprisonment of from three to seven years. When this action is committed with accomplices, against several persons, more than once or against children fourteen to eighteen years of age, it is punishable by imprisonment from five to fifteen years. When this action is committed against a child under fourteen years of age or a child who is not sexually matured, regardless of whether it is committed by use of violence or not, it shall be punishable with no less than twenty years of imprisonment. When this action as a consequence has brought the death or suicide of the victim, it shall be punishable by not less than twenty five years of imprisonment”. Next, Article 108 provides for “Immoral acts”, while article 108/a defines sexual harassment as: “Actions of a sexual nature which violate the dignity of a person, by any means or form, through creating a threatening, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, shall constitute a criminal offence and is punishable with one to five years imprisonment”. Article 121 includes the definition and punishment for stalking.

Although the Criminal Code contains a number of provisions for sexual violence against adults and children, there is still a need to include more precise definitions and in accordance with the aforementioned Conventions in order to address this phenomenon. Thus, Articles 100, 101, 103, 105 and 106 do not define the term “sexual intercourse” with reference to the type and level of penetration (vaginal, anal, oral) which is an essential element of the criminal offence. Also, articles 107/a, 108 (3) and 108/a do not provide any definition of the term ‘action of sexual nature’ which in all three cases is an essential element of

the criminal offence.¹⁷ The issue of “lack of consent/approval” of the parties involved in sexual relations is still elusive. At a time when international conventions clearly suggest that sexual violence and sexual crimes include all forms of sexual relations or immoral acts without the person’s consent, the Criminal Code refers only to cases where violence is used, except for cases of sexual activity with adults where the term “without the consent of one of them” is applied. In the case of teenagers aged 14-18 or homosexual relationships, this term is not applied. Article 107 includes performing actions of a sexual nature on the body of another person through the use of “objects” but not with “parts of another person’s body”. Finally, actions where, under the use of force or without the consent of the person, one is forced to engage in sexual activity with one/several third persons are not included, but only cases where the crime is committed with accomplices.

Child sexual abuse is covered by the Albanian Criminal Code, in a fragmented manner, through a series of provisions. These provisions cover almost all the elements provided for in the international standard with the exception of sexual abuse through coercion and threats. These provisions lead to confusion and difficulty in understanding and applying child and adolescent sex crime legislation.¹⁸

- » **CRIMINAL PROCEDURE CODE (CPC).** In the Criminal Procedure Code, there are several articles that regulate the process of mandatory criminal reporting and cases where a criminal proceeding is initiated ex-officio. Articles 281, 282 and 283 provide for mandatory criminal report by public officials, medical staff and citizens aware of a criminal offence. Article 284 of the Criminal Code regulates the initiation of criminal proceedings in Albania and provides that all sexual crimes except one - are initiated ex officio in Albania. The excluded criminal offence is sexual or homosexual intercourse with consanguine persons or with persons under custody in Article 106 of the Criminal

Code. Since 2015, the Lanzarote Committee has recommended to Albania to rectify this situation. **Law 35/2017 “On some additions and amendments to Law no. 7905, dated 21/03/1995, “Criminal Procedure Code”** with the addition of Article 58/b “Rights of sexually abused victims and victims of human trafficking” requires that sexually abused victims be heard without delay by a judicial police or prosecutor of the same gender; refuse to answer questions regarding his/her private life obviously not related to the criminal offence; request to be heard during the trial through audio-visual tools pursuant to the provisions of this Code.” Also, this law legitimises every victim of a criminal offence to be entitled to lodge a claim for compensation from the perpetrator of the criminal offence. The victim can also submit this lawsuit to the Prosecutor’s Office so that the two processes can be conducted as one. The heirs of the victims can also file this lawsuit.

- » **LAW NO. 9669, DATED 18/12/2006, “ON MEASURES AGAINST VIOLENCE IN FAMILY RELATIONS”**, as amended. The aim of the law is to prevent and reduce domestic violence in all its forms and to protect victims through a rapid, affordable and simple procedure. The two most important improvements of this law date from 2018 and 2020. The amendments strengthened the protective and procedural measures to deliver a more effective response to domestic violence and the protection of victims, through the issuance of the Order for the Preliminary Measures of Immediate Protection, preceded by the risk assessment, for each handled case. For the first time, women and girls in intimate relationships are protected, without having a formal relationship with the perpetrators, such as marriage or cohabitation. Whereas, the amendments made to Law 125/2020 “On some additions and amendments to Law no. 9669, dated 18/12/2006 “On measures against violence in family relations” define the measures for the immediate removal of the perpetrator from

17 Bisha, E., Sulstarova, A., Shapo, Zh. and Ymeri, H., (2019) WebFactor: Assessment of the legal framework and institutional readiness to address child sexual exploitation and abuse online in Albania, UNICEF Albania/Shapo Consulting, Tirana 2019.

18 ibid

home, the specific programs of rehabilitation for perpetrators, the establishment of a register of protection orders, etc.

- » **LAW 18/2017 “ON THE CHILD RIGHTS AND PROTECTION”**, where equality and non-discrimination are mentioned in its general principles. The law defines what child protection means, clarifying the “protection measures” that workers can apply when they find cases of children in unsafe situations due to violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation. The law does not have a specific article on sexual abuse and violence against children but includes it in other forms of abuse.
- » **LAW NO. 7961, DATED 12/07/1995 “LABOUR CODE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA”**, amended by Law no. 136/2015, highlights, inter alia: taking the necessary measures to stop the moral harassment committed by the employer and other employees, as well as the posting of provisions on moral and sexual harassment and the corresponding sanctions; prohibiting the employer from performing any action that constitutes sexual harassment for the employees and not allowing the employer to perform such actions by other employees. The recent EU progress report for Albania emphasizes that in terms of non-discrimination in the workplace and social policy, legal amendments have been made that clearly define sexual harassment and do not burden the victim with the burden of proof.¹⁹
- » **LAW 37/2017 “CRIMINAL JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN CODE”** which guarantees a legal framework for criminal justice for children, promotes the reintegration of children in conflict with the law, the protection of the rights of child victims and/or witnesses of criminal offences and prevents re-victimization/secondary victimization of a child who has previously been the victim of a criminal offence. In relation to sexual violence, there is a special article in this law (Article 41 “Special rules for questioning minors who are victims and/or witnesses of sexual exploitation

or sexual violence”), which regulates the questioning of children and adolescents witnesses or victims of sexual violence. Under this article, audio and video recording is mandatory for child victims or witnesses of sexual violence, which can be used in the court session without their presence. It also stipulates that they must not be questioned in the presence of the abuser and that the trial should take place behind closed doors.

- » **THE 2008 LAW ON GENDER EQUALITY IN SOCIETY** includes effective provisions on gender-based discrimination and on any form of behaviour that promotes gender-based discrimination, especially in working relationships. Also, Law 10 221 dated 04/02/2010 on Protection from Discrimination includes provisions against gender discrimination and the case law of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination has been enriched by issuing decisions on sexual harassment as a form of discrimination in work relationships.²⁰

In addition to this legislative framework, there are a number of laws and by-laws that provide for services for victims of violence, including sexual violence, such as: the law on social care services, which provides for specialized services for abused women and girls; the law on state-guaranteed legal aid that provides free legal aid to victims of sexual violence; the law on social housing, under which abused women are part of the categories that benefit from social housing; the law on social assistance that includes the category of abused women in benefiting economic assistance.

19 European Union, European Commission. Albania progress report 2021. Available at https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2021_en, accessed in September 2022

20 OSCE (2019). Well-being and safety of women in Albania. OSCE: Tirana

3. POLICY FRAMEWORK

Albania has so far adopted and implemented a number of strategic plans for gender equality and domestic violence, and for the rights of the child, including protection from various forms of violence against children. The latest strategy on gender equality (National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021 - 2030) approved in 2021 indicates that the challenge ahead is the proper handling, according to standards and with dedicated services, of cases of sexual violence found in children or adults, both in and outside family relationships. Thus, this strategy includes a strategic goal (III) that aims to reduce all forms of harmful practices, gender-based violence and domestic violence and provides for the improvement and implementation of the legal framework, the expansion of the range of support services for survivors of violence, a justice-friendly system and education on sexual and reproductive rights, inter alia.

The National Agenda on the Rights of the Child 2021 – 2026 brings to attention the lack of sufficient information about the extent or prevalence of child sexual abuse, child labour and exploitation as well as the shortcomings of the child protection system to have an integrated, effective and comprehensive response to protect children from sexual abuse and violence, including technology-facilitated abuses. The second goal of this Agenda is “Elimination of all forms of violence and protection of children” which expressly prioritizes the establishment and improvement of special and integrated mechanisms and services to address the most serious forms of violence including sexual abuse and online abuse and exploitation.²¹

21 Ministry of Health and Social Protection. National Agenda for the Rights of the Child 2021 – 2026.

4. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. CENTRAL LEVEL

The Istanbul Convention in the fourth chapter from Article 18 to Article 28 makes a detailed description of all services that should be delivered to survivors of violence, including sexual violence for their support and protection. The comprehensive framework of services starts with appropriate legislation, information thereof, general support services (legal and psychological counselling, financial assistance, housing, education, training and assistance in finding a job), assistance with individual/collective complaints, specialized support services especially for survivors of sexual violence, shelters, helplines, support for victims of sexual violence through a sufficient number of referral centres (having a full range of necessary services), protection and support for child witnesses, and reporting by practitioners.

In Albania, the structures responsible for sexual violence at the central level are the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the Coordinator's Office against domestic violence in the Ministry of Justice, the Deputy Prime Minister's Office (responsible for gender equality). **The Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP)**, starting from September 2017, in addition to health, is also responsible for the development of policies to address gender-based violence, abuse against children, women and other groups, gender equality, protection of the rights of the child, non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, etc. These responsibilities are fulfilled through the Sector of Policies and Strategies for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality, at the Directorate of Policies and Development of Health and Social Protection at the General Directorate of Policies and Development of Health and Social Protection.

The Coordinator's Office against Domestic Violence established at the Ministry of Justice (on 25/11/2017), for the coordination of institutional actions at the central and local levels, for the prevention, protection and support of victims of domestic violence, mainly women and girls, and for providing assistance in scaling up institutional actions in this regard. The office is composed of

representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (State Social Service) and the Ministry of the Interior (Directorate for Crimes, under the Domestic Violence and Protection of Minors Sector).

At the central level, the **National Council for Gender Equality** (with renewed membership under the Prime Minister's Order No. 239, dated 13.12.2017) is the advisory body for the stewardship, definition and development of state policies for gender equality, as well as for the coordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention. The Council is established by Order of the Prime Minister, is renewed once every four years, is chaired by the Minister of Health and Social Protection and is composed of nine representatives of line ministries at the deputy minister level and senior managers, and of three representatives of civil society organizations, which are selected based on an open competition, under the criteria of experience in and contribution to these issues.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection funds two specialized support services at the national level, which provide accommodation and long-term treatment with a focus on reintegration, for victims of domestic violence and human trafficking: The National Centre for Handling Cases of Violence in Family Relations and the National Reception Centre for Victims of Trafficking.

A positive step in providing specialized services to survivors of sexual violence was the opening of the Liliu centre in 2018. In this centre, a one-stop, 24/7 and short-term (24-72 hours) emergency service is provided for victims/survivors/survivors of sexual violence and their families. LILIUM provides a socio-health model, with a multidisciplinary team of forensic physicians, gynaecologists, paediatricians, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, social workers, police officers, prosecutors, lawyers, and nurses. Cooperation with the Coordinated Referral Mechanisms plays a vital role for the long-term treatment of cases.

4.2. LOCAL LEVEL

At the local level, there is the Directorate of Social Service at the Municipality level, which consists of the Needs Assessment and Referral Unit (NARU), under the law 121/2016 “On social care services”. NARU consists of the domestic violence specialist, the child protection officer, the social administrator, but other specialists can join based on the Municipality needs.

The Local Coordinator for Domestic Violence is a position which in most cases is merged with the Gender Equality Officer to create the “Domestic Violence and Gender Equality Specialist” position. Also, at the local level, pursuant to Law 9669/2016 “On measures against violence in family relations”, as amended, the Coordinated Referral Mechanisms for cases of violence in family relations (CRM), have been set up in all municipalities (the authorities responsible for establishing and strengthening these mechanisms), are led by the municipalities and are based on a coordinated multi-sectoral approach. CRMs include all local institutions responsible for the implementation of the legal framework in the area of violence against women and domestic violence (the municipality and its social services, the police, the prosecutor’s office, the court, the forensic physician, the law enforcement, health, education, the state social service, the employment service, the probation service, the prefect, etc.), as well as civil society organizations specialized in providing support services necessary for case management and intervening in prevention and awareness raising of the society as a whole (organizations that deliver accommodation services, psycho-emotional or legal counselling, rehabilitation and reintegration services, information, activities to strengthen the practitioners’ capacities, etc.). The operation of these mechanisms needs improvement. In order to improve the effectiveness of the intervention and overall operation of the CRMs, in June 2021, DCM 327, dated 02/06/2021 was approved “On the mechanism of the coordination of work between the responsible authorities for the referral of cases of violence in family relations, and on its way of functioning for the support and rehabilitation of victims of violence”. Also, in 2021, the **Protocol for**

the Management of Cases of Sexual Violence among Adults was prepared at the local level through a coordinated multi-sectoral approach, following the Protocol for the Management of Cases of Domestic Violence at the local level through the Coordinated Referral Mechanism (CRM), to help the members of this Mechanism (but also other responsible institutions), to standardize the necessary actions for an immediate, comprehensive and responsible response for the protection and handling of cases of sexual violence.²² This protocol was approved by the order of the Minister of Health and Social Protection addressed to all mayors, as CRM chairpersons.

The Child Protection Unit (CPU) at the municipality level is established and operates as a special unit within the structure responsible for social services at the municipal level and is tasked, in a special way, with the prevention, identification, assessment, protection and follow-up of cases of children at risk and/or in need of protection, including cases of sexual abuse. The Child Protection Officer (CPO) is part of the CPU and cooperates with the Domestic Violence Coordinator in cases where children are involved.

In addition to the local institutions and services, there are also the Regional Directorates of the State Social Service, which are responsible for the placement of survivors of sexual violence in the national service delivery centres and have a representative in the CRMs.

In recent years, several emergency shelters and centres delivering emergency services have been established, some of which are managed by Municipalities, others by NPOs and one of them is managed collectively. The minimum services provided by shelters are: safe accommodation, clothing, food, psychosocial support and referral. The services tailored according to the person’s needs are: psychological, legal, medical, financial and educational assistance. These centres are the following:

- » Centres managed by municipalities: Permet, Pogradec, Roskovec, Saranda, Ure Vajgurore, Kruja

22 MoHSP (2021). Protocol for the Management of Cases of Sexual Violence among Adults at the Local Level Through a Coordinated Multi-sectoral Approach. Tirana

- » Centres managed by civil society organizations (CSOs): Shkodra, Korça, Elbasan, Vlora
- » Centres managed by the municipality and NPOs: in Dibra and Durres. In the latter, the “Emergency Centre for the support of women and children”, operates as a collaboration between the Durres Municipality and the World Vision organization, a project supported by the Social Fund.²³

4.3. PROVISION OF SERVICES BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

The main existing services provided by NPOs to women and girls/men and boys survivors/perpetrators of sexual violence are:

- » Counselling Line for Women and Girls - LKGV 116 117 – a national helpline service, managed by an NPO - member organization of AWEN;
- » The “Vatra” centre in Vlora, which is the first centre to provide services to victims of trafficking and survivors of sexual violence;
- » The Counselling Line for Men and Boys in Tirana and Shkodra has provided counselling services for men and boys who have committed acts of domestic violence since 2012;
- » Shelter for Abused Women and Girls in Tirana;
- » ALO 116111 – National Counselling Line for Children, a specialized, free 24/7 service of a non-profit organization for abused children;
- » The ARSIS initiative, provides emergency accommodation for up to 7 days for categories in need, including abused women and girls;
- » “Different and Equal” Organization, Tirana
- » “Tjeter Vizion” organization, Elbasan
- » Non-public religious centres that accommodate

survivors of sexual violence, such as the Pope John XXIII Community Association in Shkodra, the “Gender, Peace and Security” Association in Durres, the “Today for the Future” Centre in Durres, etc.

In an analysis of the functioning of the coordinated referral mechanisms of cases of domestic violence at the local level in Albania in 2019, it was found that all municipalities report a lack of specialized services for survivors of sexual violence, for women with mental health problems and for men perpetrators of various forms of violence.²⁴ Other reports highlight the lack of crisis centres for survivors of sexual violence at the local level. The current approach to helping girls/women survivors of sexual violence is ad-hoc, often under the overarching general health services, in separate rooms in women’s shelters or other settings, which are not prepared to cope with cases of sexual violence.²⁵

At the same time services for cases of sexual harassment are non-existent. Apart from reporting and filing the case to the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and/or the People’s Advocate, other specialized services for sexual harassment are totally non-existent. Certainly, girls or women who are victims of sexual harassment in the workplace can receive the services that are generally provided to women survivors of sexual violence, but since their provision also suffers significant shortages, it is quite unlikely one would receive such services. According to the Convention of the International Labour Organization on “Violence and Harassment” 2019 (No. 190) support, services and legal remedies for victims of gender-based violence and harassment should include measures such as: (a) support to help victims re-enter the labour market; (b) accessible counselling and information services accordingly; (c) 24-hour helpline; (d) emergency services; (e) medical care and treatment and psychological support; (f) crisis centres, including shelters; and (g) specialized police units or specially trained officers to support the victims.

23 *ibid*

24 Ministry of Health and Social Protection and UNDP (2019). *Analysis of the Functioning of the Coordinated Referral Mechanism of Cases of Domestic Violence at Local Level in Albania*. MoHSP: Tirana

25 Llubani, M (no date). *Mapping of policies and legislation on violence against women and the Istanbul Convention in Albania*. European WOMEN’s Lobby

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. APPROACH

The methodology of this survey study is based on a qualitative research and uses the descriptive phenomenological approach. In general, researchers agree that qualitative research is particularly useful in investigating sensitive issues and that quantitative research is not.²⁶ Qualitative research is particularly recommended in the study of topics related to abuse^{27,28} and trauma.^{29,30}

The phenomenological approach in qualitative research enables the description, understanding and interpretation of people's perception of their experiences.³¹ In the context of this study, it enables us to achieve the goal of describing and understanding perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment and sexual violence.

5.2. DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND SAMPLING

In order to respond to the research questions elaborated for this survey study, primary qualitative data were collected and analysed. The latter were enabled by means of developing and applying two instruments on data collection: individual in-depth interviews; and b. focus group discussions.

a. In-depth interviews with survivors of sexual harassment and/or violence.

The in-depth interview was designed and used to document the experiences of survivors of sexual harassment and/or violence. It was constructed in such a way to explore the variance in experiences, evocation, perceptions and understanding, as well as the strategies that survivors have used in coping with harassment and/or sexual violence.

It is impossible to identify and have a sample frame of the population of survivors of sexual harassment and violence. Also, the sensitivity of the issue being investigated generally has a discouraging effect on potential participants.³² Based on these conditions, purposive sampling was used to identify and recruit cases, and the support of non-profit organizations that operate to provide services in this area in the country was sought. In total, after identification, contact for information (face to face or by phone) and encouragement to participate in the study (after informing about the importance of the study and ethical principles in its implementation), ten cases (n=10) accepted and became part of the study.

All participants were girls and women. Their average age was 26.7 years, ranging from 13 to 49 years of age, at the time of the interview. Most respondents were adults at the time of the data collection (n=8) and only 2 were under 18. The participants came from urban areas (n=3), rural areas (n=4) and peri-urban areas (n=3). The first time of abuse had

- 26 Silverio, S. A., Sheen, K. S., Bramante, A., Knighting, K., Koops, T. U., Montgomery, E., November, L., Soulsby, L. K., Stevenson, J. H., Watkins, M., Easter, A., & Sandall, J. (2022). Sensitive, Challenging, and Difficult Topics: Experiences and Practical Considerations for Qualitative Researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221124739>
- 27 Burgess-Proctor A. (2015). Methodological and ethical issues in feminist research with abused WOMEN: Reflections on participants' vulnerability and empowerment. *WOMEN's Studies International Forum*, 48(1-2), 124-134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.10.014>
- 28 Roberts C., Montgomery E., Richens Y., Silverio S.A. (2021). (Re)activation of survival strategies during pregnancy and childbirth following experiences of childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02646838.2021.1976401>
- 29 Gooberman-Hill R., Fox R., Chesser T. J. S. (2011). What can qualitative approaches bring to trauma outcome research? *Injury*, 42(4), 321-323. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.injury.2011.01.021>
- 30 Seal D. W., Bloom F. R., Somlai A. M. (2000). Dilemmas in conducting qualitative sex research in applied field settings. *Health Education & Behavior*, 27(1), 10-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019810002700102>
- 31 Bloor, M., & Wood, F. (2006). Phenomenological methods. In *Keywords in qualitative methods* (pp. 129-130). SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781849209403.n40>
- 32 See for e.g. <https://magnoliaconsulting.org/2017/08/sensitivetopicqualitativeveresearch/>

occurred in adulthood (n=5) and in childhood (n=5), where the earliest age of abuse was 7 years. Cases of abuse ranged from incest (n=2), other family members (e.g. from in-laws, n=1), partner/husband or ex-partner/husband (n=3), and cases where the abuser is a neighbour/ resident of the village or surrounding area (n=3). In some cases, there were multiple abusers (n=2) such as brothers, or ex-husbands and traffickers.

b. Focus group discussions

The second data collection tool was focus group discussions. In order to collect data on the understanding, experiences of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and their interpretations, 5 focus groups were conducted, with a total of 42 participants, that had the following characteristics:

- » Focus group with men, in urban areas (Shkodra, n=9)
- » Focus group with women from urban area (Elbasan, n=10)
- » Focus group with women from urban and rural areas (Dibra, n=5)
- » Focus group with women from national minorities (Yzberisht, Tirana, n=11)
- » Focus group with practitioners, representatives of civil society organizations (Tirana, n=7)

5.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The data were recorded (consent was obtained from participants) or written and then transcribed and analysed topically focusing on the following key themes/issues:

- » understanding sexual harassment and violence;
- » factors that shape experiences and evocation of harassment and violence;
- » risk and resilience factors;
- » coping strategies and help-seeking;
- » life after harassment/violence
- » policies/services and addressing needs.

The findings of the topical analysis were discussed in the legal and political context in the country to come up with concrete recommendations for their improvement in the framework of approaches and services for prevention, support and reintegration of survivors of harassment and/or violence.

5.4. ETHICAL ISSUES AND LIMITATIONS

Participation joined the study only after the informed consent of the identified participants, and in the case of minors, the informed consent of their parent was also obtained. The data have been processed and will be reported in this document while preserving the data confidentiality and the anonymity of the respondents.

The key limitation to this survey study is the lack of cases of men and boys survivors of sexual violence and/or harassment. None of the identified cases accepted to participate in such survey study. However, this explicit bias of the survey study simply reflects the incidence of harassment and violence in the society, where the majority of victims are women and girls. Hence, the survey study and its findings remain relevant and useful to the initial purpose.

6. FINDINGS

6.1. UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Awareness and understanding of sexual violence and sexual harassment are not easy processes in Albania. Previous studies have shown that people often do not have information about sexual violence or harassment, especially in cases of sexual violence in intimate relationships.³³ The girls and women participating in this survey study claimed that they were not informed about sexual violence or sexual harassment either at school or from their families. In many cases, discussing such issues in the family was considered “a shame”, which left the participants uninformed. At the same time, these issues were neither discussed at school for the same reason. The young girls who participated in the focus group confirmed that until 5-6 years ago, when they were students, the situation at school was the same: teachers divided the class when they talked about sexuality issues and tried to avoid or skim the topic.

“When we were in the 8th grade – and the teacher was going to explain what sexual violence or sex was, the teacher divided the class. She didn’t even explain what sexual violence or sex was or gave us a very small explanation....She was uncomfortable talking about it. They explained more about the part of the body and gave us general information” (a girl, focus group, Elbasan)

During focus group discussions, it was noticed that people were unclear of the difference between violence and sexual harassment. Some participants thought that sexual violence is “dirty talk” that boys can say on the street. Others said that sexual violence only happens between partners, while sexual harassment happens on the street. Few participants had a correct understanding of both concepts and the fact that marital sexual violence does exist. On the other hand, there were participants who had never heard of it.

Representatives of civil society have expressed their concerns regarding the high prevalence of sexual harassment in schools and other settings and the low level of information, awareness and telling the difference from other forms of behaviours. CSOs often face difficulties if they want to discuss topics such as sexual abuse in schools, while the phenomenon is quite prevalent.

“The public narrative must change - we should call things by their names. There are people inside the institutions who are uncomfortable to talk about this - while harassment in schools, on the bus, in public places wreaks havoc. In London I saw a sign on the bus that said “inappropriate touching is equal to harassment.” Why can’t the municipality post this in schools? It’s not necessary to plead them to do it since they are obliged because there is a legal framework” (a representative of civil society, Tirana)

Also, according to representatives of civil society, sexual harassment is still elusive in the Criminal Code, as the different forms of sexual harassment are not yet precisely described, despite the mentioned definition. They showed cases where judges and other practitioners did not perceive comments or other forms of harassment that did not involve touching as “sexual harassment”.

The phenomenon of sexual violence was perceived as widely spread and expanded all over Albania, with a worsening tendency. The focus groups participants described different cases of sexual abuse that were published in the media, as well as known cases from their social circle and beyond. When asked where they think this phenomenon is more prevalent, some replied urban areas. Also, boys associated sexual harassment with higher use of the internet and saw it as more present in urban areas.

33 Dhëmbë E., Duci V., *Intimate partner violence and sexual violence among young people in Albania*, AWEN, 2021.

“Sexual violence has worsened. It is more prevalent in urban areas. Even in rural areas there are cases, but they are rarer.” (a girl, focus group, Elbasan)

Sexual harassment was also reported as a spread phenomenon mainly among divorced women. Since many participants were survivors of sexual violence, they had their own experiences of looking for an apartment for rent or a job. They described many cases where they were sexually harassed by the landlord or business owner.

“It is very difficult for us tenants. You will have to go to these building, but he will start molesting because they know we are divorced.” (a survivor of domestic sexual violence, urban area)

“When they learnt at work that I was divorced, both the owner and his son started harassing me... I quit my job. I don't even want the money, I want nothing... I got rid of another nuisance. Why should I stress out at work? Because the son's owner harasses me?...Tomorrow I will have a family, what will I tell that other guy.” (a survivor of domestic sexual violence, urban area)

In the vast majority of cases women and girls thought that they were more affected by abuse, sexual violence and even sexual harassment compared to boys and men. It should be noted that in the focus group of boys, they discussed that younger boys aged 6-7 may be more at risk than adolescent girls aged 13-14.

6.2. FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The forms of sexual violence and sexual harassment can vary depending on the persons involved and the type of sexual harassment or violence. The study participants mentioned several cases of sexual violence in its most severe form, that of rape. But they also mentioned cases of sexual violence against children while attempting to benefit sexual acts as well as of sexual harassment in public places, in school, in police premises, while looking for housing and at work.

Cases of sexual abuse against children, mainly teenage girls, have been reported in the school

setting. This was also mentioned in one of the focus groups, where one of the girls brought the example of a girl who was raped by a supportive school staff, against whom no measure was taken except dismissal, since the girl did not press charges.

Many cases of voiced sexual violence against wives/ female partners or children have occurred within a family environment or within a trusted circle of people. Thus, cases of sexual abuse by the uncle, the stepfather and the husband's father were mentioned.

“The uncle used to make touching gestures, it happened about 3 times. She thought that maybe he would change...A family member told girl's father and warned him to stop sending his daughter to her uncle's. When the father asked the girl, she confirmed it. He went over his brother's and had a fight” (a girl, focus group, Peshkopi)

The most frequent forms of sexual harassment that were mentioned by the participants related to comments of a sexual nature and requests for sexual favours mainly in the workplace. As mentioned above, they faced difficulties in finding an apartment to rent due to their divorcee status, or a job without being harassed. It is shocking that one of the female survivors of sexual violence who participated in the study reported sexual harassment by the police officer to whom she was reporting the violence.

“I have also been to the police. They don't provide any proper services. Even there I was sexually harassed by a policeman, he told me ‘You are very beautiful... are you here on the phone? You're very young’...’He wasn't the right one for you...’ and then my dad arrived and he stopped.” (a survivor of a sexual assault, urban area)

6.3. HOW IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT EXPERIENCED AND WHAT ARE THEIR CONSEQUENCES?

The consequences of violence and sexual abuse vary. In this study they can be categorized into

emotional, economic, educational, employment and attitudinal consequences for the future. The emotional consequences of sexual violence are found in the literature. Survivors of sexual violence experience a series of negative feelings such as boredom that can lead to depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts, feelings of detachment, feelings of being void or “dirty”, delusions, etc.³⁴ They often exhibit health or psychosomatic problems. In children and adolescents, the consequences are even more severe.

A young girl described what she experienced at the time she was sexually abused:

“I felt angry, I wanted to run away, but he wouldn’t let me. He kept me against my will, he wouldn’t let me go. He didn’t hold me tight for he was afraid my father would notice. He said that if I told anyone, he’d kill me. He threatened me.” (a girl who survived a sexual assault at the age of 11, peri-urban area).

Another girl described how she had lost faith in the “privacy” of her thoughts. Survivors of sexual violence often find it difficult to feel in control of their bodies and minds, even when the abuse is no longer happening.

“It seemed to me that they were reading my mind. I was starting to feel ashamed of other things as well. I was embarrassed by my thoughts that they seemed to be listening to.” (a girl, rural area)

Another woman says that: “I would cry in secret. I was very upset. I thought to take something and die, I didn’t want to live. I started gaining weight, I also got diabetes”. Other women indicated that they had high levels of fear and stress, not only them, but their children, too. At the same time, the physical consequences of sexual violence are very serious, as a surviving girl said:

“Because he had forced himself on me, I was bleeding. At that moment, my mum arrived and she [a family member] told her that I had fallen on the concrete. He [the rapist] came and took me to the hospital, when the forensic examination was performed and the police were notified. I was bleeding a lot and I had a surgery.” (a girl, rural area, survivor of incest)

Another sexually harassed woman indicated that she had problems with headaches that continued up to the time of the interview:

“I had a headache, I cried... when I was alone, I just cried, the headache continued, I still have it... they tell me it’s from stress. I don’t open up. I just cried and cried. I was anxious because I had no one to talk to” (a woman, Peshkopi)

In addition to the experiences at the time of abuse and sexual violence, these girls and women keep having emotional consequences after leaving the perpetrator. All participating women and girls were no longer living with their perpetrator. Some of them had feelings of relief and reduced anxiety after reporting the perpetrator, while others continued to experience negative feelings.

A woman said:

“I am at peace and I have two children with me who are the most precious thing. I’m not stressed as I used to be...because I was anxious to go out and have a coffee. I was totally dependent. I am at peace. I know where I am and where I am not. But it’s not that I’m satisfied with my life, but at least my children are well. When you don’t enjoy life in your youth... now the children are my joy and a way to move forward” (a woman, rural area, survivor of marital sexual violence)

However, most of the women who had pressed charges against their partners faced negative reactions and comments from their families of

34 Sigurdardottir S, Halldorsdottir S. Persistent Suffering: The Serious Consequences of Sexual Violence against WOMEN and Girls, Their Search for Inner Healing and the Significance of the #MeToo Movement. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021 Feb 14;18(4):1849. doi: 10.3390/ijerph18041849. PMID: 33672865; PMCID: PMC7918207.

origin and from the community that exacerbated their emotional state. Some of them continue to live in fear, as their ex-partners continue to stalk, threaten and insult them.

"I am more scared now. He won't leave me alone. I freed from slavery but I live with the fear that he will show up and kill me. My biggest fear is that my children will remain orphans." (a woman, urban area, survivor of marital sexual violence).

In the survivors' social community, the most serious consequence is exclusion from society/community or family and/or discrimination in the workplace. The participants said that in many cases their family did not support them in their decision to report their husband and separate. Brothers in particular seem to be stricter against their sisters. Civil society representatives also said that family support has an important role for women to decide to report and even more for girls and women survivors of sexual violence to re-integrate into the society.

They said all sort of stuff in the beginning. I felt terrible because of their gossip. Now they know who I am but earlier... They insulted me and supported my ex-husband. Later they saw what he was like, they saw how things went and they changed their opinion. (a woman, rural area, survivor of sexual violence)

The survivors' community or acquaintances took the same stance. They said that community members discriminated against them by criticizing their decision, making negative comments and not supporting their decision.

"Women gossip about me. I go to work because I have 4 children to raise. When I go out to work women talk behind my back." (a woman, urban area, survivor of domestic violence)

The consequences of sexual violence extend to other areas of life, such as employment and education. The case of a teenage girl raped by supportive school staff and the teacher's awareness of the fact is shocking. The girl dropped out of school after the rape, while her father only argued with the worker but did not report it. Another girl

reported that she has no friends at school and that the other children pick at her (but not about what happened because they were unaware). Civil society representatives have highlighted the role of parents in protecting their children and in reporting the cases. Some of them claimed that it is a well-known phenomenon in schools to "close the case right there and then", as in the case above.

"The parents' repulsion is also a problem. That greatly affects the low number of reported cases. In recent years there has been no significant growth. Reported cases of sexual violence have not increased." (a representative of civil society, Tirana)

Harassment in the workplace for being divorced and even worse, sexual assault was quite prevalent. As mentioned above, most of the women who were looking for a job met a lot of sexual harassment mainly from business owners.

"I quit my job because of the harassment. They see you as a divorcee, as an unprotected woman. They feel like they can go straight ahead. When they showed other interests in me, I quit my job. This happens often in Albania. I used to work in a bar but I realized that...When I don't like the environment I don't have to work there. It really hurts. It's a shame." (a woman, urban area, survivor of sexual assault)

In many instances, women survivors of sexual violence who report their ex-husbands have economic problems, because they have to pay the monthly rent, besides other expenses. They also have to leave their apartment, regardless of the provisions of the law amended in 2020 on violence in family relations.

"When I went through this trauma, it was dire. The problem was tackled by the police and the municipality. I felt ashamed of myself. I was wondering what had happened in my life. A friend of mine helped me and stood beside me. I had nothing to eat but at least someone was beside me. I was given a small, empty room. I didn't have money to buy food. I just needed a roof over my head. That room was perfect for me

in those conditions. It was just one room with a bed" (a woman, survivor of sexual violence, urban area).

my grandmother sleeping. He asked me to go to his room. He closed the door behind, I wanted to go out, but he locked it. I couldn't get out." (a girl, abused, 15 years old)

6.4. RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

A myriad of personal and contextual factors influence at different intensities the shaping of sexual harassment and violence in general, as well as on a case-by-case basis. In this section we will present what the participants in the study perceive and report as factors responsible for the degree of vulnerability and risk, and resilience and protection factors against sexual harassment and violence.

For women and girls, it is thought that it is their "soft" nature, lack of information and economic dependence that make them more vulnerable.

PERSONAL LEVEL FACTORS

On a personal level, many of the participants in the study, with lived or non-lived experiences of harassment and violence, list stereotypical factors and refer to men as perpetrators and women as victims. Individual factors of violent men encompass elements ranging from unmet sexual needs to alcohol and drug use.

"Women who have a job are the most protected ones, they are safe and don't fall victims." (a woman, focus group, Elbasan)

"Women are softer beings...The lack of information takes its toll, too." (a woman, focus group, Elbasan)

On a personal level, civil society representatives notice that there is a persistent mindset that when talking about personal characteristics, people mean the characteristic of the victim rather than the perpetrator's and her vulnerability.

"Those who had a wife and are now divorced can be more violent, and are driven by their sexual needs." (a woman, focus group, Dibra)

"Men have lust...they harass. Even young boys and girls can fall prey." (a woman, focus group, Elbasan)

"Those who drink are more prone to behaving badly with their wives. They feel like God!" (a woman, focus group, Elbasan)

SOCIAL AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

» Parental presence, care and communication

In the stories of sexually abused girls and women, even from relatives or trusted people, it was found that the parental presence, care, and good communication played a crucial role. Especially in rural areas, working long hours in agriculture and livestock requires the commitment of both parents. Children are often left without care or under the care of each other or of their relatives. This leads not only in a fragmented care, but it also leads to failure in communication between parents and children.

In some of these factors, the survivors seek to find an explanation for the great disappointment that happened in the case when the sexual violence occurred by close family members.

"He takes alcohol and drugs...I didn't notice anything before. I know that he takes drugs and other things. He has also been in prison. I found

"I was the youngest and was very close to my brothers. I was closer with my younger brother, I had a very close relationship because there were only 2 years gap between us. We shared the same thoughts.

We used to go to school together, we did the homework together... The two older brothers didn't understand me that much... Mum and dad worked the land and we as children stayed at home. When I came home from school, they didn't have time to talk to me... We also had my uncle nearby, next to us. It was their children who took care of us, because they were older." (a girl, abused since she was 7 years old)

Even the boys and men participating in this survey study listed good communication with the parents as one of the most important factors, along with the presence of male figures in the family and good economic status.

"Perpetrators do not take any steps where they know there will be consequences; where the father is present, where there are 2-3 brothers, where the economic situation is good and they know that they will follow up the case. They also wouldn't dare in those cases where there is good communication between the girl and her parents. In those cases, they know that the matter will not remain unsettled, that the girl will open up to her parents. They see what happens the other way round, where there is no father or brothers, where the girl has no communication with her parents, or is afraid of them." (a boy, Shkodra)

The total absence of parents, or one parent, is considered an important risk factor even in the stories of survivors. The following case illustrates the very impact of the loss of one's father on one's life and the vulnerability leading to the sexual assault.

"I lived in a village in Berat. We weren't well-off but we got by. I used to go to school...I didn't have a good time at school because I didn't have my dad. They used to pick on me and I was an introvert. My father died when I was 3 years old. I seemed very different and did not feel at home in their company. I had 2-3 close friends in my neighbourhood, not at school." (a girl, abused since she was 14 years old)

» Education and information

Education, knowledge and the level of information are personal factors (as identified above) and contextual determining factors in the events of sexual harassment and violence. The higher level of education in general and good information about sex education are deemed as protective and preventive factors. The opposite is reported to fuel situations of sexual harassment and violence. In particular, premature exposure to and/or sexually inappropriate content became responsible factors in some cases, especially when both the victim and the perpetrators were minors. In these cases, children can be misled into perceiving the abuse as love and care while abusers attempt to try things they are inappropriately exposed to. The following case best illustrates this connection.

"When I was about 7 years old, I had a relationship with my brother... [she is silent for some seconds]... I mean sexual intercourse with my brother. When I was little, I didn't understand anything. I was the only girl at home, I was little. Mum wasn't home and dad wasn't home either.. [when the abuse happened]. I had sex with the three brothers... they were not aware that they were doing this to me. The elder and the younger did it only once and stopped. The middle brother kept on doing it. Whenever he found me alone, he did this. When he did it, he told me to never tell anyone. He did it in secret. He told me not to talk at home about this... The elder brother told me not to tell, not to talk. I'm doing this, but I'll buy you something. He bought me things in the nearby shops. I thought he loved me, he bought me things, and he kissed me and laughed with me and did these things and I thought he loved me. He told me he would make money and buy me things again. But I had to keep quiet... At that time, I didn't understand much, but I watched some movies, some series that were not appropriate for the children's age...When there was a man and a woman, they [the brothers] and I would watch it, and they would tell that we were doing what they were doing in the film." (a girl, abused since she was 7 years old)

Information is very important for both prevention and reporting, seeking help and preventing re-victimization. It is important to underline the multi-faceted character of information. Some participants

were careful to point out that it is not enough just to have information about and be aware of what is wrong and what to avoid, but also how to get out of sexual harassment and violence situations. One survivor of violence, with a relatively long experience in a shelter for women survivors of violence, pointed out the lack of information and capacity building of survivors of violence to make it on their own, which would prevent their re-victimization.

“Girls who were violated would get back again... it’s wrong. You have to find your strength. It wasn’t just a matter of economic means, or not being informed that it’s bad. They wanted to go back to where they were. It was easier and simpler because they didn’t know how to live differently, how to get by on their own.” (a survivor of violence)

Although the importance of education and information is widely acknowledged, little seems to have changed over the years. Opportunities that could aim at broader education and information are being underutilized. Although sex education is part of the curriculum, the subject is avoided or implemented partially and separately for boys and girls. The psychosocial service is also reported not to be integrally engaged in this regard. Moreover, the very school staff can become an obstacle to civil society initiatives aimed at awareness raising and education.

“The school and the psychosocial service are good opportunities, but they remain detached from the activities. In rural areas, boys are still taken outside to take the physical education class when there are topics related to sex education. Since we were in high school until now, boys were never told about sex education at school. The school principal himself becomes an obstacle and does not allow us to visit the school and talk about these topics. Then the community joins in and says: “What are you doing?! You are making our daughters immoral.” And the same time the families have betrothed most of them since they were 15-16 years old. This happens in areas not farther than 10 minutes away from Shkodra. Imagine what happens elsewhere!” (a boy, activist, Shkodra)

“Schools do not allow us to talk about sexual abuse – we weren’t allowed in schools outside of Tirana. We have noticed misinformation via online sources, etc., and prevailing myths among teenagers.” (a representative of civil society, Tirana)

» Additional elements of the family context

In addition to parental presence and care, several other elements of the family context outline the situations of violence, its experience, the likelihood of help-seeking and empowerment, as well as the later recovery and reintegration.

The (enhanced) presence of parents can influence their children’s experiences when domestic violence occurs. It gives children more security and leads to likelihoods that limit violence, reduce fear, and give the abused child the opportunity to seek help.

I told him... When mum was at home, I wasn’t afraid. When the parents weren’t at home, he did it more often. As soon as I got inside, he would lock the door. I was afraid that he was hiding behind the door. When mum was at home, I was not afraid that he would do it. (a girl, abused since she was 7 years old)

Often sexual violence is added to a violent context in more general terms. Families with a history of conflict and violence can also lead to an environment prone to sexual violence.

“Dad was in jail because he used to beat mum and us. He had been doing it for a long time since we were born. Mum pressed charges against dad. Ever since we were born, dad used to beat us. For example, once he thought I was talking to two boys and he beat me with a hose.” (a girl, abused at the age of 11)

Not rarely is family criminality related to cases of domestic sexual violence. In some of the cases studied in this research, it was found that the perpetrators of incest were people with criminal records, who had served their time for criminal offences. Their victims thought that they could have had an impact on the abusers.

The health and psycho-social well-being of family members is another contextual factor that can affect the vulnerability or resilience of (potential) victims and survivors of violence in general and of sexual violence in particular. In the case below, the children were in a vulnerable situation because they had lost their father and because of the way their mother experienced this loss.

“Mum was not well... because after dad died... mum went away for months. We [the respondent and her brother] were left alone. Our neighbours kept me close; they were very kind. They kind of felt sorry for us, nothing else...” (a girl, rural area)

The family context both in the family of origin and the family that the survivors will create play a crucial role in coping with the situation and reintegrating back into the society. The families become the best supporters to prevent re-victimization.

“[about the husband] He had serious intentions right from the start and told me he would take me to Tirana, at his house and find a job, so that we could be closer. When I knew him, I rediscovered myself. We have been living together for a year. Everything is ok so far. I am not disappointed, and we get along pretty well. We live together with his mother... He knows I lived in the centre. I told him more or less how it happened and he is happy and appreciates that I made it on my own. This is a closed chapter for him. He says ‘I don’t care about your past. I only care about you.’ He’s very positive and we have very a nice relationship.” (a survivor of a sexual assault)

» **Social contextual factors: mindset and gender stereotypes.**

Often the survivors of violence come from family and social contexts where a patriarchal mentality prevails, where gender stereotypes remain rigid and victim blaming dominates. In these attitudes, the gender differences are narrower, as women also articulate and manifest victim blaming. In one of the focus group discussions, a participant said: “The man may be the initiator, but the woman is always the culprit.” No matter how resounding and

irrational this may sound, the evidence from the case studies confirms that victim blaming remains a critical problem in matters of sexual violence and harassment, and that it recognizes no threshold even when the victim of sexual violence is a first-grade child.

In the two cases below, to protect the abusive sons, the mothers blame and/or coerce their daughters or granddaughters.

“I had a longer [sexual activity] with the middle one [brother], until high school. Once my mum was home but she was working outside. He started abusing me, I made some noise. Mum came in to get something and she found us. He said: “Stop it! Mum will hear you!” At that moment, mum came in and she found us. I was wearing a skirt that day. He went outside. My mum checked if I was wearing any underwear and when she saw I wasn’t, she got upset, she cried and approached me. She told me: “How can you do this? Do you know you are brother and sister? How could you do something so evil?!” He got dressed and went out. He spoke to no one.”

“My grandmother begged me to forgive him [the abusive uncle]. She said she wanted to see him well while she was alive. Even my father and some uncles told me to forgive him.”

By blaming the victim, some seek the ‘solution’ in restrictive measures against the girls and not in confronting and addressing the perpetrator. This is displayed in asking them not to speak, to forgive, or in restricting the girl/woman’s freedom.

“When mum and dad went out, I would ask them to take me with them because I was afraid. Dad didn’t really believe that he [brother] did this. Dad said that these things are shameful, and I shouldn’t talk about them.” (rural area)

“Dad was upset afterwards, he spoke harshly to me...he said that it was my fault, that I had slept with him. Mum didn’t say anything. She told me not to go out too much, and to avoid people.” (a girl, peri-urban area, abused at the age of 11)

Women and girls are blamed not only when they are the victims, but also when the victims are expected to be under their guardianship. In cases of incest, family members blamed the girls, who were victims of violence, and their mothers who had failed to “educate properly” and/or “prevent” the “thing from happening”. This led to more domestic violence against girls and women, as shown in the case below.

“These things led to the quarrel at home between mum and dad; he didn’t blame the children, but the mother. Dad used dirty words at home. Whenever he was angry with us, he spoke to mum with dirty words. When I recall them, I feel very embarrassed, ashamed of myself.” (a survivor, rural area)

Peace cannot be found even after women escape the violence, because the public opinion and mindset haunts the women even in their decisions and the ways they choose to survive the violence. They feel judged and blamed constantly.

“Here in Albania, the husbands exert violence. After you separate/divorce, it is the public opinion that exerts the violence. When you live with an abusive husband, people say “How can you live with him? Why don’t you leave him?”. When you leave him, they say “But how could you leave him?”... No matter how guilty the husband is, his mother would never tell you that you are being brave, and that you are taking care of him. She would usually be supportive just because you are raising his children.” (a woman, urban area, domestic violence)

The mindset becomes an obstacle to the education and awareness raising of the young generations. As mentioned above, families and communities impede their children from being educated, especially girls, claiming that this type of education is no education at all and is making their daughters’ “immoral”. This attitude contrasts with some parents’ behaviour, especially in rural areas, that betroth their daughters as soon as they start high school.

“They ask you not to talk to schoolgirls about these things, while three quarters of them have been betrothed since they were 15-16 years old. I really can’t understand how one betroths the child, make her enter a sexual relationship and does not want to educate her about that. (a boy, activist, Shkodra)

Women and girls from rural areas and from minority groups such as the Roma minority, pointed out the problem of early marriages. This mindset exposes girls to sexual harassment and violence and makes them vulnerable.

“There should be more information and awareness raising for girls and parents alike. Parents should not marry off their daughters at a young age but let them decide for themselves... My sister-in-law was married at 16; they married her off into a big family when she was so young. She was in her first year of high school. At first, her fiancé promised that she would go to school, but after marrying her he said: “Forget about school!” Tell me, how can a child married off into a big family look after herself when they don’t even let her go to school?!” (a girl, rural area)

» Other contextual factors: exposure to sexually inappropriate images and/or behaviour and bullying

Living in remote and isolated areas affects the level of knowledge and information that children and young people have, as well as their level and forms of socialization they develop. Certain communities may be little or no sensitive at all to the level, forms and content of information or actions their children are exposed to.

The first example illustrates cases where children are placed in communities that expose them to inappropriate information, while the second illustration shows family and socio-cultural contexts where inappropriate actions are performed in front of children.

“In the neighbourhood where I lived, I was the youngest. I was alone, it was a crowded place, and they said inappropriate words for me to hear.” (a girl, rural area)

“Children hear and see all sort of things. When adults and children are sleeping in one room, the child will see and learn everything.” (a woman, minority group)

Boys and men in focus groups discussed the great impact of pornography and early, undiscerning, and uninformed exposure to pornographic content. Greater access to the internet and lack of information about how and what sources to browse and use for information lead to miseducation and behaviour patterns that can generate sexual harassment and violence.

“Pornography has a huge impact. Young people, even young children, have full access. Many don’t know what keywords to use to browse the internet and so they see whatever content pops up.” (a boy, urban area)

Bullying based on sexual relations is reported as a driver of sexual harassment or violence. Especially among boys, who refer to the pornographic content as a model, there is high pressure and bullying to engage in sexual activity as early as possible and to achieve this at any cost to reach the ‘macho status’ in the community.

“There is tremendous pressure among boys. Those who do not have a girlfriend are ridiculed. They feel a lot of pressure, because they see others allegedly having 6-7 girlfriends and wonder how that is possible. How come a guy has 7 girlfriends while every girl is rejecting him. This suffering builds up and they wish to prove that they can do it, that they are man enough. So, they harass or even rape.” (a boy, urban area)

6.5. SEEKING HELP: DRIVERS AND BARRIERS AND THE ROLE OF VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS

» Seeking help

Girls and women survivors say that seeking help in a judgemental and victim-blaming context requires

great strength and courage as well as family and community support. The latter often play an opposite role, become barriers, and discourage survivors.

“It takes a lot of courage and strength; God gave it to me! From that moment I made up my mind – I want to leave! I ran away, I asked for help, and I haven’t set foot in the village ever since.” (a survivor of a sexual assault)

“He wrote a letter saying that I did it on my free will [sexual intercourse]. My grandmother, my father and some uncles asked me to forgive him. Only one uncle who lives in the US and my mum told me not to forgive him. Mum has given me a lot of support...I don’t know how I would have done it without her.” (an incest survivor)

“This is not a sympathetic society. Besides the trouble at that time, I had to run away... and my co-workers asked “Why are you going there and not here?” “Why did you come early and not as usual?”. Apart from my close friends who knew what was going on, but not all the forms, the rest were onlookers who called me names.” (a woman, urban area, survivor of domestic violence)

“They tell us [in schools]: “Who are you to interfere? “Why should we make the school disreputable?” In those few cases where they [survivors] take the initiative, they are very few and they are hunted down by the community and do not feel safe.” (a civil society representative, Vlora)

Such factors as service existence, accessibility and validity, information and the level of access to the latter, family support, as well as trust in institutions and from them are determinant to start with the help-seeking process and its continuity. We will discuss them more specifically in the following sections.

» The police and the court

Trust in institutions is crucial to approach them for help. The support they provide determines not only the progress of help, but also the future of other survivors' relation with the institutions such as the police, the court, and the media.

In some cases, the police are reported to have been distrustful, helpless, intimidating, corrupt, and reproducer of violence. Herein there are the testimonies of some survivors and their experiences with the police.

"I was asleep, maybe it was three or four o'clock in the morning. He came home, entered my room, caressed, and kissed me and I ran away, at night to the police; I asked help from the police. They didn't believe me because I was very young, and the police inspector said I was lying. I walked to the police station. I arrived at seven o'clock in the morning. Two women on the road helped me; they gave me some food and took me to the police. I felt bad that they didn't believe me in the police. I was telling them clearly about what had happened. I was telling the truth. This happened to me, from so and so... I think he [the police inspector] knew that man and that's why he was saying I was lying. He told me withdraw the charges, and that he would help me." (a survivor of sexual assault)

At times the survivors were sexually harassed by the people they had turned to for help and protection, as in the case of this young woman from Dibra.

"I was also in the police; I did not receive any proper services. A policeman harassed me sexually. He said "You are very beautiful... are you here on the phone? You are very young"... "He wasn't the right one for you..." and then my dad arrived." (a woman, urban area, survivor of sexual assault)

The pressure of the police and/or the court have been decisive in restoring justice and empowering the survivors. Due to the lack of professionalism,

intimidation, and harassment that survivors may have experienced in the police and/or courts, they were repelled from obtaining justice and punishing the perpetrators.

"I withdrew the charges because I was too young and succumbed to the pressure. I kept thinking 'why me! Why me! Because of the pressure, I didn't think about the sentencing. The [name of organization] asked me: "But why did you withdraw the charges?" 15-16 years old [1 year after the sexual assault] I regret withdrawing the charges. Since I was there, I should not have repelled. It takes a lot of courage to seek help when there is no one to help you to make it to the end." (a survivor of a sexual assault)

In terms of courts and judicial proceedings, we still find evidence of delays and prolongations of proceedings or of pressures and requests to withdraw from the trial.

"The last one was the pardoning hearing ... because he had written a letter that I had done it on my free will." (an incest survivor)

"To finalize this matter, the trust of the police was imperative. Then, it was the court proceeding. I appeared to court twice when I was 15 years old. We tried but they let him go. The case was examined in the first and second instances. The case was dismissed and the person was never punished. The court said there was no evidence, nothing and they did not sentence him. Why would I have lied? The proceeding took time. There were no witnesses, nothing... But who could have seen him at three-four o'clock in the morning?! [he] was in Albania at the time and did not appear in court." (a survivor of a sexual assault)

Research has documented that mistrust and impunity cause additional harm to victims of sexual violence. By having the trust and expectations in institutions broken, they lose confidence and get

re-victimized, lose themselves and amass negative effects on their health and psycho-social condition.³⁵ Impunity also plays a key role in terms of prevention efforts. Male participants in the survey study discussed how impunity serves as an 'encouraging' factor of future cases of harassment and violence.

"Impunity is the main element. One would not dare when knowing that there will be revenge and they will be punished. When they see how other cases are ignored, they assault knowing that nothing will happen" (a boy, Shkodra)

» The role of practitioners in schools and the health system

Apart from the police, schools and health institutions are the first 'knocking doors' where survivors of sexual harassment and violence are identified and/or where they seek help. Some cases in this survey study show the key role that teachers play in the help-seeking course. They have been the first supporters and liaison with other service providers in the school and beyond that have made the referral chain operational.

One of the surviving girls tells how she used an essay to ask the teacher for help.

"I wrote an essay in Albanian language course – I wrote about this [about what had happened to her]. I asked the teacher ... to read it. "Is this true!" she asked. Everything I had gone through was there. She called me to her office, talked to me, supported me; and said: "We will support you with whatever you need!" (a non-public school, Shkodra)

"I asked for help because I was having bad thoughts. When I was at school, I was known timid. The teachers had also noticed this. When I was in high school, in my senior year, I attended school regularly, I understood better. I realized that it was not something good [what

had happened to her] and I needed help. A psychologist was married and living in our village. I told the room teacher that I needed to talk and she put me in contact with the psychologist. She [the teacher] was old and I was shy to talk to her. She advised me to meet the psychologist. I told her that I had had sex with the second brother. She promised she would not tell. She showed me here [to the shelter] and advised me to think well about it. 'You can stay here and not be afraid.' she said I came to the shelter. I visited the psychologist. She told me I could stay at the shelter even for one night." (an incest survivor)

Doctors and nurses have had decisive roles in situations where the family pressed the girls not to report. However, guaranteeing an enabling environment and preserving the best interest of the survivor, even when they were minors, leaves room for improvement.

"A policewoman and an investigator arrived, and the nurse and the lady doctor asked to say what had happened. I told them. My mum found out and was mad. He [the abusive relative] was outside and he was taken into custody. The doctors came to see me at 11 o'clock in the evening, the psychologists arrived the next day. I stayed at the shelter for 5 days. Until the next day neither my father nor his wife knew about it. They learnt about it the next day when we were at the police station. Journalists wanted to come in, but they were stopped." (an incest survivor)

"It was uneasy and embarrassing for me. I was nervous. The persons who questioned me at the prosecutor's office were women. It was much better that they were women. I went to the police and they asked me about the same thing. It was uneasy to tell the whole story all over again. It was embarrassing to tell all the details. They asked more questions. I had a medical examination at the Durresi hospital by a man doctor... I was afraid and ashamed, and it was painful... There wasn't any psychologist... He had

35 McQueen, K., Murphy-Oikonen, J., Miller, A. et al. Sexual assault: WOMEN's voices on the health impacts of not being believed by police. BMC WOMEN's Health 21, 217 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-021-01358-6>

escaped in the meantime. My father went to the prosecutor's office...then he went to the police." (a minor, peri-urban area, Durresi)

"About the girl who was raped at school. She went to the bathroom and the guard followed her and raped her there. A teacher saw it. The information leaked and that's how we learnt it. She didn't report him; the school only fired the guard. The school psychologists advised the girl to report it. Some said that she did it of her own free will, that's why she didn't report it. The girl's father had fight with the guard... Her mother's got cancer and she's having a really bad time." (a focus group, Dibra)

The above testimonies show that it is necessary to improve the services and build the practitioners' capacities. Service improvements require interventions in infrastructure and human resources. These would help to avoid or minimize the following situations where quality and safe service delivery is not ensured for survivors seeking help.

"When I was in the car [the abusive uncle] winked at me." They escorted me there and the nurse told me to wait for the lady doctor to arrive; they told my mum. The doctor asked me if I had been forced to or if I had consented to it. I told her that I had been forced to." (an incest survivor)

"Every time the husband came to the court hearings, he was drunk and aggressive. He would say: "Come home. I'm not divorcing you." (a survivor of domestic sexual violence)

"Judges do not consider the issuance of protection orders for children. They issue the protection order only to the mother claiming that the mother cannot deny the father the right to see the child regardless of him being violent, alcoholic, and with mental health problems. This has happened frequently. The fathers have also beaten the mothers in the presence of the child, cursed the child and beaten him too. The court justifies it by saying: "The father only slapped

him" – it is quite challenging to convince the judges that the child is an injured party.... There have also been cases when the application for a protection order was totally rejected. There is a judge who considers these conflicts as normal domestic conflicts and irrelevant of the scope of domestic violence" (a civil society representative, Elbasan)

"The Counselling line for Men and Boys is available, too. Violence in married couples is quite prevalent and identified very late. Sexual violence is identified alongside after a series of hearing... Children are often included as witnesses. These pieces of evidence are disregarded by judges." (a representative of civil society, Tirana)

These issues were also underpinned in discussions with civil society representatives who work in this area. In their perception, apart from the police, which has realized and integrated to some extent its role and responsibility, other institutions are lagging behind. A participant illustrated it with an example from the health system.

"There is another challenge, as well. The institutions, except of the police, have no idea what their responsibilities are and how they should act! The mother had taken her 5-year-old child for treatment [after a sexual abuse]. She [the lady doctor] refused to report the abuse because she didn't want to get into trouble. The health centre said there was nothing they could do!" (a representative of civil society, Tirana)

» The role of non-governmental organizations and religious institutions

Non-governmental organizations and their interventions have often been crucial in aiding, helping survivors avoid re-victimization and reintegrating them. Their services are multi-faceted and with a relatively high responsiveness and professionalism. However, their service scope and capacity is limited and not necessarily sustainable. The following cases indicate the importance of NPO interventions as well as the (lack of) presence of public services.

“Thank God the centre [name of the centre] arrived by car. There were no social and psychological services. The orphanage refused to admit me because I was 14 years old, and it was Sunday.” (a survivor of a sexual assault)

“I am grateful for the psychological help, I spoke up and expressed myself... it was quite a relief... I went through endless open trials. In addition to protection orders... there was domestic violence, the divorce. He appealed... every court verdict. He asked for DNA paternity tests...they aren't completed yet. The trial lasted for 2 and a half years... I was financially devastated the first year regardless of the horrific emotional devastation. I was on economic assistance earlier, although it was very little... The first year I did not know about it [about the housing bonus], the second year the decision was made after 7 months, and the third year I benefited from it. I live by my salary. I have two children to raise, to pay the loan or the rent.... The father does not pay any alimony payment. He never wanted to know anything about the children” (a woman, urban area, survivor of domestic sexual violence)

Not only civil society organizations, but also religious institutions play an important role in information and awareness raising, and the delivery of emergency services such as health, education, accommodation, etc. Religious institutions, however, have their limitations in scope and object/range of their work.

“A priest came and spoke to me and my mum. Afterwards, the priest found a school and a dormitory for me. I left the village immediately and I have never gone back.” (an incest survivor)

“They only have the internet. There are also religious-based centres and NGOs that make attempts to provide something, but they are very few, and the impact is minute.” (a boy, Shkodra)

» The need for multi-faceted support and good coordination

Provision of multi-faceted, timely and sustainable support is the best strategy to empower and reintegrate the survivors.

“It [happened] only once, and I left and stayed at [name of organization] for [time in years]. I felt good, I felt I was in a kind family, which I had missed. The shelter gave me tenderness, they taught me how to make it on my own, how to be independent, and not depend on a man... how to do chores...they were a regular family I had missed. Since I went to [name of the centre], my life changed completely. They provided counselling. I was participating in reading, various activities, schooling, working... and I decided to forget, to throw it behind, and move on.” (a survivor of a sexual assault)

It is precisely this approach that survivors have found only in non-profit organizations in the form of shelters that is essential to coordinate the helpful services and pursue the case's journey towards empowerment and reintegration. However, their testimonies show that they are limited and insufficient. It is imperative to check how a multi-faceted, sustainable, and well-coordinated support from the public sector can be further developed and guaranteed. The survivors' testimonies indicate that it is still far from providing help and support to such standards, and the lack of support can lead survivors to new vulnerable circumstances.

“Now I've left [the shelter]. I was subsidized with cash to pay the rent and food only for the first 6 months. ...I worked, I collected some money. My brother and my third sister also helped me. They sent me money or clothes. My mum sent me the farm products. They came to see me and brought things.” (a survivor of sexual assault, rural area)

“I did not obtain what I was demanding from the state or the municipality; I work now. I didn't receive the rental bonus back then because I didn't even have a lease contract... I was subsidized by [organization name]. I didn't know the applications were periodic. I was told later that the deadline for applications was closed. This

service should be on ongoing basis. It was very tough. I had to pay the monthly rent and utility bills" (a woman, urban area, survivor of sexual assault)

"This association has assisted me for 4 months. I have tried to benefit a rental bonus from the municipality, but it is difficult. For example, I must apply quarterly. Divorced women have not economic assistance at all. It is very difficult to benefit it from the municipality out of 6%. I haven't benefited anything. I receive only ALL 40,000...and you can't pay your food, your rent, raise your children with that amount. The wage is also very small: 10,000 – 20,000 ALL. I tried to arrange things with my dad. He helped me with the rental bonus" (a woman, urban area, survivor of domestic sexual violence).

"I left the shelter because my aunt found me a good match in Belgium. After I went there, my aunt told him my story and he sent me back. Now I'm back in the shelter. I'm not ready to leave." (a survivor of sexual violence, at risk of trafficking, 22)

7. CONCLUSIONS

The legal framework on sexual abuse and violence has significantly improved in recent years in an effort to harmonize it with the international standards requirements. However, there are still some issues related to the definition of rape, not only in cases of coercion, but also in cases “without the person’s consent”. Also, there is ambiguity in the definition and specifications of immoral acts and various types of sexual harassment. That would improve the judicial panels’ understanding and their appropriate sanctioning of these acts.

Local mechanisms and structures that address issues of sexual violence are insufficient, with a lack of qualifications and overwhelmed with more than one duty. The Gender Equality Officer and the Domestic Violence Officer often come together to perform both duties, at a time when only recently did all municipalities have the structure of the domestic violence expert incorporated. In this context, addressing sexual harassment remains elusive and without clear orientations on how to address it.

Information and awareness raising about sexual violence and sexual harassment was insufficient and confusing. In schools, the open discussion of sexual issues is considered a “taboo”, thus adding to the load of stereotypes that this issue encompasses. In terms of abuse of boys – a phenomenon that was identified in the survey study – there are fewer informative and preventive efforts. By neglecting information, awareness - prevention - intervention and help- seeking becomes extremely difficult. Thus, it seems that education and awareness raising are the Achilles’ heel in prevention, help-seeking, recovery and non-re-victimization.

Forms of sexual violence or abuse ranged from touching and harassment without touching to rape. Many such cases continue to occur in the circle of trust, where both children and adult girls or women find it more difficult to seek help, especially under the family and community pressure.

The consequences of sexual violence are undoubtedly serious for its survivors. They range from fear, anxiety, and anger to health consequences such as headaches, health consequences from the act of rape, and chronic

diseases such as diabetes or migraines. On the other hand, it should be noted that when distanced from the abuser and reporting the latter, the majority of women who had survived sexual violence felt better emotionally despite the long ordeal of trials and on-going efforts for their reintegration to the society.

Abuse, sexual violence and sexual harassment are not isolated phenomena. They occur in a family, community and societal context. In this analysis of the situation, they were present in families with other social problems, such as the use of alcohol and drugs, criminality, other types of violence in the family.

The role of the family remains critical to prevent sexual abuse and to support survivors when they seek help. In this study, it was pointed out that the parental presence, care, good communication between parents and children and mutual trust were essential factors to firstly, inform and raise awareness of children and adults about this phenomenon, and secondly, to prevent and help during the confrontation. When abuse or harassment occurs in a circle of trust, parents’ trust in their children/adolescents is vital.

The patriarchal mindset is still prevalent in the Albanian society, especially in rural areas, but not only. The presence of strong gender stereotypes enhances the challenges in the process of reporting and help-seeking. Prejudices such “no matter how the coin flips, it’s your fault” were present in almost all cases. When women and girls subjected to sexual violence and abuse, the rest judged them and when deciding to report their abusers, they were also judged. Community solidarity was non-existent, thus highlighting the difficulties to overcome patriarchal mindsets in such communities.

Such factors as service credibility, information and the level of access to the latter, family support, as well as trust in institutions and from them are determinant to start with the help-seeking process and its continuity. Gender stereotypes and prejudices seem to be present in other institutions as well, such as the police, court and schools, thus making it more difficult to seek help and causing a re-victimization to the victim.

The few services delivered at home by the public system to the survivors of violence were insufficient, both in outreach and time. The emergency centres accommodating the survivors were non-public. The services provided by the local and central government such as the economic assistance, housing bonus, etc., were insufficient to increase reintegration of these women and girls to the society, since the process to benefit from them was time-consuming, bureaucratic and almost exclusive in criteria (e.g. to benefit from the rental bonus, the application must be filed in a specific period of time, a lease contract must be secured and a long time

passes until it is approved). In such a problematic context of service provision, the issues related to sexual harassment in different environments remain uncovered with services. Also, there are no specialized public services for survivors of sexual violence and sexual abuse.

The NGOs and religious institutions have taken a leading role in service provision even though by nature it is impossible for them to make up for the deficiencies in the public system. Additionally, their sustainability is uncertain due to dependence from donations.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this survey study, we suggest a series of recommendations arranged under the main topic, as follows:

» Improving the legal framework to adapt to the international documents' requirements

There are still some gaps to improve the legal framework. It is necessary to harmonize the definition of "rape" with international standards by linking it not only to coercion but also to the lack of the person's consent.

Also, the different forms of sexual harassment should be specified in the Criminal Code, to facilitate the understanding of the phenomenon.

Thirdly, it is necessary to invest in building the capacities of court panels, and especially of judges, in terms of the phenomenon of sexual violence and sexual harassment and the delivery of respective sentences.

» Early and inclusive education

Despite the efforts to date, there is a huge and nation-wide need, in urban and rural areas, to inform and educate more on issues related to gender-based violence in general and to the sexual one more specifically.

As long as sexual violence occurs early, education to protect against and prevent it is never too early.

New curricula and trainings to build the practitioners' capacities in this regard should overcome the current overfocusing on the characteristics and context of the victim/survivor, but instead deal with the same intensity with the issues and factors that influence the perpetrators and their behaviours, as well as the fact that boys are also victims of sexual harassment and violence, and the curriculum must explicitly address the relevant specifications.

All parties recommend that children, especially girls should attend school longer instead of being isolated and removed from school.

» Educating parents and communities is equally important to the education of young generations

Initiatives to prevent sexual violence shall target parents and children equally. Their education about the importance of parenting and good communication with children alongside education about gender-based violence are essential to effectively address the problems of violence in general and of sexual violence in particular.

The government, line ministries, independent institutions, service providers, non-governmental organizations, etc., working in the fight against sexual harassment and violence must advocate and engage communities widely. Their mentality is often a huge barrier to preventing and addressing sexual violence and harassment. In such efforts, these stakeholders might engage policy-makers, the media, human rights and gender equality activists, parliamentary committees and relevant MPs, key community members, important persons (VIPs), etc., to convey awareness-raising messages as effectively as possible.

» Addressing issues of sexual violence and harassment in an integrated manner.

Both in matters related to education and awareness, as well as in the provision of assistance and long-term addressing of problems of sexual harassment and violence, it is important to have an understanding and integrate a perspective that does not look at and deal with these problems in isolation from other economic and social ones. The context in which victims, perpetrators, survivors, their families, etc., find themselves, is particularly important to understand and take into consideration any intervention. Likewise, the deriving evidence should further feed into and reinforce the need for integrated services to support survivors and handle violent men and boys.

Along these lines, the survey study made it clear that in prevention efforts, but not only, there is a need for dedicated support for single-parent households, with parents who have left (e.g. in

migration, etc.), for children with parents with behavioural problems and low level of care, etc.

» **Proper information at a proper time and a proper outreach**

At a time of unlimited internet access and the low capacities of parents and/or teachers to control the typology, quality, and relevance of the resources and information that children access, it is imperative to work not only through appropriate and professional channels of information (such as schools, etc.), but also by informing parents and other stakeholders on the importance of control to minimize the inappropriate exposure of children to sexual content that leads to bullying or other harmful behaviours, including sexual violence.

On the other hand, awareness raising campaigns are never enough, much less exaggerated. Awareness raising campaigns should continue with a larger outreach, more intensive, and topic-oriented such as sexual violence. Both in educational and awareness-raising campaigns, the problem of blaming the victims, which still remains very disturbing, must be highlighted.

» **Restoring trust in institutions and professional work**

Education and health institutions, and especially law-enforcement institutions such as the police and courts, must work to:

Restoring trust: reporting and punishment of the crimes of sexual harassment and violence will enhance if trust in the enforcement institutions increases. Institutions can achieve this not only by working professionally, but also by informing about their work and achievements periodically, and cooperating with the media.

In this regard, not only rewarding methods should be applied (for good performance, merits of work), but also punishment of the lack of professionalism and violation of the ethical work principles with survivors of sexual violence should be applied. This applies to state, public and non-public institutions.

Capacity building: front-line practitioners, performing specific tasks and responsibilities for prevention, treatment and reintegration should

not stop actions for building and updating human capacities, from the most basic knowledge and skills, to capacity building for services of specialized counselling and treatment of adult and child survivors, such as trauma-oriented therapy, etc., which have been applied through self-learning.

Improving infrastructure: quality and effective services require adequate infrastructure. Many institutions lack qualified staff as well as adequate and enabling settings for questioning, examining, etc.

» **Mobilizing all resources and services, and coordinating them accordingly**

In its prevention, treatment and integration efforts, our society does not have the luxury of wasting or taking advantage of every existing resource and service. The responsible structures must on-goingly map and well-coordinate work with their partners.

The public system must strengthen the support mechanisms, make them more accessible and tangible in supporting survivors. Whereas, the civil society organizations, which are limited in resources and outreach of their activities and services, will have to be more proactive in sharing and replicating the best practices.

Better coordination and better use of resources should not be limited to the public and non-governmental sectors, but efforts must also be dedicated to think on how to invite and encourage provision of support by the private sector as well.

» **Ensuring specialized services which are long-term and provide for geographical coverage**

It is indisputable that in order to address the problems and needs related to the prevention, treatment and (re)integration of survivors of sexual harassment and violence, there are specialized, and accessible services distributed both in time and space. Emergency services localized in a single area (be it in the capital of the country) are completely insufficient to provide for an on-going support required on a case-by-case basis, but also to cover the entire territory of the Republic of Albania with services.

Service fragmentation in time and space can only be overcome with clear service planning, costing and budgeting of these services both at the local level (by the local government) and at the central level.

» **Continuous monitoring and reporting**

Elements of gender-based violence and sexual violence must be part of the permanent monitoring and reporting mechanisms and tools for all relevant actors.

Consecutively, the civil society and academia must continue to conduct on-going operational researches and situational analysis in order to generate evidences to evaluate and inform policy-making and decision-making in this sector.

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ANNEX - SURVEY STUDY TOOLS

INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Information Letter

This interview is being conducted in the framework of a survey study on “A situational analysis on sexual violence in Albania”, which is being carried out by the Albanian Women’s Empowerment Network (AWEN), which constantly conducts studies on various topics related to women and gender equality issues. The survey study was carried out in the framework of the “Protection and promotion of women’s rights in Albania” program, financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency - SIDA. We would be grateful if you would agree to be part of this survey study and answer our questions by sharing your thoughts and experiences about sexual violence and sexual harassment, coping, help-seeking and empowerment and reintegration after surviving violence.

We would like to assure you that all information we collect will be strictly confidential and will only be used for research purposes. No specific individual or address will be identifiable at any stage of the research/study. Your participation in the survey study is completely voluntary and at any time you may feel free not to answer certain questions or to withdraw from the study.

General information

Age _____

Gender _____

Education level _____

Current employment _____

Marital status _____

Area _____ (Urban or rural)

Age when abuse occurred _____

Section 1. Life before sexual abuse

- » What was your life like before the abuse occurred?
- » How would you describe your relationships with your family, friends, partner, school or work? Why?
- » How would you describe your childhood? Adolescence? Youth?
- » How would you describe yourself? Your personality? What was your character like?
- » Have you had problems with your physical health? What about mental health?
- » What would you single out as the most important events in your life in the years before the abuse occurred?
- » What did you consider most important in life? Why?
- » What pleased you and what bothered you?
- » What did you think you did/had done well up to that point? What hadn't you done well?
- » Have you been physically abused before? Emotionally? Sexually? If so, by whom? Did you discuss it with someone? Why so/ why not?

Section 2. Period of sexual abuse – not just a moment in time

- » What would you like to share with me about your experience of sexual abuse? Where would you like us to start?
- » Did you know the abuser before it happened? If so, what was your relationship?
- » Was it once or was it repeated abuse? What was your reaction after the first abuse?
- » Was there any time you lost faith/hopes that the situation would change? (In particular, we can ask about: the support of the family/ friends, trust in the abuser, self-blame, threats or manipulation by the abuser, lack of

information, lack of trust in institutions, etc.)

- » What were you experiencing physically, emotionally or mentally? What about after the event/s?
- » Did you ask for help? What urged/prevented you from seeking help?

(if yes)

- » When did you decide to ask for help? What influenced you to do this?
- » Who did you turn to for help? Why to that person?
- » What did the others react? How did they perceive the experience you told them about?
- » Did you feel supported or criticized? Why? How would you describe the help-seeking course from the moment of making the decision to the end? What challenges were there in this course?
- » Was there any service you could receive as an immediate response to the situation? Why?
 - » If so, what service did you receive? Did you have previous information about the service?
 - » How did you feel? What were the attitudes of the service provider?
 - » How well did they meet your needs at the time?
- » What would you appreciate most from the help-receiving experience? What could have been better? What would you suggest to improve the services for other survivors of sexual abuse?
- » What was the most difficult moment in this whole experience? What has impressed you the most this far?

Section 3. Life after sexual abuse

- » How has this experience changed your life? What has changed in you? (physical, mental health, personality, values, etc.)
- » What about work, socializing with others, relationships with relatives, intimate

relationships or other areas of life?

- » Based on your experience, which service(s) would you single out as the most valuable/helpful for you? Why?
- » Which ones were disappointing/harming more than helpful? Why?
- » What services are you receiving now? Are you satisfied with them? Why?
- » What other services would you like to have?
- » What would you like to see improved in the services provided by state and non-state structures? How could services be improved to encourage more reporting of abuse and getting help?
- » How do you see your future?
- » What advice would you give to another person who might be going through a similar experience right now? Do you know someone else who is in this situation?
- » Are there any other questions you wish you had been asked? Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you!

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Women and/or men

A situational analysis on sexual violence in Albania

Information Letter

This focus group is being conducted in the framework of a survey study on “A situational analysis on sexual violence in Albania”, which is being carried out by the Albanian Women’s Empowerment Network (AWEN), which constantly conducts studies on various topics related to women and gender equality issues. The survey study was carried out in the framework of the “Protection and promotion of women’s rights in Albania” program, financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency–SIDA. We would be grateful if you would answer our questions about your opinions and experiences regarding sexual violence and sexual harassment, its prevalence in Albania, opinions about survivors and abusers, the help-seeking course, as well as the challenges of survivors of violence.

We would like to assure you that all information we collect will be strictly confidential and will only be used for research purposes. No specific individual or address will be identifiable at any stage of the research/study. Your participation in the survey study is completely voluntary and at any time you may feel free not to answer certain questions or to withdraw from the study.

For the moderator and note taker

Area: _____

Location: Urban or rural _____

Date: _____

Group composition:

No. of participants: _____ of which girls/women _____

Notes:

Details of participants

No.	Gender	Age	Employment	Urban or rural area	Education
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					

Questions for discussion

1. Understanding sexual violence and sexual harassment

- » In your view, what is sexual violence? What is sexual harassment?
- » When was the first time you heard/learnt about sexual violence and harassment? From whom?
- » Where were/are you informed about sexual violence or harassment? Is it easy to access this kind of information, why?
- » What makes a person more vulnerable to being a victim of sexual violence or harassment? Can you give us some examples? What makes a woman/girl or man/boy feel more confident? (stereotypes, prejudices about the victim or the abuser)

- » Who is it most likely to happen to? Are there characteristics / behaviours / attitudes etc., that could make someone more vulnerable? And more resilient? What? Why? (check for gender differences)
- » What makes a person more prone to be a sexual abuser? Why?
- » What do you think, how prevalent is the phenomenon of sexual abuse in Albania? What about sexual harassment? In which areas of life is it more present?
- » In your community / your circle of acquaintances, have you heard of such experiences? What?
- » Has the situation regarding sexual violence or abuse improved or worsened in recent years? Why is Albania/specific areas more/less affected by this phenomenon?
- » How and where do girls/women or boys/men seek help in cases where they are sexually harassed or abused? Is there a difference? Why?
- » What makes it harder/easier to seek help? (intimate relationship, relationship of trust with abusers, urban/ rural area, the age, trust in institutions, etc.)
- » Getting back to the cases mentioned above, how did the institutions/services react when she/he reported sexual violence? What about sexual harassment? Have they received the necessary/appropriate services? How satisfied were they with such services? Why?
- » How much information do you think you have about sexual abuse and harassment? Who are the least informed, why?
- » If something similar happened to you, how would you cope with it? Would you ask for help or not? Why?

2. Experience of sexual violence or sexual harassment

- » Please do not mention names. Do you know someone who has experienced sexual violence or sexual harassment in their life? If so, can you describe what happened based on the information you have?
- » Where does sexual harassment occur? What about sexual abuse? Are there specific places/ areas where it might occur the most? Why right there?
- » How did you learn about the cases you mentioned? What happened to these girls/ women (or men/boys) later? What problems did they face?
- » How did their families react? Did women and men in the family react differently? What about the community they lived in?
- » What do you think about their reaction? What could have been better?
- » Based on the stories you know, what has the future been like for survivors of sexual violence? What are the challenges beyond seeking help and addressing the situation of violence?
- » What are the challenges/barriers in the reintegration process for survivors of sexual violence?
- » How can they be helped to overcome them?
- » Are there any other questions you'd like us to discuss?

Thank you for your participation!

3. Seeking help

- » What do you think, is the victim willing to seek help in a situation of sexual violence/ harassment? Why?

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Civil society representatives

A situational analysis on sexual violence in Albania

Information Letter

This focus group is being conducted in the framework of a survey study on “A situational analysis on sexual violence in Albania”, which is being carried out by the Albanian Women’s Empowerment Network (AWEN), which constantly conducts studies on various topics related to women and gender equality issues. The survey study was carried out in the framework of the “Protection and promotion of women’s rights in Albania” program, financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency-SIDA. We would be grateful if you would answer our questions about your opinions and experiences regarding sexual violence and sexual harassment, its prevalence in Albania, opinions about survivors and abusers and the help-seeking course.

We would like to assure you that all information we collect will be strictly confidential and will only be used for research purposes. No specific individual or address will be identifiable at any stage of the research/study. Your participation in the survey study is completely voluntary and at any time you may feel free not to answer certain questions or to withdraw from the study.

For the moderator and note taker

ZArea: _____

Location: Urban or rural _____

Date: _____

Group composition:

No. of participants: _____ of which women _____

Notes:

Details of participants

No.	Gender	Age	Employment/Institution	Work position
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				

1. Understanding sexual violence and sexual harassment

- » In your view, what is considered sexual violence in Albania? What is sexual harassment? Are there differences between boys/girls’ opinion? Are there differences between rural and urban areas?
- » What makes a person more vulnerable to being a victim of sexual violence or harassment? Can you give us some examples? What makes a woman/girl or man/boy feel more confident? (stereotypes, prejudices about the victim or the abuser)
- » What makes a person more prone to be a sexual abuser? Why?
- » What do you think, how prevalent is the

phenomenon of sexual abuse in Albania? What about sexual harassment? In which areas of life is it more present?

- » Has it improved or worsened over the recent years? Why is Albania/specific areas more/less affected by this phenomenon?
- » If you have information, what is the reporting rate of sexual violence or sexual harassment? Why?

2. Experience of sexual violence or sexual harassment

- » In your experience, have you met people who were sexual victims or abusers? What about victims of sexual harassment? If so, can you describe what happened based on the information you have?
- » Where does sexual harassment occur? What about sexual abuse? Are there specific places/ areas where it might occur the most? Why right there?
- » Are there characteristics / behaviours / attitudes etc., that could make someone more vulnerable? And more resilient? What? Why? (check for gender differences)
- » What happened to these girls/women (or men/ boys) later? What problems did they face?
- » How did their families react? Did women and men in the family react differently? What about the community they lived in?
- » What do you think about their reaction? What could have been better?

3. Seeking help

- » How and where do girls/women or boys/men seek help in cases where they are sexually harassed or abused?
- » What makes it harder/easier to seek help? (intimate relationship, relationship of trust with abusers, urban/ rural area, the age, trust in institutions, etc.)
- » Getting back to the cases mentioned above, how did the institutions/services react when

she reported sexual violence? What about sexual harassment?

- » How satisfied were they with such services? Why so and why not?
- » What is the future of survivors of sexual violence? What are the challenges beyond seeking help and addressing the situation of violence?
- » What are the challenges/barriers in the reintegration process for survivors of sexual violence?
- » How can they be helped to overcome them?

4. Legal/policy framework and services

- » What are the national and local laws/strategies or action plans that address issues of sexual abuse and harassment?
- » What is their priority level at the central level? What about the local level?
- » How well are they implemented? How is their implementation measured?
- » Do you think these address all issues/ needs related to sexual harassment and sexual violence? If so, how? If not, what are the challenges/gaps and how can they be overcome?
- » Based on your experience, what are the existing services for survivors of sexual violence or harassment? Are they sufficient? Why?
- » How can existing services be improved? If there is a need for new services, what are they?
- » Are there any other questions you'd like us to discuss?

Thank you for your participation!

