



Youth4Youth: Empowering Young People in Preventing Gender-based Violence through Peer Education

Cross-Country Policy Recommendations for Gender Equality Education

Introduction

This policy paper provides a short summary of cross-country research results and relevant recommendations from individual research studies undertaken in five EU member states within the framework of the project 'Youth4Youth: Empowering Young People in Preventing Gender-based Violence through Peer Education'.

The project was funded under the Daphne III Programme of the European Commission, and coordinated by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (Cyprus). This 24-month project was implemented in partnership with Casa Delle Donne per Non Subire Violenza (Italy), the Centre of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities-University of Barcelona (Spain), the European Anti-Violence Network (Greece) and Women's Issues Information Centre (Lithuania).

The main aim of the research was to explore the relationship between gender stereotypes among adolescents and tolerance towards various forms of gender-based violence (GBV).

The research results in all participating countries confirmed that there is a clear link between negative gender stereotypes and tolerance towards gender-based violence among adolescents. Furthermore, it was evident from the research results that boys maintain more conservative attitudes toward gender stereotypes and violence than girls in all countries examined. In terms of types of violence, the cross-country research results indicated that psychological violence in intimate relationships is more tolerated than physical and/or sexual violence, with the former often justified or confused with expressions of love and/or concern for one's partner. Moreover, there was a strong tendency by teenagers across countries to place the responsibility for the violence on the victim, a phenomenon known as 'victim blaming'. Thus, girls were often held responsible for the violence they experience. In addition, there was also a tendency to attribute male violent behaviour towards women to factors unrelated to unequal power relations between women and men and gender inequality such as mental health problems, stress, use of substances such as drugs or alcohol, as well as men's 'natural' tendency for aggressive behaviour.

The final country research reports can be found on the project webpage at <http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/news/youth4youth-empowering-young-people-in-preventing-gender-based-violence-through-peer-education/>.

The recommendations below are based on the research findings in all the participating EU member states. Although specific recommendations for the participating member states can be found in the individual research reports, the recommendations below are those stemming from our cross-country research results that can be of value and relevance across member states and on a European level. The recommendations are directed towards Ministries of Education, education practitioners and teachers in formal and non-formal education and concern gender equality education specifically.

Policy Recommendations for Gender Education:

- (1) Educational curricula in public educational establishments should include comprehensive programmes for children and adolescents of all ages informing them about gender equality and challenging gender stereotypes and attitudes that lead to violence against women.
- (2) Negative gender stereotypes should be eliminated from school curriculums at all levels.
- (3) Teachers and education practitioners engaged in all levels of education should be adequately trained to identify possible victims of GBV and to refer them to the appropriate specialized services.
- (4) Schools should provide services for young people including a variety of community-based activities and information campaigns, and should promote open discussion on gender roles and GBV.
- (5) Clear procedures should be in place within the public education system at all levels, for the handling of GBV cases among youth. Such procedures should be made accessible to students and should guarantee discretion.
- (6) Sexual and reproductive health and rights should be made a part of the mandatory school curriculum at all levels of education.
- (7) Promote non-formal education methodologies, including the peer education methodology, within educational frameworks.

Specific recommendations for education programmes to combat gender based violence (GBV):

- (1) **Promote and support the peer education methodology for preventing GBV among adolescents in secondary school as well as in non-formal education.** Youth can take an active role in combating gender-based violence within their environment. By training as peer educators, young people are able to see in themselves their potential to become role models and change-makers of tomorrow. Peer education puts the resources and the knowledge on combating gender violence in the hands of young people students and has shown to be more effective in transferring knowledge and awareness among peers as well as in influencing youth behaviour.
- (2) **Critically discuss relations between gender power (asymmetries) and violence.** Gender education should include discussions on the root causes of gender-based violence

including sources of gendered power asymmetry, to encourage critical thinking about the links between power, control and violence. It is also important to deconstruct myths in relation to gender based violence.

- (3) **Address gender hegemony (especially in constructions of masculinity) as a root cause of gender-based violence (GBV);**
- (4) **Address GBV as a wide social phenomenon transcending all socioeconomic and socio-cultural groups** and not as a 'specific' problem affecting particular social groups. Such discussions should also raise awareness on the cross-cultural implications of GBV.
- (5) **Dissociate feelings of 'guilt' from progress in 'modern' values, including the increased value on gender equality.** Gender education ought not only to sensitise students about current inequalities and gaps, but also encourage them to acknowledge the gains and progress achieved, to help address mixed messages. This process can help dissolve myths that are still prevalent, and exonerate progress in 'modern' values that stress equality.
- (6) **Highlight the responsibility of social actors, the media and the state** along with individuals/families to prevent and combat GBV;
- (7) **Emphasize the role of men and boys** in preventing and combating GBV. As the cross-country research results showed more conservative and patriarchal attitudes among boys, the latter should be a specific target group for interventions relating to GBV.
- (8) **Give special emphasis on the deconstruction of negative gender stereotypes, particularly those that refer to victim-blaming,** especially in relation to girls 'provoking' GVB. Victim-blaming within intimate relationships should also be addressed as victims are often held accountable for failing to set limits in their intimate relationships, failing to adequately respond violence, or for failing to exit a violent relationship.
- (9) **Provide thorough information on all forms of GBV.** The research results demonstrated that adolescents often fail to recognize non-physical forms of abuse such as verbal and/or psychological violence.
- (10) **De-romanticize violence in intimate relationships.** In some country contexts the research results indicated that teenagers are prone to justify certain forms of violence within relationships, such as jealousy or controlling behaviour, as expressions of love.
- (11) **Emphasize that GBV is never a private matter** but that its roots can often be found in unequal power relations between women and men that produce forms of disempowerment and oppression.