



# Focus Group - Students

## Contents

Introduction .....	2
A. Main Concerns .....	2
B. Innovative Ideas .....	3
Primary Prevention – CULTURE – EDUCATION – CAMPAIGNS.....	4
A. Sexual violence and Harassment (SVH) on Campus .....	4
i. Definition of SVH.....	4
ii. Consent .....	7
iii. Who is affected by SVH.....	7
iv. Bystander .....	9
v. Cases of SVH .....	12
B. Awareness of available programmes and campaigns targeting SVH on campus .....	13
i. Examples .....	13
ii. Suggestions on context of awareness raising campaigns and/or programmes.....	14
C. Awareness and understanding of the legal context of SVH .....	15
i. National Legislation: .....	15
Secondary Prevention – RESPONSES – INTERVENTIONS – SUPPORT SERVICES.....	16
A. Procedures in place.....	16
i. Examples .....	16
ii. Suggestions .....	16
B. Reporting and disclosures.....	18

## Introduction

**COUNTRY:** Cyprus

**PARTNER ORGANISATION:** Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies

**DATE:** 28/02/2018

**INSTITUTION:** University of Nicosia

**ATTENDANCE<sup>1</sup> (NUMBERS):** 12 (1<sup>st</sup> focus group: 3 female students & 3 male students, 2<sup>nd</sup> focus group: 6 male students)

**Students Profile: Origin:** From European countries (Russian, Greek), African countries (South Africa) & Middle East Countries (Saudi Arabia, Syria). **Ages:** 18-35

This report summarizes focus group findings conducted as part of the 'Ending Sexual Harassment and Violence in Third Level education (ESHTE)'. Findings are based on two focus groups that were conducted with university students during a 3 month period in 2017 and 2018. The focus groups explored student's experiences with procedures for reporting sexual violence and harassment (SVH) cases on campus as well as any awareness raising campaigns and workshops that took place on campus. Their personal experiences, opinions on the culture around SVH as well as any suggestions they have towards better practices were incorporated throughout the report.

### A. Main Concerns

The main concerns observed from the focus groups was the general lack of awareness around SVH and what it consists of as well the strong culture of victim-blaming towards female students. More specifically,

- **There are no awareness raising initiatives on SVH.** Most students are unable to recognise all forms of SVH, both as a perpetrator and/or as a victim. That is why a culture of victim-blaming has been steadily growing. Moreover, none of the students were aware of any procedures in place for handling SVH instance or support services available to seek help.
- **No clear understanding of consent.** I.e. they did not know that consent is not permanent and can change with every different sexual activity.
- **No clear understanding of all SVH forms.** The main focus when discussing SVH was on sexual abuse and mainly rape. Sexual harassment was not taken seriously among the students, especially the male students.
- **No clear understanding of how they could intervene as bystanders.** The students are unaware of the different ways they could intervene indirectly without having to use force or confront the perpetrator. This was one of the main reason many are hesitant to intervene, out of fear that they would be injured.

---

<sup>1</sup> Please keep attendance lists as a permanent project document

- **There is a clear victim-blaming rhetoric and a prevailing culture of gender-based discrimination.** The majority of the male students strongly believed that some women provoke their perpetrators with their clothing, behaviour and so forth.

## **B. Innovative Ideas**

The focus group has not shown that we are at a stage where we can offer any innovative ideas but a minimum standard of code of conduct in relation to handling SVH disclosures as well as raising awareness ideas. As it will be discussed later on, students are unaware of any procedures in place where they could seek help and support as well. They are also not aware of the root cause of SVH and how one should address it.

## Primary Prevention – CULTURE – EDUCATION – CAMPAIGNS

### A. Sexual violence and Harassment (SVH) on Campus

#### i. Definition of SVH

The majority of the participants had a general understanding of the physical aspect of SVH, but there was a tendency to overlook or even discredit the verbal and especially non-verbal aspect of it. Some participants stated that SVH,

*“Is when person harasses another, girl/boy in a way or a manner that they don’t give **consent** for. It is very easy but it happens a lot, because people either they are intoxicated or they are just sober but mentally not stable or maybe they are just obsessing or stalking their victim, it could be a lot of things.” (Female student)*

*“Flirting for instance, some people might take that as a sexual harassment and others might find it normal, so I think it depends on how the person perceives it, it depends on the **level of consent** as well as where they come from culturally. [...]It depends on the mentality so it depends on how emotional is the mentality of the local people. So for some people certain manners, gestures certain words and phrases are a sign of showing affection a sign of highlighting the aesthetic beauty of a women. While in other cultures it can be absolutely unacceptable and something that will not be tolerated. So is very much a global thing, but at the same time in certain areas is more concentrated.” (Female student)*

These two statements show that even though there is somewhat an understanding of what consent is, there seems to be a tendency of “excusing” such behaviour under the pretext of some sort of enabling factors that perpetrators act upon. Such as drunkenness, mental illness or even cultural differences between the victim and the perpetrator. There is no much attention drawn to the systemic misogyny that objectifies women enabling such behaviours from **any man** towards **any woman**. Even though one of the female students did mention how “gender equality and the greater respect between the two genders” can solve such a culture of violence, again the discussion was shifted towards cultural differences and how some gestures might be perceived as SH depending on the country one is living in. The example was provided was that of shaking hands, which is not seen as an acceptable gesture in Middle East countries but it’s a very common gesture in Europe, especially in professional environments.

Continuing some of the male students from the first focus group stated that,

*“For me, sexual harassment is something which is correlated to illness. Of course, flirting is something important between the two genders, but sexual harassment is an illness I believe. Someone with this habit must visit a doctor or a specialist.” (Male student)*

*“For me SH is when the two people are not conceding to have a form of intimacy. When someone forcefully takes advantage of the other person because she might be vulnerable. From what I see or what I’ve heard, the ladies are more affected by SH. You hear things like rape. SH can be of different form publicly or indoors.” (Male student)*

Here we can see two completely different views on SH and consent altogether. There is again the tendency to attribute the blame on mental illness, and not to the social norms that normalise such behaviour, as well as only recognising the physical aspect of SVH. Even so, there seemed to be a subtle understanding of the power dynamics between the perpetrator and victim, as well as who is mainly affected by SVH.

The second focus group had very conflicting opinions on what SHV is as well as where the blame is assigned to. One of the participants stated that,

*“I will take it from an academic angle since I’ve done many reports on it. I would like to lay the foundation that SH doesn’t happen when there is consent from both sides. SH is all about an unwelcome action. The moment the person that is in question feels discomfort about it it’s when that becomes SH. By the way, ladies are not the only recipients of SH, sometimes the ladies are the perpetrators. **Male Student 2: But they are majorly affected.** Yes, they are majorly affected, but you do have to state that 30%, for example are men. Also, you sometimes say that **women are the victims but there are cases where women encourage it.** For example, I was at a friend’s house and he was wearing only a boxer and then the female roommate asked him to change because she felt uncomfortable. Now, if that can affect a lady, imagine now when ladies dress like this sometime and you find yourself in that some sort of situation, what happens then? **Visually they are harassing our (men) sexuality.** Sending unwanted text-messages, sharing sexually informed videos. Making sexual comments or derogatory comments. [...]Also I would like to mention **there are some catalysts that instigate some things to happen.** Imagine a lady wearing an open shirt, revealing her cleavage like that. All I say is modesty it’s best. [...]That person is actually harassing whomever is around her.” (Male student)*

This was a controversial topic during the discussion.

This opinion did not sit well with the other students. Some answered by saying that,

*“I personally think it has more to do with the person itself than the recipient. For example, you mentioned that ladies wear revealing clothes. If you want to look at a lady in a sexual way then you are bound to be sexually aroused, even if she wasn’t. It’s not her fault she is wearing clothes that you think are “sexually arousing” or revealing. Is the same thing with women breastfeeding in public, if you want to look at that sexually then a pervert will think that that is offensive but technically speaking it’s just a lady breastfeeding her baby. So I wouldn’t really blame people of what they wear or choose to wear and not wear. It has more to do with your own mind.” (Male student)*

*“No, I don’t think that’s the case. We are living in a free world. You are entitle to wear whatever you want. The way I dress shouldn’t arouse you, shouldn’t bring about or be a catalyst for SH. I think it has to do with the state of mind. For instance, when I look at you, I choose not to think about you in a sexual way. I choose to look past you. It depends on the way you think and the way you think of sexuality. There are many guys out there obsessed with it. In campus there are many guys that want to have a piece of every girl, when the girls are not consenting to that, that brings on SH as they try everything in their power to go out*

*with that girls. SH has to do with the person involved not the person at the end of the message. I can dress in any way that I want and a girl can too. It's not about what he or she is wearing, if you aren't feeling comfortable you walk away."* (Male student)

Even though the discussion was gender neutral the participants seem to understand that the perpetrator is the only one at fault and not the victim. Therefore, up to a certain extent the participants do realise that men feel some sort of entitlement that allows them to act as they please towards women. The second comment also touches the issue of "toxic masculinity" and how some men feel the need to go out with as many women in order to somewhat prove that they are fulfilling their role as "real men".

Continuing, another student tried to defend the initial statement by saying,

*"But you know the possibility when you are wearing a revealing dress is high to draw attention. I don't look at any person, but it is possible that when I see a woman wearing something more revealing that I might stare. I think it should be like this. The problem is that I am from a country that everything it's under codes, in my country every girls has her own hijab or burka. I know it's not right but I believe there should be some codes on what you wear and how you act in public. Because of the possible outcomes.[...] In a man's view, is in their nature to have visual attraction. On a biological/nature perspective different things happen to men and women. Maybe it sends a code that I'm different from the other people (animal kingdom example of male attracting female) but sometimes some people are perverted they see codes in everything. I'm talking about the possibility that maybe a person is good but will react in a bad way."* (Male student)

Again, the responsibility and burden is put on women who need to act and dress "accordingly" so they won't draw unwanted "attention" to them. On the other hand, educating men on how to respect women and not treat them as sexual objects is not considered a preventative and a viable strategy as men normalize such behaviour and attitudes.

Continuing, this myth was debunked by the following participant who stated that,

*"I will give an example, I come from S. Africa where we have a tribe called Zulus. The Zulu women won't wear bras, or shirt and they stay bare breasted. You don't see any men saying "oh my God", for them, the society has been structured to not perceive breast only for sexual satisfaction. If you perceive it that way then that would be outside the norm. This example shows that SH and sexualisation of something has to do with thoughts and attitudes. If you choose to see what a woman is wearing, or more importantly to perceive a woman as a tool of sexual satisfaction then no matter what she wears it's going to be a problem. So if you try to justify harassment on the basis of what she wears then we don't know where it ends."* (Male student)

This was a plausible example which showed how SH is an end result of normalising women's sexual objectification.

## ii. Consent

Later on, it was only natural that the issue of consent was brought up. This led to an interesting exchange of views. Initially, a student stated that,

*“Sometimes in African countries when she says no she might mean yes. The African culture is more of an eye contact culture and body language to communicate things. So people are “listening” more to your body language unlike in the Western countries where no means no. So we read more into body-language rather than actual verbal communication.”* (Male student)

To this another student replied that,

*“My concern now is towards the last statement that no means yes and yes may mean no and we focus only on the body language. Where exactly do we draw the line? Because if we are now determining consent on the basis of body language that is very dangerous. No she said no but her body language was saying yes so I had to do what I had to do.”* (Male student)

Continuing another participant stated that,

*“I think it has more to do with body language. Open body language but then unclear body language and then when there is unclear communication but then the body language is off the charts then something is bound to happen. Whether it’s welcomed or not welcomed depends on the two people sharing that body language.”* (Male student)

Such belief it’s also quite dangerous, since it bases consent on subjectivity and how each individual understands “positive” body language. Communication and consent should not be based on an assumption, but should be clear during the entire interaction.

Overall, it is interesting to note that gender played a decisive role in the dynamics of the group and the way the conversation unfolded. During the first focus group where female students were also present, the conversation seemed more balanced, with less vulgar examples and less gender-biased opinions. Even though, none of the participants blamed women for SVH the conversation still lacked the gender-dimension, in the sense that students were not always aware of why SVH happens it. On the other hand, the second focus group discussion was quite controversial and with opposing and confusing views. The conversation started well, with some general comments on consent and how discomfort is a sign of SVH but it abruptly took a different turn. Many of the participants used victim-blaming rhetoric to excuse perpetrators and their actions. In some instances they even tried to prove that the perpetrator is actually the victim in some cases. There were a couple of students that seemed to recognise how women’s sexual objectification is the root cause of SVH and that the victim should never be blamed.

## iii. Who is affected by SVH

There was a general consensus that women are disproportionately affected by SVH. Some participants were also quite aware of how gender inequality and sexism might be linked to SVH.



Answering this question, one participants stated that,

*“I believe the majority are women. No matter how much we deny it, it happens to women more. Men are harassed too of course, but women are usually looked at, based on the way they dress and behave. It does not matter though, we can do what we want, but there is so much sexism in the society that women are looked down upon. If a woman wears something very short, she is considered a slut, and that a guy can take advantage of her, because she was dressed like that. So what if I was dressed like that? It does not matter, it is not an open invitation.”* (Female student)

*“Even if it comes to education and being more open-minded and understanding that there is gender equality and you need to respect each other etc. it is not a fact, but it happens daily. You do not need to log on the internet and search for statistics to see that the gender “woman” is going through more difficult time than men. It is very sad.”* (Female student)

Despite that, when further asked if they perceive SHV as a result of gender inequality, the opinions were divided.

One participant stated that,

*“I think they are sort of related. For example a hierarchy at a work place, where the man is leading, and then he has the authority to talk to his female employees and probably sexually abused them, just because he is at a higher level. I think that if a woman was leading, it would be a better scenario for the woman employees within the company.”* (Female student)

Another one added that,

*“One of the things that gender equality says is that you have to respect the person of another gender. When you do the sexual harassment, you disrespect the other gender. Gender inequality also includes that you are not allowed to get into the personal space of someone if he does not allow you to (a person of the opposite gender).”* (Male student)

While the next student, even though she seems conscious of the gender-based discrimination women face, there was still some sort of reluctance in stating that women are indeed affected more. She stated that,

*“It is in human nature to be sometimes violent and aggressive and it does not matter if you are man or woman. It all depends on how you were raised and what morals you have. But when a woman attacks a man, one group of individuals will say, “See, men are also victims. You women should not say you are the only victims here in this world”. Another group of people are not even going to react to the situation or look into it. It would be something normal of a woman to attack a man, for different reasons- self-defence or an actual attack for no reason at all. Yet, it would not be looked into, because of the gender.”* (Female student)

She then continued by saying that,

*“I think gender equality is really important, but I do not think that gender equality and sexual harassment are related. I think this, because gender equality has other factors, such as woman and men doing the same jobs, but getting different salaries, and this has nothing to do with sexual harassment. [...] I would like to add a factor as to why I said I did not see the link between the two. Gender equality is affecting both genders. Under sexual harassment, what about LGBT members? When a woman harasses a woman, or if a man harasses a man? This will no longer be gender inequality, but just sexual harassment. Here you will not be able to point out “If it was a man harassing a woman or vice versa”. You can no longer assume your gender. But at the same time to the same genders it is not gender inequality, but sexual harassment. This is when the difference comes in- when we take into account other members of our society.” (Female student)*

Even though the participant understands how gender inequality affects women and men, since such stereotypes are a direct result of patriarchy, she does not seem to make the link between SVH and gender inequality. Although she understands how gender pay gap is an end result of gender inequality she does not realise how this power-relation is paving the way for sexual harassment and violence. Since this is another example where women are being undervalued for their work and which creates a power imbalance between men and women. As a result there have been several instances where women were sexually harassed or abused at the workplace by their superiors as well as their fellow co-workers, as a way to assert that power on them<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, she brings LGBTQ community and same-sex cases of SVH as an argument to prove that gender is not part of the equation.

Continuing, in the second focus group the opinions regarding gender equality were quite different. Some agreed that gender inequality is definitely related to SVH, since women are undermined and not respected while some disagreed. More specifically, one student even expressed his concern about making that connection because,

*“SH should be dealt for both genders but when you discuss gender equality you talk about women so it dilutes that as it is another topic on its own. Therefore, SH should be a topic on its own and balanced even if women are the ones that are more harassed.” (Male student)*

Generally, throughout the discussion there was a tendency of trying to be politically correct and therefore disregard the fact that SVH is gendered. Also, some participants seem to be confused and unaware on how the current power dynamics of men and women is linked to the cases of SVH or how stereotypes can influence such behaviours.

#### iv. Bystander

The role of a (active) bystander raised many questions among the participants. In the first focus group the majority of the students were quite reluctant to intervene as bystanders, as most of them were concerned of any possible retaliation they might face from the perpetrator. Specifically, it was stated that,

---

<sup>2</sup> *Sexual Harassment as a Gendered Expression of Power*. (2012). C. Uggen & A. Blackstone. University of Minnesota. Print. (URL: [http://users.clu.umn.edu/~uggen/Uggen\\_Blackstone\\_ASR\\_04.pdf](http://users.clu.umn.edu/~uggen/Uggen_Blackstone_ASR_04.pdf))

*“I personally do not tolerate this. Sometimes bystanders can be accused of not doing anything in the face of danger. Sometimes it is the fear of the unknown. If I try to intervene, what happens if I get stabbed?” (Male Student)*

*“You cannot force a person, because you are putting his/her security under danger. It might not be immediate danger, but in the long term, the person will notice that if I he/she interferes, they will become the victim too. But then again, someone will remember the person as taking part of that. It will come back and bite you in the back in the future. For example, if the situation I brought up with the harasser approaching the girls<sup>3</sup>, this has happened in the middle of a very large crowd, where many people witnessed it. Some might have understood what was happening, but others did not. Yet no one was approaching them, because it was a **very private kind of situation**, even if you could see discomfort all over the girl’s face.” (Female Student)*

In the second statement the participant also notices that there’s no sense of a shared community responsibility, which is why people tend to not interfere in situations.

Continuing, the next participant was very outspoken about being an active bystander,

*“Honestly, if I were in a situation like this, I would definitely help. If it were a girl and a boy would pull the girl away. I know it is a huge risk, but maybe the girl could get hurt. I could not just look at it, I would call security or the cops. I would not just stand and look. I think people should be more aware that way. You cannot stand and look and let someone get crushed. It is not fair. If you are watching it and you are there, you should do something about it. It is not possible otherwise. [...] It is the funniest thing when the bystander is the police. [...] People do not do anything. They are afraid. I see full grown men in the room, while a woman is getting abused with another man and she is his wife. And nobody does anything to help. What are people doing with their lives?” (Female student)*

Another issue brought up was the legal repercussions one can have if she/he intervenes. Specifically, one of the participants argued that one should not directly intervene but instead she/he must testify of what she/he has witnessed. That way, “[...] you have protected yourself and justice was served. However, if you try to intervene you might get accused by the victim and might end up going to jail.”(Male student).

The last statement shifted the discussion into assessing when should one intervene in such cases and it was concluded that it should be when the SVH incident is deemed to be extreme. As one participant stated,

*“I would only interfere if it is extreme. If it was just something minimal, I would not care. If there is physical damage, I consider it extreme. Extreme is usually physical. When a person becomes physical, it means that he consciously understands what he is doing, but he loses the control over his own body and only follows his instincts. This is the real issue.” (Female student)*

---

<sup>3</sup> See “Cases of SVH” (page 9-10)

On the other hand, the second group had a very different viewpoint on this matter altogether as there was a general agreement that one should intervene. What was interesting though was the reasoning for doing so. More specifically,

*“There is an instinct in every man when you see a lady in trouble to want to protect the lady from such a harassment. It doesn’t even have to be something extreme like rape, but if a guy is bothering a lady and the lady seems troubled then you might want to help.”* (Male student)

Another stated that,

*“If I see a guy harassing a girl I will intervene, if I see that the girl can take care of herself I will let her take care of it herself. But I think more girls should learn to take care of it themselves. Because this instinct that drives us, men, to protect these women is the same instinct that drives those douchebags to harass the women. You are not more superior to the women, you are equal. I think that girls should say “leave me alone”. If she looks him in the eye and say “stop” he’s going to stop.”* (Male student)

The first participant’s statement, although it might seem well-intentioned it is framed in a very stereotypical way. The participant sees this act of helping as a chivalrous thing, as a man’s duty to protect a “damsel” in distress, emphasizing the “weaker sex” stereotype. Even though the second participant seems to disagree with this notion of the “weaker sex” he seems to be oblivious of the power dynamics that exist in SVH and gender-based violence. He also seems unaware of the dangers the victim might face if she retaliates and provokes the perpetrator. This issue was addressed in the first group by the female students who explained how difficult it is to decide how to act in such situations. Specifically,

*“For instance you are of a certain age and a man of a much greater built and age approaches you, and here you have contradictions, should I be diplomatic, should I be respectful because of his age? If he is bigger than you he is going to choke you and then he will do what he has to, without you being able to do anything to defend yourself.”* (Female student)

*“Imagine you walk home alone at night at like 3 o’clock, a drunken guy shows up, and he wants to pound you. What do you do? There is no way to run.”* (Female student)

These statements depict the different ways male and female student understand SVH.

In conclusion, the general sentiment around bystanders is that students do not usually intervene out of fear. Fear of getting harmed, of possibly becoming a target as well, for being falsely accused and so forth. Even so, the majority of the participants did argue that one should interfere in “extreme situations”, when it becomes physical. Additionally, there was a clear misconception about how a bystander can intervene without necessarily needing to directly confront the perpetrator. For instance, seeking for help (police officer, or campus official) or indirectly interrupting the situation<sup>4</sup>. All the above mentioned issues need to be addressed and explained to the students.

---

<sup>4</sup> The 3 Ds of active bystander intervention (Direct, Distract, Delegate)

v. Cases of SVH

When discussing cases of SVH that the students have heard of or witnessed there were very few examples provided, and the majority were given by the female students.

For example, one of the participants stated that,

*"[...] Maybe because a lack of certain security as well as certain specific protection of the university campus, different individuals might enter the place. This has happened. A group of girls were approached by an unknown, older individual and was very insistent in asking where these girls came from. He was specially focused on some of the girls coming from Eastern Europe. He asked whether these girls are single or not. Even when he was ignored the man continued to insist. After this incident one of these girls wanted to leave the university because she was terrified because the man showed signs that was going to stalk them. This was a very panicking situation."* (Female student)

Next, another participant stated that SVH are not so widespread anymore because people are getting more and more educated nowadays. This statement was confronted by another participant who stated that,

*"I do not think that education matters in sexual harassment. I knew a lot of people who were educated- friends- who got harassed by colleagues who were educated too. It is about how you are thinking rather than how much education you have. However, it is more common in an uneducated background. But not that much different from the more educated. Lust comes from within, not from how much you know. Besides, people these days are more open. They want to do things. It is not like 50 years back, when a man decided over women. Now it is different, which is good. However, things still do get messed up."* (Female student)

Finally, the last case provided was about a female student who had falsely accused a male student of sexually assaulting. In the end the student admitted that she had consented and she had falsely accused him out of anger for cheating on her. What was interesting about this case was that after this incident took place, a group of male students decided to form a lobby and demanded that the university introduce sexual consent forms. According to the participant the consent form was to be handed to the girl to sign so that there would be "evidence" she had consented. Ironically, that was when, *"SH was mentioned for the first time on campus."*(Male student) This last example strongly shows student's misconception of what consent is since is not permanent and should be given every time and with each new activity.

## B. Awareness of available programmes and campaigns targeting SVH on campus

### i. Examples

The participants were unable to give any examples of programmes/workshops or campaigns addressing SVH. Even so, they were all very keen on the idea of having more awareness raising campaigns and workshops on SVH.

One of the students attributed the lack of campaigns/workshops addressing SVH on cultural differences that exist from one country to another. More specifically she stated that,

*“It is because in another nation there has been a huge issue and people have been seriously offended by even a minor thing. Us, we live in a different kind of mentality and social system, where certain things happen as a norm. Yes, the world has become more liberal, professional and educated and has understood that we need to respect one another. But then issues, such as feminism, which sexual harassment is linked to most of the times, might get annoying for some people, and they might think “How many conferences can you have?” People might not even acknowledge that certain things that happen on a daily basis against feminism or against gender equality, because for them it’s a norm. It would not even work nor be effective.”* (Female Student)

Another participant added that,

*“I believe that awareness always helps to counter the problem to a certain extent. So if we have something like this, just to gather awareness among us, I believe it would help. I mean, it will obviously not cure the problem, but if an idea is put in somebody’s head that “this is wrong”, they will keep it in the back of their heads. However, if a person is messed up in their head, he will do what he will do no matter what you tell him or teach him. In the end, education is always the most efficient tool.”* (Female Student)

Indeed, such behaviours are normalised and misogynistic mentalities are enabled exactly because there is a lack of awareness and knowledge around SVH. Therefore, there is a need of awareness raising campaigns, workshops and conferences in order to change this - debunk myths, raise awareness of what consent is, and shift this existing victim-blaming culture.

Continuing, another participants also stated that,

*“When we were in high school we had sex education. I believe that awareness always helps to counter the problem to a certain extent. So if we have something like this, just to gather awareness among us, I believe it would help. I mean, it will obviously not solve the problem, but if an idea is put in somebody’s head that “this is wrong”, they will keep it in the back of their heads.”* (Female Student)

ii. Suggestions on context of awareness raising campaigns and/or programmes

There were several suggestions when discussing the context of any campaigns and/or programmes. One example was raising awareness on how to identify SVH as it was stated it would help students to report such cases as well as be active bystanders when witnessing such incidents.

In the first group, when discussing the context of such initiatives it was suggested that apart from defining SVH, a wave of solidarity as seen through the #metoo campaign needs to be created as well. More specifically,

*“About the awareness campaign, I was thinking that since the college does not have anything, we could get onto the #metoo hype and have a wall in college, where somebody could volunteer to sit on the table and offer paper and notes, where people could write their experiences and just stick it on the wall. I do not know if any of you would contribute, but I would definitely write something, because I am sure others have experienced it, and I want to share my story with others.”* (Female student)

Continuing, the discussion with the second group was again focused on how SVH instances “enabled” by the victim and therefore the university should,

*“Raise awareness of the enabling of SH. Social awareness to avoid unwanted attraction to yourself. Identify what enables SH.”* (Male student)

In other words, the victim is responsible of whatever happens to her and therefore she should know how to avoid it.

When discussing the perpetrator and how the university should deal with them, there was a small disagreement between the participants. The majority believed that they should be made aware of the consequences their actions will have,

*“Whether they are drunk or not they should know there are consequences to their actions. Then they will think about it twice before acting on their thoughts.”* (Male student)

Another participant disagreed with that because,

*“I don’t like the idea of consequences. Let’s go to the root problem. Me as a man why would I start fantasising for a woman in front of me. Why would I harass her without knowing nothing about her? That’s not normal. That’s time being wasted. That’s someone that can’t read a book and fills his time doing nothing.”* (Male student)

When the participants was then probed to another solution, his response was that the woman should deal with the perpetrator herself, for example she should slap him.

Even so this statement draws attention to the need of having awareness raising workshops on gender stereotypes that would make them aware of such realities – how women are sexualised, how sexual harassment is normalised and so forth.

Continuing, this statement shifted the discussion on why there should be consequences on perpetrators.

One of the participants gave the following example,

*“Let’s say they are in a cafeteria and the guy makes a rude comment. In most case perpetrators and SH offenders are very powerful so slapping that person in the face doesn’t necessarily have the desired effect. When it comes to consequences we have to find tangible solutions on what to do with such kind of persons. Another example of the recent cases of SH with Weinstein, he is being doing this for almost 30 years now, the dude is really rich, very powerful and multiple connections how do you slap that person in the face?”* (Male student)

To this the answer of another participant was,

*“Fair enough, that’s the thing I’ve grown in S. Arabia and the things are different there. There are fewer private places. If you are in a private room with a girl, no matter of how long, that period of and if the girl says that something happened that girl’s words are always true no matter if something happened to her or not and the guy’s head can be chopped off.”* (Male student)

*“There is a big problem, how can a guy show that his actions are not SH. For instance touching in Islamic Countries is SH. Even shaking hands. I had that problem when I arrived here because I avoided shaking hands because in my culture that means showing respect towards women. Having no eye-contact or touching in any subtle way. Now, how a guy can defend himself that what has done is no SH.”* (Male student)

The abovementioned discussion highlights the misconception and misinformation around consent and SVH as well as the dire need to address such gaps. It also draws attention to the different beliefs and stereotypes that students with different cultural background have on certain issues. Therefore, these differences need to be taken into account when trying to inform such a diverse public on such a sensitive issue.

### **C. Awareness and understanding of the legal context of SVH**

#### **i. National Legislation:**

Since the participants were mostly international students, none of them were aware of the current Cyprus legislation on the issue nor any policies and procedures provided by the university.



## Secondary Prevention – RESPONSES – INTERVENTIONS – SUPPORT SERVICES

### A. Procedures in place

#### i. Examples

There was a general lack of knowledge of any procedures or support services in place for handling cases of SVH.

#### ii. Suggestions

There was a general agreement that the protection of the victim's identity and confidentiality should be a high priority when dealing with such cases.

One participant stated that,

*"If it becomes public, no one will go- it is a reverse effect. This is because people will be afraid of judgement, consequences and social opinions about it, because information travels very fast. So it should be private that there is a service or line that can help you, everything should be confidential- very much one on one."* (Female student)

Therefore, one of the participants suggested that to avoid that there should be a helpline which the victim can call anonymously for support as well as any information she/he might need.

What was also noteworthy was the general sentiment of trust participants expressed towards counsellors, and their abilities in supporting victims of SVH.

The main reason as one participant stated is that,

*"Talking to somebody might help, but at the same time this close talk might happen with others from your close environment. If it has to be a counsellor, it has to be a very educated one. But if he works for an organisation and the person actually goes there and spills out his emotions etc. yes it will help him in a psychological level and it will help the person realize what has happened etc. However, the reason why the person might go there is to get a solution. So, if that counsellor is tied to an organisation and this here happens very anonymously, there will always be a document or something that would make sure it stayed anonymous, then yes it would be practical."* (Female student)

Also,

*"Even if right now there will be an assumption that this person will firstly go and tell their friends and their family member, it is going to be completely opposite. The person is going to be afraid to trust the friend. They will want to go to the professional, because they will know that they are going to talk and these words are going to go somewhere and something is going to be done because of these words. I think that is a person goes through sexual harassment either physical or mentally, they are in a state of shock. To ease them out, they*

*need a person to talk to. Maybe their family or closed people could help them, but professional help is always better. Psychologists know what to do, and how to treat them. It might not help 100%, because all people are different and the way they think is different. However, you still have to give it a go. It will make the person ease out and understand that this was not their fault. They were just at the wrong place at the wrong time.” (Female student)*

Another suggestion that was very interesting was the creation of a platform where students can share their experiences under the supervision of a counsellor. Such groups can be online anonymously or group session could be organised at the Centre for Therapy, Training and Research (CS).

As one of the participants stated,

*“I think someplace where people can share their experiences, and inform others what happened to them, for example “I have sexually harassed before and I would like to speak about it, because it was not my fault.” I think that people at some point have been harassed mentally or physically and when they speak about it, it always eases them out and connects them to other people. (Female student)*

Finally, the general suggestions from the second focus group was to have a separate awareness raising session during the orientation’s week that would focus on SVH and also provide students with a code of conduct manual with all the procedures in place as well as support services and also consequences the perpetrators will face.

## B. Reporting and disclosures

The majority of the students, as previously seen, were very keen on involving psychologists in the entire process, both for disclosure and reporting. The main reason is to provide psychological support and a sense of safety for the victim to trust in order for him/her to open up about her/his experience.

According to one of the participants,

*“For example, if a girl is SH by her boyfriend, but she does not want to talk about it because she still likes him etc. psychologists are able to understand this and make her talk in a delicate way. Firstly, the girl must not feel guilty when the boy gets arrested by the police. There are loads of times when women were claiming that they were the guilty ones and even though they were the victims, they did not admit it.”* (Male student)

Interestingly, indirectly this argument comes to show that when a victim is given psychological support she might feel empowered and safe enough to testify or give a declaration to the police.

Continuing, the student also added that psychologists can also help with the victim’s recovery,

*“When the psychologist gets into the problem, she/he understands how she/he is supposed to help the victim who was harassed to find something else to do, an activity for example that would help her to recover from the trauma.”* (Male students)

Finally, another suggestion was that the university could approach grassroots NGOs that deal with such issues to send some of their officers on campus. That way they could help raise awareness on the issue as well as provide services,

*“If for example the university could cooperate with an NGO, where which is specialised in handling such cases, and could assign specific people being here on ground to observe the situation or have a specific office where you might go to or an office nearby. If somebody goes straight to the police station they won’t be helped, I know a lot of cases with the same situation. Young girls in Cyprus are not protected, I’ve heard many stories of girls being raped and the police didn’t do anything. So even though she was brave enough to report it nothing happened. That’s why I believe having a mediator, an NGO for example, observing the area, finding specific people that might need and then referring them to the police is best. Because people are present at this university and we trust this university. By being here every day, they create a connection to the place. So, if there is going to be someone sitting here, it provides a sense of security, knowing that someone can help you on campus.”* (Female student)

Later on, when participants were asked if the existing services offered by the university are sufficient and whether they would feel safe enough to report SVH incidents they all said no. The main reason was that they felt not enough effort was put by the university in making such services visible and accessible to the students. Since none of them were aware of what the standing procedures are when handling such cases or who to talk to.

One of the participants raised an issue when discussing the accessibility of such services,

*“I think if we to make the process of reporting SH easier and do it at the Student affairs then the system will be more prone to abuse. Let’s remember that SH covers a wide range of things from text messages to verbal abuse. If we could make the process very easy then every day we will have reports of SH.”* (Male student)

He then clarified that,

*“From a legal perspective there are criteria of what SH and this includes text messages (e.g. There was a case where an employer was describing in a text- messages how his penis looked like), verbal remarks. But then every day the Vice- President office for administration will deal with text-messages and verbal remarks so the standard should be increased to tackle at least serious issues.”* (Male student)

This statement was quite ambivalent, especially because it implies that disclosing instances of SVH, of any sort, is done with such ease that there would be numerous cases “abusing” the system. Despite that, the participant does draw attention to the need of having a well-structured framework for handling SVH cases. Services that would allow students to disclose instances of SVH need to be accessible and efficient in the way they are handled and investigated.