



**RECOGNISE and PREVENT
Sexual Violence!**

**DISCOURAGE Abuse!
HELP Survivors!**

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I. Why This Brochure?

- ⇒ Because sexual violence is the form of violence least known and reported (between 75% and 90% of cases don't get reported to any authorities); together we have to break the silence and the shame surrounding sexual violence!
- ⇒ Because sexual violence affects hundreds of thousands of women in Romania (between 6-7% of women in Romania were victims of some sexual assaults according to FRA, 2014); sometimes boys are victims of sexual violence too.
- ⇒ Because you own your body! Remember this and do not let anyone touch you if you do not want! Your body like yourself, has limits that you can establish. Your body is not an object for others to dispose of!
- ⇒ Because A.L.E.G. provides counselling free of charge for those who are going through a situation of abuse or experienced sexual assault in the past. There's no shame in asking for information or help if you are going through a difficult time. A.L.E.G. can support you with psychological and legal counselling, to accompany you to the police or hospital, to connect

you with a lawyer. Or if you simply want to talk with someone, we can listen to you without judging you in any way.

In a recent study of The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2014), „Violence against women: everyday and everywhere”, presents the results of the most comprehensive survey undertaken in Europe on violence against women, showing the extent of abuse suffered by women at home, at work, in public and online. According to the study:

- ⇒ **30% of women in Romania** say they have been victims of physical or sexual violence at some point in life, after the age of 15
- ⇒ 24% of women in Romania suffered violence **from their partner**, while 14% of women in Romania have suffered violence from a person other than the partner
- ⇒ 24% of the women in Romania say they were subjected to physical or sexual violence by an adult **before the age of 15**
- ⇒ 6% of women have suffered sexual violence from their partner or another person
- ⇒ 11% of women had experienced sexual harassment

⇒ in 97% of sexual violence cases the abuser was a male

What Is the Use of This Brochure to You ?

- ✓ it helps you understand what sexual violence is, who is affected, how it is manifested
- ✓ it offers some practical tips about how to avoid becoming a victim and how to discourage those around you from committing sexual offences
- ✓ it offers guidelines for what to do if you or / a friend suffer sexual assault; it explains what your rights are, who to address and what you can expect
- ✓ it helps you understand the effects of physical, psychological and social aspects of sexual assault. Do not forget: if you recognize symptoms in someone close, do not hesitate to listen and to provide some useful information.

Who Is It For?

- ✓ For young people!... As you begin to discover the world, life, friendship and love it is good not to forget that, "you own your body". The boundaries of your own body are inviolable and nobody has the right to touch you or force you to do something you're not ready for.

- ✓ For young people!... A key word not to forget: CONSENT. Understand it and it will enable healthy relationships in which you can experience positive emotions and feelings.
- ✓ For young people!... Unfortunately around 50% of sexual violence victims were under 16 at the time of the assault, according to worldwide statistics.

II. What Is Sexual Violence?

Gender based violence

... is a form of violence that has its main causes in encouraging stereotypical social norms where masculinity is associated with dominance and aggression and femininity with submission. It disproportionately affects girls and women, but men can be victims too.

Violence against women

... is any act of violence that result in, 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 (*Council of Europe, Convention on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*).

Sexual Violence

... is sexual assault, sexualized violence or sexual exploitation; a perpetrator makes use of the trust, the dependent position of the child/adolescent/adult or their impossibility to act freely, in order to satisfy his sexual desires against the will of the victim.

- ⇒ may be preceded by threats and violence
- ⇒ may occur only once or can be repeated
- ⇒ victims may be children of any age (girls and boys), adolescents, young adults from any environment, social class, ethnicity or religion
- ⇒ any unwanted act or conduct of a sexual nature to which the person cannot oppose
- ⇒ uninvited sexual activity that includes remarks and jokes with sexual overtones, unpleasant comments, exhibitionism, phone calls, SMS or online messages, offensive, unwanted sexual proposals, being forced to look at pornography or participate in pornography, unwanted touching
- ⇒ sexual activity by coercion, rape, incest, submission of woman to sexual acts which she considers painful or humiliating, forced pregnancy, trafficking and exploitation of women in the sex industry

Sexual violence is one of the most severe forms of gender based violence, and in Romania, the form that is the least

known and reported. Sexual violence remains hidden because of social norms that direct shame and guilt towards the victim instead of the perpetrator.

Sexual violence is one of the most serious offences and human rights violations as it results in much more than physical suffering and injury, affecting the most intimate part of our being.

Sexual violence should NOT shame the victim but the perpetrator!

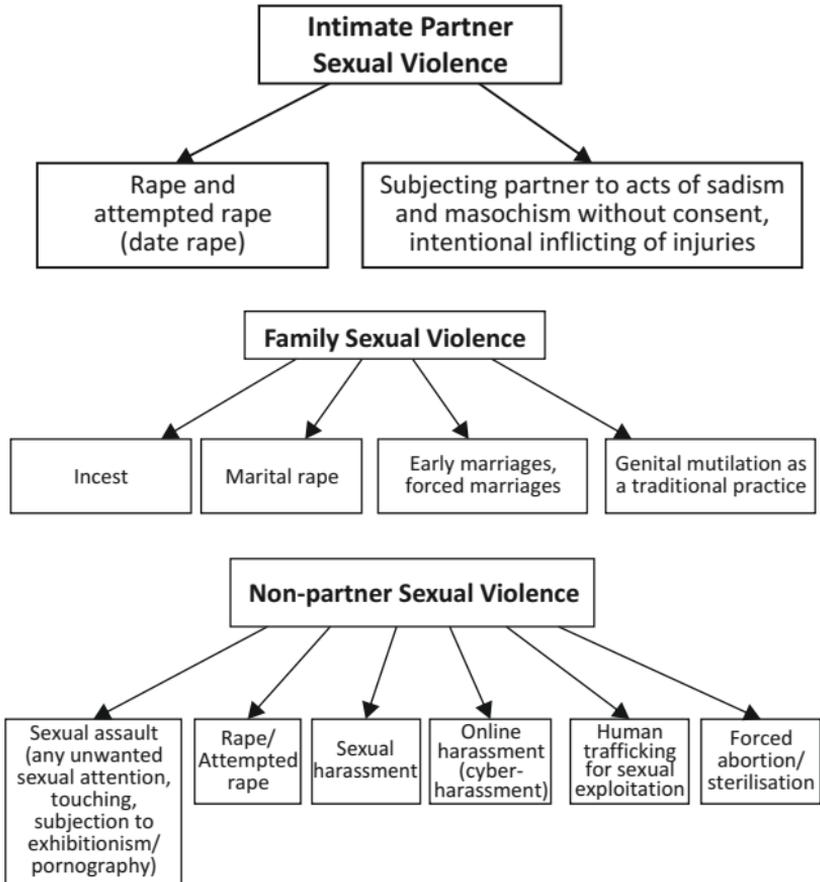
Sexual violence is NOT the victim's responsibility but that of the perpetrator!

Sexual violence is an aggression and an offence, and survivors need help, understanding and empowerment.

Seek for help, discourage violence and provide support!

Sexual violence is not just rape. Any unwanted sexual experience, including those experiences that do not involve direct physical contact (e.g. exhibitionism) is a form of aggression. Even whistles or offensive words are forms of sexual assault, because they are motivated by the desire of the perpetrator to make the victim feel dominated and threatened.

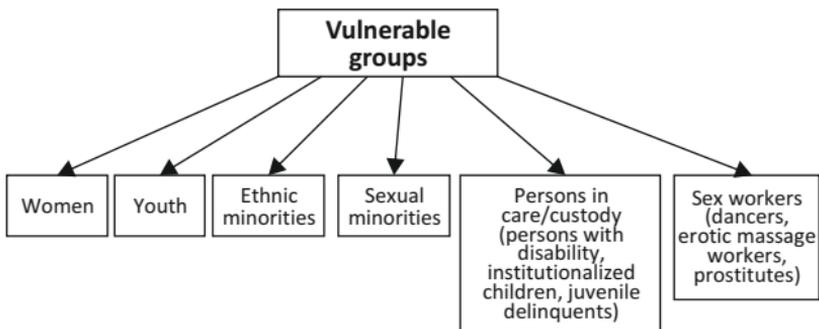
SEXUAL VIOLENCE ACCORDING TO CONTEXT AND VICTIM-PERPETRATOR RELATIONSHIP



You are more likely to become a victim of some form of sexual violence if:

- ⇒ **You are a woman** – in more than 90% of the attacks, the victim is a woman
- ⇒ **You are a young person** – young women are in greater risk of being sexually assaulted, but anyone can be a victim at any age
- ⇒ **You have a disability** – people with physical or mental disabilities are often at risk because they depend on the help of others; abusers exploit this vulnerability
- ⇒ **You grew up in a poorer environment** – women and girls living in less safe neighbourhoods become more frequently victims of assault; poor women and girls are often in the situation of being demanded sexual favours when trying to get a better job or other benefits, and they have less access to authorities or are not taken seriously when reporting violence
- ⇒ **You belong to an ethnic minority** – discrimination against Roma women restricts their access to authorities and to justice.
- ⇒ **You work in the sex industry** – prostitution, erotic massage, exotic dancing, video chat -people working in such areas are poorly protected by the authorities, are stigmatized by society and vulnerable to abuse on the ground that they should be ready to accept sexual intercourse anytime, in any conditions.

- ⇒ **You have other sexual orientation** – LGBT people can be victims of aggression as a form of punishment; sex offenders can attack LGBT people to show them that "abnormality" is not tolerated.
- ⇒ **You have been or will be institutionalized** – institutionalized minors, disabled hospitalized people, offenders who are imprisoned may suffer acts of sexual assault by people in positions of authority or control of those institutions or from other institutionalized persons.



III. Myths and Facts about sexual violence

Myth: sexual assault is most often committed by people with mental health problems, easily identifiable by their physical appearance and behaviour.

Fact: ... most often, the perpetrators are people without severe mental disorders, with a common look that do not make them suspicious; what distinguishes them is the need to feel powerful, to control and to dominate others, and very often they are acquainted to the victim: a family members, a friend, a neighbour or a colleague. 89% of victims say they knew their perpetrator (*RCNI 2010 Ireland*).

Myth: sexual assault occurs most often at night, in dark alleys, and the abusers are strangers

Fact: more than half of the sexual violence cases are occurring in homes, at different hours of the day, as in most cases the abuser is a known person (family member, friend, colleague, doctor, teacher, etc.)

Myth: people who dress provocatively, flirt or behave in a friendlier, sociable way, bear some of the blame if they are sexually assaulted

Fact: the only responsible for sexual violence is the abuser. Victim's clothing or behaviour are not invitations to aggression nor a substitute for consent.

Myth: if I accept to go out on a date, and he pays for that, than it's normal for him to expect a sexual reward

Fact: a date is primarily a social contact that does not necessarily involve sexual intercourse. By accepting a date I agree to meet, talk, hang out etc.. It does not imply I agree to have sex.

Myth: if I accepted a sexual gesture than it means that I agreed to any sexual behaviour

Fact: for both partners to feel good and to speak of consented sexual activity, all components must be in harmony with the will of the people involved. Consent or agreement given for a sexual activity is not irreversible, it can be withdrawn at any time and the partner must take into account the change of mind. I can always request my partner to use a condom even though I have not talked about it at first.

Myth: sexual violence can't happen in couples or between people who are married to each other

Fact: sexual violence between partners / spouses is a common and extremely serious act. Marital rape is punishable by law. Lovers or spouses are not obliged to accept a sex. NO can be said at any time, and a responsible partner must accept.

Myth: abusers are people with excessive sexual desires, without a stable couple relationship, trying to obtain sexual satisfaction

Fact: a large number of offenders are involved in a relationship, are married, have families. It is not the lack of sexual activity what motivates their acts of aggression but the sexual pleasure associated with the need to control another person, to exercise power over them, in the absence of consent.

Myth: rape, sexual aggression involves physical violence, beatings, and injuries. If there was no physical violence, there was no rape.

Fact: in some cases the abuser does not makes use of violent gestures, but intimidation or blackmail are enough to create intense state of fear and cancel opposition.

Myth: sexual harassment is exaggerated. Most so-called harassments are negligible and harmless.

Fact: sexual harassment in the workplace or in schools happens very often and to many it may seem trivial. Unwanted sexual attention can affect victims in two ways, professionally (career advancement is conditioned by the acceptance of sexual compromises) and psychologically. The pressure on the harassed person turns work / study into an unpleasant, stressful experience- a nightmare you cannot escape unless you lose your job or place of study. Sexual harassment at work in Romania is punishable under the Criminal Code.



IV. Is It Really CONSENT?

Here are some questions that only you can answer to see if you are in a relationship that is based on equality and consent:

- ⇒ The decision to have sex is free of any pressure from your partner or from others?
- ⇒ What are your reasons to have sex or to start your sexual life?
- ⇒ Do you feel that your partner respects your decision to have or not to have sex? Do you trust and respect your partner? *The respect for body and sexual limits means the liberty to say NO, to decide and re-decide over the sexual intercourse.*
- ⇒ Do you feel uncomfortable talking with your partner about sex, your needs, desires, sensations and emotions? *Communication is essential, it involves discussions with the partner about expectations, needs, fears, etc. and to listen and learn about each other's thoughts.*

- ⇒ Do you feel safe with him/her? Do you trust that he/she will respect any of your decisions? *Trust in each other is very important because only when you feel safe you enjoy a positive relationship, without fear that can threaten your mental health.*

The basic element in all forms of sexual violence is the absence of consent. For a person to be involved in sexual activity it is necessary that she/he expresses her/his will freely, in full knowledge about the facts.

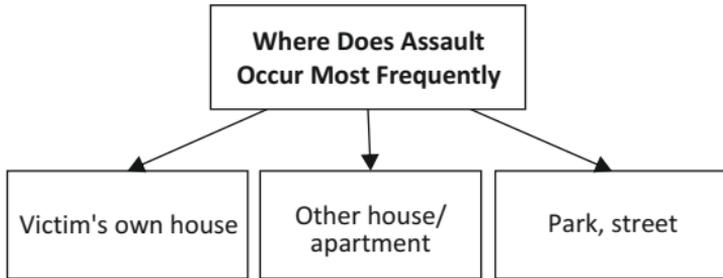
Consent is NOT considered valid when it is expressed:

- ⇒ By a minor (under 13) in a relationship with an adult
- ⇒ By a person whose state of consciousness is impaired by alcohol, drugs, medication or bad health
- ⇒ Under constraint, pressure, fear
- ⇒ Without acknowledgement of all the necessary information, or based on false information

Important! Learn to cherish, to discover what you like and what you don't and to feel good in your own skin. Choose when you want to have a boyfriend/girlfriend (when you find the right person) and do not accept just anyone for fear of loneliness. You are better off alone than with a dominating partner who controls you.

V. Practical Tips for „Weird” Situations

When you feel you are in a “weird situation” trust your gut instinct – you probably really are. Trust your inner voice as most often it will guide you to safety. Do not hesitate to stand up and leave or to ask somebody you trust to accompany you on the way home, note down the number of the taxi you get in and make the taxi driver aware of that, have your phone on you and call someone close to let them know your whereabouts. If you are a man and you witness a suspicious scene, you can intervene. Talk directly to the person assaulted and offer your help to get to a safe or public place. If you are out with friends and they lose control and become aggressive, try to convince them that they will regret soon what they intend to do. Do not encourage sexist or dirty jokes, explain firmly that you do not want to be part of a staring game, making fun of or whistling at girls, as you prefer to speak decently to a woman.



● Harassment on public transportation

If a man presses you or rubs against you in public transportation don't pretend it's nothing. Try to defend yourself! Make it clear that you are not willing to tolerate such transgressions: „Don't touch me!”, „Leave me alone!”. Speak up so that people around you can hear you. It will also help you to expose the man, which will most likely be unpleasant for him! Say what comes to your mind. Speak with a determined voice and look the man in the eyes, this way you will show him that you cannot be intimidated. You may feel helpless in such situations, not knowing how to defend yourself against such attacks. Tell others. The perpetrator will try to intimidate you, don't let it happen! Always think that the situation is not your fault! No matter what clothes you are wearing and regardless of what you may have said! If you are the target of sexual harassment or an attack, don't hesitate asking others for help and support (parents, friends, by-standers, specialists).

● Harassment on the street, dark places

Urban spaces are places to be enjoyed by women but they can also be scary when public space loses its positive side, ceasing to be an open space for free movement and communication and generating instead fear, insecurity and a feeling of threat. For many women, the entrance ways and stairwells of buildings are “scary places” and it is no coincidence that they feel threatened. Studies show that the scenes of about one third of all violent sexual offences committed against women by unidentified perpetrators are in entranceways.

If you feel harassed, draw the line and act through words and gestures: *“Enough!”*. Show your strength and intimidate the perpetrator. Tell him to stop, firm and clear *“Leave me alone!”*. Make him understand that you will not tolerate such violation of privacy.

● Harassment in Cafes, restaurants, clubs etc.

Cafes, bars can also be places of unpleasant encounters. Some men do not seem to understand that women who are out alone do not necessarily seek advances from a man. It is difficult to tell a man to leave you alone if he has had a few drinks too many.

- ⇒ Make it clear that you are not interested in talking, let alone any other form of contact
- ⇒ If someone comes too close and wants to touch you, don't allow that

- ⇒ Make a complain to the bar staff
- ⇒ If you are afraid that the harasser will be after you, take a taxi or call a person you trust and ask to be accompanied
- ⇒ Do not accept drinks from strangers, take care of your drink, at anytime someone can put a drug into your drink to make you loose your control

● In your own home

Most of the people think that the four walls of their home offer a safe haven. However, certain things should be borne in minde to protect your private home.

- ⇒ Don't allow unknown persons into your flat. Use the intercom or the spyhole. Make it clear that you will not open the door. If he does not go away and continues to ring the dorbell, say that you feel harassed and that you will call the police if he doesn't stop.
- ⇒ If plumbers or service technicians etc. make an unannounced call, don't hesitate to phone the company or authority to make sure. Ask the caller to show you an identity card whilst you keep the door chain on.
- ⇒ Do not give unknown persons who call you any information about yourself
- ⇒ Plan your way home carefully

● Harassment over the phone

Obscene phonecalls can cause fear and unrest. Often you can get rid of the caller by putting down the receiver without saying a thing. If the caller continues to call, you may record as evidence or to block the number. Be careful who you give your phone number to!

● Online harassment (cyberharassment)

A particular form of violence is violence through the internet. The internet offers the opportunity to come into contact with anyone easily. Do not rush to give your personal data: name, address, telephone number. A nickname helps you stay anonymous, but others may hide behind nicknames too! Photographs are not reliable, either. If you meet someone, you should choose the place. Never accept to meet in an apartment or neighbourhood where you have not been before. Always choose a public place, for e.g. a café, where you can take a friend with you. However tell someone where you're going. Enjoy meeting new people, have fun, but do not forget that the other person has to win your trust!

The FRA 2014 study shows that one in 10 women has experienced at least one form of violence in cyber space from the age of 15.

Forms of violence via the Internet or mobile phone comprise:

- ⇒ Illegal and/or offensive content (pornography, child pornography, erotic images, photos or images of

children, erotic and/or pornographic cartoons, messages with racist and xenophobic, discriminatory or intimidating content)

- ⇒ Online and real time contacts (through chat and email) are used by perpetrators to gain trust, obtain information they use to commit abuses and crimes
- ⇒ Receiving offensive messages / unwanted advances over social networks
- ⇒ Posting content to "destroy the image" of a person (publishing intimate or denigrating photos)

Usefull addresses where to report online abuse:

<http://www.sigur.info/>

<http://www.safernet.ro/>

<http://www.salvaticopiii.ro/>

● Harasement at school (bullying)

Denigrating behaviour or assault from schoolmates can make you feel isolated and humiliated. In many cases it seems perfectly normal for a girl to be touched by a boy/man. But the fact is that only you can decide who you allow to touch you! Also, sexual remarks or harassment from teachers is not acceptable!

Do not be afraid to make even a complaint to the school board. Defend yourself, talk to your parents or an adult you trust. Ally yourself with other colleagues who are going

through the same situation, remember that „united we are stronger“! Together, you can confront the violent classmate in a self-assured way and tell him that he has no right and you will not accept his behaviour. If you ask yourself or have dilemmas like *„How can I defend myself from a colleague/teacher/adult?“*, *„At what age can I go out alone in the evening?“*, *„Can my parents decide who my friends should be?“* go and talk to the school psychologist.

● Harassment at the work place

The workplace is the most common place where sexual harassment can occur because men typically hold executive positions and tend to make abuse of power. In the cases of adolescents it is the school where this happens. Some men pretend that they have problems differentiating between flirting and sexual harassment. However, telling them apart is quite straightforward: whatever both parties enjoy is allowed. If there is no mutual consent or if pressure is exerted by one side, this is defined as harassment, irrespective of whether the harasser is a superior, a colleague or a customer. Sexual harassment does not only include undesired touch or comments but also making inappropriate jokes, hanging pin-up photos or showing pornographic pictures.

- ⇒ Make it clear that advances, whether verbal, physical or any kind are unwelcomed
- ⇒ Collect proofs of the harassment – videorecord the

perpetrators, keep the e-mails, record phone calls, keep documents that can help you prove the harassment (internal decisions etc.)

- ⇒ Do not let yourself intimidated by the harasser. If you keep silent in order not to lose your job or your position you most likely will continue to be exposed indefinitely to harassment.
- ⇒ Talk to female colleagues. Other women in the company might go through the same situation too. It will be easier to take steps against the harasser if you join forces. If the situation continues, make a written complaint to the supervisor and keep a copy.

● Abuse by a family member

If you are subjected to sexual violence by a family member or by an intimate partner, have in mind the following:

- ⇒ Violence will not stop by itself or if you behave differently. Violence happens because the abuser has this pattern of behaviour.
- ⇒ Don't hope that the partner will change and stop abusing you in time. If your partner shows signs of coercive behaviour from the beginning of the relationship (disregards your will, controls every step you take, is excessively jealous, slaps you) think carefully about whether to go ahead with the relationship or not. Violence tends to aggravate in

time and it is much harder to escape once it becomes a pattern in your life.

- ⇒ Don't hope that a pregnancy will change the situation. Most often violence and conflict intensify during pregnancy.
- ⇒ Do not hide the abuse because you feel ashamed. Shame and guilt should not be on you, but on the perpetrator who commits such abuse.
- ⇒ Keep in a safe place your documents, a set of keys, some money for emergencies if you have to leave home in a hurry
- ⇒ Call the police in case of emergency. If you cannot call for help, ask a friend or neighbour to call the police when they have suspicions. Usually people around see what happens but are reluctant, not knowing how to help or if their help is welcomed.
- ⇒ Ask for support of a specialized service (shelter, counselling center, etc.) that can guide you to make an informed decision
- ⇒ To file a complaint or to get a protection order you need evidence (certified forensic records, witnesses, etc.).

VI. Sexual Violence – Legal Aspects

It's good to know that many forms of sexual violence mentioned above are actually crimes in Romania. Sexual harassment, rape, incest, sexual assault, sexual intercourse with a minor under 13, trafficking falls under criminal law and are punishable by imprisonment. To start a criminal investigation, in almost all cases, the authorities need a complaint from the victim. Without this formal statement, the authorities cannot start a criminal case. Do not forget this limit and if you want to report sexual violence, file a written complaint either to the police or the prosecution. Do not forget to ask for a registration number for your complaint and a contact from the police so you can follow legal procedures in your case.

● Sexual violence as part of domestic violence

In international conventions, domestic violence includes all actions of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence, occurring in the family, domestic unit or between former or current spouses/partners, whether the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim. According to statistics, one in 5 women suffers

some form of violence by their partner. In Europe, one in 20 women were forced to unwanted sexual acts by a current or former partner or consented to intercourse fearing the partner's reaction if she refused.

In Romania, Law 217/2003 with its amendments uses a narrower definition and refers only to preventing and combating *family* violence, implying that the victim and the perpetrator have shared the same home, not covering violence between partners who never lived together. To lodge a complaint, the victim needs evidence such as complaints to the police or a medical certificate obtained from the forensic office. In some counties in Romania a victim can access public or private services, but public services often require identification documents and proof of the abuse.

● Marital rape

If the husband forces his wife to have sex, using physical violence or other forms of coercion, this is marital rape. In the past, marriage between the parties removed criminal liability in case of rape, but this provision is no longer valid. Sexual intercourse without consent is also punished between married partners.

● Incest

It is defined as sexual intercourse between relatives in direct line or between brothers and sisters. Constitute a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment. Being people of the same family, it is rarely reported to authorities and it is quite difficult to prove. The abused person is subjected to very high pressures (emotional blackmail, threats, blame, etc.). Unfortunately, incest and molestation within the family are the most common forms of child sexual abuse. According to the Incest Trauma Center organization in Belgrade, incest involves a repetitive situation, the average duration of the abuse being 5 years. In 28% of cases the victim was subjected to abuse by multiple perpetrators.

● Rape

It is defined as any kind of sexual intercourse with a person of the opposite sex or the same sex, through coercion, or by taking advantage of one's impossibility to defend themselves or to express their will. It is punishable by imprisonment from 3 to 10 years and removal of some rights. Under the new Penal Code to punish the perpetrator it is required the prior complaint of the injured party.

The penalties are more severe if:

- ⇒ The offense was committed by two or more persons together
- ⇒ The victim is under the care, education, protection or treatment of the perpetrator

- ⇒ The victim is a family member
- ⇒ The victim was a minor under 15 years
- ⇒ It has caused the victim serious bodily or health harm
- ⇒ The act led to the death or suicide of the victim

● **Sexual assault**

It is defined in the Criminal Code as an act of a sexual nature other than rape, with a person, committed under coercion, unable to defend themselves or express their will or taking advantage of this state; it is punishable by imprisonment from 2 to 7 years and deprivation of certain rights. These acts may be: touching, kissing, exposure to pornography etc.

● **Sexual harassment**

It is defined in the Criminal Code as the repeated demand of sexual favours within a work relationship or similar (e.g. school) if violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile environment. It is punishable with imprisonment from three months to one year or a fine.

● **Trafficking in persons**

It is defined as recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or

use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. It is punishable by imprisonment from 3 to 12 years and prohibition of certain rights.

VII. Effects of Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is an extremely traumatic event, whether consisting of a single or repeated incidents over a longer period of time. The consequences of sexual violence are not confined to the immediate impact, but on long-term affects a person's life. The consequences of sexual violence can vary depending on age, personality, nature of the incident and the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.

People who experienced sexual violence face extremely serious consequences that affect their emotional, behavioural, cognitive, social, professional functioning on a long-term.

Reactions and signs on different levels:

- ⇒ **Physical:** sexual assault may be followed by painful sores, infections in the genital area and or pregnancy; headache, nausea
- ⇒ **Psychological:** shock, temporary amnesia (the victim does not remember the entire sequence of events) or total (not remembering the occurred events - occurs in people who have undergone sexual violence for long periods of time), depression, anxiety

(restlessness, fear, state of tension and constant vigilance expecting something bad to happen anytime); post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), flashbacks (the person remembers gestures, images, smells, sounds, bodily sensations, as if reliving the traumatic experience again and again); low self-esteem (people believe that there is something wrong with them, that they are somehow to blame for what had happened)

- ⇒ **Emotional:** self-blame, feelings of shame and humiliation, low self-confidence
- ⇒ **Sexual:** disorders; fear of intimacy in relationships *(any act of physical expression of affection is reinterpreted through the violence experienced and may be perceived as unwanted, aggressive, traumatic. Intimate relations can be a real ordeal, initiating any physical closeness may trigger traumatic episodes in mind, as if current partner is the perpetrator and the traumatic event is relived)*
- ⇒ **Social:** fear of strangers, of new situations / places, of losing a loved one, social isolation, fear to establish any kind of relation
- ⇒ **Behavioral:** low efficiency at school /work *(concentrating and attention difficulties)*. Some people turn to use of drugs, alcohol to escape the tormenting feelings, the risk of developing addictions

is extremely high. Others turn to self-harming acts (*cuts, burns, etc.*) the temporary pain caused, for someone, can be the only way to minimize temporarily the pain of the abuse and to “forget” what had happened. Eating disorders are attempts to regain a minimum control over their lives, a means to adjust negative emotions. Sleep disorders are frequent.

An extremely serious consequence is that a large number of people who have survived sexual violence think about suicide. They can end up having various risky behaviours, engaging in dangerous activities without taking the necessary precautions etc.

VIII. Taking Action!

If you have suffered an act of sexual violence

It is very difficult to cope with an experience of sexual violence without even going to the police, prosecutor, forensic or other institutions. Everything a person who went through such an experience wants is to overcome the trauma as quickly as possible and to continue life under normal conditions.

Very often, victims of sexual violence are blamed that they did not oppose strongly enough, they have not clearly demonstrated their refusal, did not shout, do not react vehemently when they were assaulted. Although these reactions seem difficult to understand, these are normal and justifiable reactions under threat. Studies conducted on human behaviour show very clearly that people can exhibit two types of reactions when faced with a major threat:

1. A common reaction is to "freeze": the person becomes immobile, unable to speak or move, as if in a state of paralysis. For this reason it may not remember later what happened.
2. Reacting through struggle or a reaction alternating between fighting and freezing.

Basic tips:

- ⇒ Go to a place where you feel safe
- ⇒ Go to someone you trust, who can support you emotionally
- ⇒ Do not be scared if you relive the sexual assault, you experienced a strong shock
- ⇒ Do not let anyone force you to talk about what happened, speak when you feel safe and to people you trust
- ⇒ Talk with a psychologist and/or a lawyer
- ⇒ Request medical examination - for forensic proofs and medical care, detection and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases and emergency contraception

If you decide to file a criminal complaint:

- ⇒ Do not wash until after the forensic examination! Important evidence remains on the body and clothes. Do not eat, drink, smoke, postpone to shower, go to the bathroom after medical emergency control. Do not change your clothes before going through the necessary procedures, change yourself only after the medical examination.

- ⇒ If you think a drug was put into your drink, keep a urine sample and take it with you to the hospital.
- ⇒ Write down as many details about the attack as you can remember, where it happened, what you remember about the aggressor; in the report to the police you need detailed information that you may not remember right away when you are asked.
- ⇒ Report the assault to the police. You have the right to ask a psychologist be present during the police interview.
- ⇒ Proving the assault requires a medical certificate issued by the Institute of Forensic Medicine and / or witnesses

When you act in violent situation:

- ⇒ General rule: avoid escalation of the dangerous situation as you can
- ⇒ Do not physically confront another person unless you try to avoid being attacked. In a tensed situation, any physical contact can be interpreted as a challenge and can lead to violent reactions
- ⇒ The use of weapons, knives is not recommended because they can easily come into the aggressor's possession; wrongly used pepper sprays can be used against you and leave you defenceless.

- ⇒ A way to intimidate, scare an attacker or to attract the attention of people nearby is for you to make noise, whistle, ring an alarm
- ⇒ Step by step, think about what might happen if you are afraid and reflect on how you would react and respond. Everybody reacts differently. This way you'll find your personal reaction.
- ⇒ There are several ways for self-defence, it is important to find one that fits you and has the highest efficiency in case of danger.
- ⇒ No woman should wear weapons that can be used against her. But women should have certain items that, if used quickly may be useful.

IX. Discourage Abuse and Offer Help!

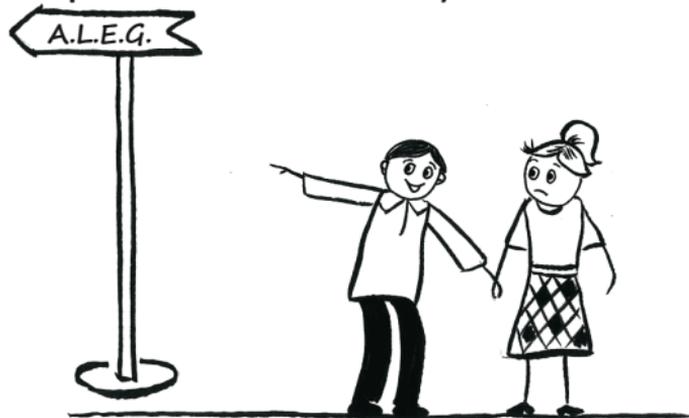
Sexual Violence Affects Everyone!

In preparing this brochure A.L.E.G. conducted a survey among youth to see what they think are the best strategies to prevent sexual violence. Here are the suggested ways to discourage abuse:

1. **In my circle of friends I react against obscene and humiliating jokes about girls. I don't think it's ok to become popular through such jokes.**



2. I help someone I know who tells me that someone is taking advantage of her (I tell her she doesn't have to accept and advise where to call).



3. I respect a NO in reply to my sexual invitations. I make sure that every step I make towards any sexual activity is a step that we both want!



Because sexual violence is based on the aggressor's desire of power and control, and most victims are women, sexual violence prevention needs to be linked directly with combating stereotypes about women and men, including media representations. In the media often women appear oversexualized, transformed into decorative objects or objects of pleasure for men. Refusing to buy newspapers or products that display sexualized images of women in advertisements contributes to the fight against sexual violence.

At the same time, we must understand that violence prevention is not just about girls and how well-behaved they are. Some girls have been raped in the daylight and many by a family member. Sexual violence exists because of those who perpetrate it, so if we teach our daughters about safety, we need to teach all boys about consent!

When we see girls assaulted on the street or friends who insult their girlfriends and treat them as objects, we should not pretend it is none of our business. It is the duty of every responsible young man to be aware of this reality of male sexual violence in our society and try to transform it. We need to become more sensitive to the needs and problems of others. To have courage and be the first that intervene when there is a sexual assault. To have the courage to say no to sexist jokes, to discourage whistling/horning at women on the street even when you are with a group of male friends.

Intervention and support methods for people affected by sexual violence

Although each person reacts differently when exposed to sexual assault, there are a number of „signs“ by which one can recognize a person who has gone through such a trauma (see Section VII. The effects of sexual assault). If you notice these symptoms, don't be indifferent! Talk to the person and try to help, talk about how he/she feels about what happened. If they refuse to talk, do not pressure! Tell them that you are available to listen anytime they want to talk and that you are ready to help whenever.

There are a number of essential elements that must be included in the attempt to support a person being subjected to sexual violence, such as:

- **Listening:** It is very important that the person who has suffered a sexual assault talks to someone she/he trusts about what happened. It can be a parent, close relative, friend, colleague, teacher, doctor, priest etc. Talking about what happened requires courage and it is the first step towards overcoming trauma. It is essential to give the feeling that she/he is taken seriously, believed, not judged or blamed, but listened to carefully. It help to let them know that they are not alone and there are people who can help.

- **Referral/accompaniment to healthcare services:** It is important that the assaulted person goes to a medical unit (hospital, emergency medical service, GP etc.) to receive proper medical care. The doctor treats the injuries, tests to

determine whether a sexually transmitted infection or HIV was contacted, and can prescribe emergency contraception. Doctors have the obligation to notify the police when they learn about a sexual offence committed. The police should come to the hospital to take a statement if the victim decides to press charges and she remains hospitalized. It is important to ask for medical documents as proof including the results of investigations. These documents can be useful in case of criminal proceedings and beyond.

- **Information about the importance of evidence:** to obtain a medical certificate attesting the aggression, the person should contact the Forensic Service. In most situations, this certificate is issued based on payment of a fee. The certificate can be an important piece of evidence in a subsequent criminal trial. Even if the assaulted person is not sure he/she wants to press criminal charges, it is important to know that, for the collection of biological samples and to obtain evidence of the aggression suffered, the survivor should be seen by the forensic services as soon as possible after the aggression. It is important not to discard of the clothes worn or any other items that may constitute evidence (a torn bag, a broken phone, etc.), not to wash prior to the forensic consultation, because such biological samples would be lost.

- **Information about the criminal complaint:** according to the Criminal Code, criminal proceedings for crimes against sexual freedom and integrity shall be initiated upon the complaint by the victim and not by default. To

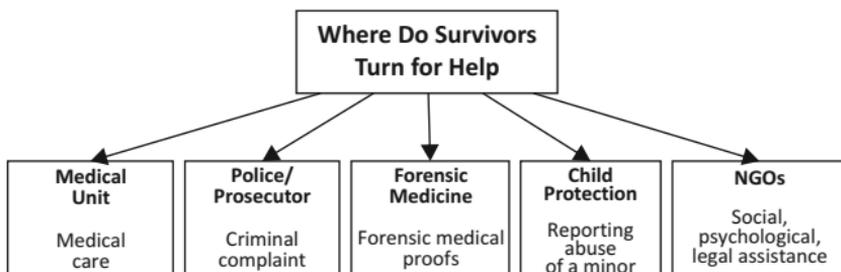
formulate the criminal complaint the person should contact the nearest police station or prosecutor. There the victim will give statements about the incident, information as detailed as possible to enable a clear picture of the incident and to help identify and catch the perpetrator. The police can give information about further steps. It is important to become aware that any act of sexual violence not followed by lodging a criminal complaint increases the risk that the perpetrator will attack again or make new victims. However, the decision whether to press charges is entirely up to the survivor.

● **Information about support services:** it is important for the survivor to learn about organizations that provide specialized services for people who experienced sexual assault (psychological, social, legal services, etc.). It help to offer a list of such organizations, information materials, brochures etc. Some organizations, such as A.L.E.G., offers specialized counselling and support groups for people who have experienced sexual violence. Explain that in order to overcome the trauma and to continue with life in the best possible conditions, it is essential to benefit from specialized psychological counselling. The psychologist/ psychotherapist is the one who can help the survivor regain trust in people, better understand their emotional reactions and behaviour, find the resources to overcome fear, regain strength and confidence, control the negative effects of the aggression, learn about prevention of further abuse. It can help transform the dramatic experience of trauma and shame into a source of personal development.

At any stage during intervention, the survivor has the right to be treated in a respectfully and dignified manner. Improper questions and comments are hurtful and should be at all costs avoided.

The chart below shows the most common alternative actions to be taken by a person that has been subjected to any forms of sexual violence:

Circuit of a victim in legal-administrative system



X. Useful Contacts

SIBIU, ROMANIA

- **Association for Liberty and Equality of Gender - A.L.E.G**
Sibiu, tel. 0369 801808,
0753 893531
ONLINE COUNSELING
www.aleg-romania.eu



OFFLINE – Lăsați un mesaj!

TÂRGU MUREȘ, ROMANIA

- **Eastern-European Institute for Reproductive Health – The center for prevention, monitoring and combating of family violence, tel: 0265 211699, 0265 213512**

Electronic Map of Services Available in Romania in the area of domestic violence:

<http://www.fundatiasensiblu.ro/harta-serviciilor-pentru-victimele-violentei-domestice/>

The content of this material cannot be interpreted as representing in any way the official position of the EEA Grants 2009-2014. The authors of the brochure are entirely responsible for the accuracy of the information presented. For official information regarding the EEA Grants please see www.eeagrants.org. This project is implemented with financial support from the NGO Fund in Romania, Program financed by EEA Grants and managed by Civil Society Development Foundation.



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