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ADDRESSING SEXUAL BULLYING ACROSS EUROPE

SEXUAL BULLYING IN YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS FIVE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Research report for the Addressing Sexual
Bullying Across Europe (ASBAE) project

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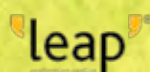
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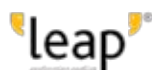
Sexual bullying in young people across five European countries

Research report for the Addressing Sexual Bullying Across Europe (ASBAE) project

January 2015

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2



Contents

Acknowledgements	4
1. Summary	5
1.1 Background	5
1.2 The research	5
1.3 Recommendations for designing and delivering sexual bullying prevention programmes	7
1.4 Wider policy and practice implications of the findings	8
2. Introduction	9
3. Findings	11
3.1 Quantitative questionnaire data	11
3.2 Focus groups with young people: Key themes	16
3.3 Focus groups with professionals: Key themes	31
4. Recommendations	36
4.1 Recommendations for designing and delivering sexual bullying prevention programmes	36
4.2 Wider policy and practice implications of the findings	38
5. References	41
6. Appendices	42
Appendix 1: Method	42
Appendix 2: Participants	48
Appendix 3: About the ASBAE project and the ACT pack	49

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the many people and organisations who have contributed to our research, especially:

- The Young People Advisory Groups (YPAGs) in Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, Slovenia, and the UK, who provided us with locally relevant input and feedback on each stage of the research;
- The research participants, both young people and professionals in child education and protection, who shared their understandings of sexual bullying and views on how it could be addressed;
- All of the schools, youth groups and other organisations that supported the research and helped with arranging access to participants;
- The project's steering group for providing advice on ethical issues, recruitment, and the research materials and findings;
- Jon Brown and Nick Frost for reviewing this report and providing valuable feedback;
- Vicki Crossley for administrative support throughout the project.

1. Summary

1.1 Background

Our understanding of sexual bullying refers to unwanted sexual behaviour or conduct, and bullying or harassment due to a person's actual/perceived sexual (in)experience, interests or orientation, or due to their gender-related appearance, identity or practices. Sexual bullying often takes place online via smartphones, instant messaging and social networks. It is a growing problem among young people, and can have a serious impact on the person being bullied, including reduced self-esteem, anxiety and depression, and sometimes, suicidal behaviour. Research to date has been limited in terms of methods (mainly survey-based), geographical location (USA; Western Europe), and focus (typically on a single problem, e.g. homophobic bullying). Consequently, our aim was to design a predominantly qualitative research project that was young-people centred and encompassed the full repertoire of sexual bullying practices in under-researched countries.

1.2 The research

The ASBAE (Addressing Sexual Bullying Across Europe) project was funded by the European Commission's Daphne III programme, which aims to protect children, young people and women against all forms of violence. The focus of the project was the programme's funding priority of 'empowerment work at grassroots level'. The project was led by Leeds Beckett University in the UK and included partners from NGOs in Bulgaria (Demetra), Italy (Pepita), Latvia (MARTA Centre), Slovenia (Papilot) and the UK (Leap). Over the five countries, 253 young people (aged 13-18) and 37 professionals in child education and protection participated in focus group discussions and completed questionnaires. The voices of young people were prioritised throughout the project, assisted by a Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG) in each country. Our analysis of this dataset helped to inform the development of our peer-to-peer intervention on sexual bullying (see 'The ACT pack' at www.asbae.eu).

Questionnaire findings

We found that nearly three-quarters of the young people had been subject to one or more sexual bullying behaviour on more than one occasion; this prevalence rate was similar across the five countries. We identified five types of experiences of being sexually bullied. From most frequently experienced, to least frequently experienced, these were: appearance-based bullying, physical sexual bullying, sexual harassment, bullying about or for sexual experience, and pressure to be heterosexually active. Young women experienced the first three of these more often than young men, while young women and men experienced pressure to be heterosexually active with similar frequencies, and the findings for sexual experience depended on the country being examined. However, there were a number of similarities in the frequency of experiences across countries, particularly for appearance-based bullying, physical sexual bullying and pressure to be heterosexually active.

We also found that over two-fifths of young people had engaged in one or more sexual bullying behaviours against others on more than one occasion. We identified two types of sexual bullying behaviours that the participants engaged in: appearance-based bullying and sexual harassment, with the former being most frequent. Young women and men engaged in appearance-based bullying with similar frequency, while young men engaged in sexual harassment more frequently than young women. While there were some cross-country differences on appearance-based bullying, the frequency of engaging in sexual harassment was similar across countries.

Overall, nearly two-fifths of young people had both experienced and enacted sexual bullying behaviours, while only one-fifth of young people did not report any experience of, or involvement in, sexual bullying.

Focus group themes

Our analysis of the young people's focus group data generated five core themes:

The first theme indicated that despite sexual bullying being commonplace amongst young people and having a damaging impact on those being bullied, it was also largely unrecognised. We therefore argue that it is a pernicious problem for young people.

The second theme referred specifically to technologically facilitated forms of sexual bullying. The young people described how personal information shared in confidence with a peer could subsequently be modified, uploaded and distributed rapidly to the wider community via smartphones and social media. They also talked about the use of technology (mainly by young men) to pressurise others (mainly young women) for sexual contact or material.

The third theme highlighted the gendered nature of sexual bullying. This included: the construction of young men and women as opposites in terms of their characteristics, the types of sexual bullying behaviours that they engaged in, and their reactions to sexual bullying; gendered ideas around reputations and responsibilities as leading to different pressures and different forms of sexual bullying for young men and women; female objectification as leading to sexual bullying for young women; and homophobic bullying as a 'male problem'.

The fourth theme related to young people's perceptions about the causes of sexual bullying. Sexual bullying was explained: as being biologically or developmentally driven; as a reaction to 'difference'; as a form of revenge or retaliation; as a result of poor upbringing, a problematic background or peer influence; as harmless or unintended; and as stemming from the (in)actions of the person experiencing the bullying. This theme highlighted a number of assumptions being made by young people that are potentially problematic and the project's ACT pack has been designed to encourage young people to scrutinise and challenge such assumptions.

The final theme concerned proposals for preventing sexual bullying. While young people felt it was important to report sexual bullying, there was a lot of discussion about the potential problems associated with doing so (e.g. a lack of interest or action on the part of the person they were reporting it to, or reporting it possibly leading to further bullying). Young people themselves were

seen to be an important source of support for peers who had been bullied and awareness-raising and stricter regulation of the internet were seen as important strategies for prevention.

Like the young people, the professionals identified sexual bullying as a widespread phenomenon; however the professionals stated more explicitly and extensively that, because it is so ubiquitous, sexual bullying has become normalised. Professionals also shared the young people's view of sexual bullying as facilitated by technology. There was a feeling amongst the professionals that young people's access to and aptitude for mobile technologies provided the tools by which sexual bullying could be enacted remotely, at any time – and that adults (e.g. parents, professionals) were far less confident in understanding and using the latest devices. As with the young people, the professionals sometimes explained sexual bullying as rooted in background, upbringing and relationships with peers; however, the professionals placed more emphasis than young people on sexualisation via the media as something that underpins much of sexual bullying. Finally, the professionals highlighted a number of barriers to the effective prevention of sexual bullying and discussed strategies for overcoming these, including inter-agency co-operation, mandatory sex and relationships education and the need for a consistent, regulated approach in responding to sexual bullying incidents by schools and other youth-centred organisations.

1.3 Recommendations for designing and delivering sexual bullying prevention programmes

We make 12 recommendations for designing and delivering primary prevention programmes for sexual bullying (see the *Recommendations* section for further details).

Prevention programmes should:

1. Raise awareness of what constitutes sexual bullying and stress that it is not limited to extreme or physical examples.
2. Highlight and address the full range of sexual bullying practices that young people experience.
3. Discuss technology-mediated forms of sexual bullying and how young people can take steps towards protecting themselves and others from sexual cyberbullying.
4. Discuss differences between joking and bullying, and the emotional impact and consequences that sexual bullying can have for those being bullied.
5. Question and challenge prejudices and stereotypes around gender and sexuality that can give rise to and perpetuate sexual bullying.
6. Examine and critique the role of the media in creating and sustaining appearance-based bullying and the sexualisation of young women.
7. Discuss and challenge victim-blaming so that young people's experiences of sexual bullying are not rationalised, downplayed or dismissed by their peers.
8. Acknowledge and address young people's concerns about reporting sexual bullying to adults.
9. Provide information on what to do if a young person experiences sexual bullying and what sources of appropriate advice and support are available within their school/youth organisation and wider community.
10. Capitalise on young people's eagerness to help and support each other by providing guidance on safe and effective bystander intervention.

11. Include young people in the co-delivery of the programme.
12. Include training for both young people and adults facilitating the programme.

1.4 Wider policy and practice implications of the findings

We make 11 recommendations for schools, other professionals working with/for children, and internet service and site providers (see the *Recommendations* section for further details):

Schools

1. A whole school approach should be employed, incorporating head-teachers, teachers, school counsellors, parents, and young people themselves.
2. School anti-bullying policies should cover sexual bullying and sexual cyberbullying specifically and make clear the reporting procedures and how incidents of sexual bullying will be dealt with.
3. Schools should engage in primary prevention programmes with young people that: raise awareness of sexual bullying; challenge the prejudices and stereotypes about gender and sexuality that can give rise to it; discuss technology-mediated forms of sexual bullying and how young people can take steps to protect themselves and others from sexual cyberbullying; highlight the effects of sexual bullying on those being bullied; and empower young people with the knowledge and skills to respond to sexual bullying acts that they might witness or experience (e.g. by employing the ASBAE project's 'ACT pack').
4. Schools should provide Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) classes to all students, which should include discussion of how to develop and maintain healthy, respectful relationships (including sexual relationships) with peers.
5. Classroom lessons (e.g. Information Technology, PSHE) should focus on responsible and safe use of locally relevant technologies and social networking sites.
6. Teachers should be provided with training on sexual bullying, its forms and prevention in order to lead provision around sexual bullying issues.

Professionals working with/for children

7. Inter-agency co-operation is required to ensure a coherent and consistent response to sexual bullying situations.
8. On-going training is required to ensure that professionals are knowledgeable about the most current forms of sexual bullying among young people in their community.
9. Community-based, trained professionals should be visible, available and active in working with young people around sexual bullying.

Internet service and site providers

10. More secure and effective controls on access to pornographic websites.
11. Greater regulation of the content of third party pop-ups.

2. Introduction

The ASBAE (Addressing Sexual Bullying Across Europe) project was funded by the European Commission's Daphne III programme, which aims to protect children, young people and women against all forms of violence. The focus of the project was the programme's funding priority of 'empowerment work at grassroots level'. The project was led by Leeds Beckett University in the UK and included partners from NGOs in Bulgaria (Demetra), Italy (Pepita), Latvia (MARTA Centre), Slovenia (Papilot) and the UK (Leap). The first year of the project was devoted to research (reported here), which helped to inform the development of our peer-to-peer intervention on sexual bullying (see 'The ACT pack' at www.asbae.eu) in the second year.



Following a detailed literature review, we conceptualised sexual bullying as an umbrella term, encompassing sexual harassment, bullying due to a person's sexual identity or expression, and transphobic bullying:

- **Sexual harassment** can be understood as unwanted sexual behaviour or conduct (for example, unwanted sexual attention or sexual coercion);
- **Bullying due to a person's sexual identity or expression** can be understood as bullying or harassment due to a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation, experiences or inexperience, or interests (for example, the type and/or number of sexual partners, or the type, range and/or frequency of their sexual activities);
- **Transphobic bullying** can be understood as bullying or harassment due to a person's gender identity or expression, i.e., because a person's self-identified gender (e.g. identifying as a man, woman, or somewhere between or outside of these) differs from their assigned sex and/or because their appearance or behaviour does not conform to societal gender norms.

Sexual bullying research to date has been considerably siloed, with one body of literature examining sexual harassment, and another, homophobic and transphobic bullying. In the few instances where these types of harassment and bullying have been considered together, the research pre-dated the widespread use of mobile and internet technologies (Duncan, 1999; Renold, 2002), was conducted only with teachers (Meyer, 2008) or was very focused in terms of its scope (WOMANKIND, 2010). We would argue that sexual harassment, bullying about sexual identity and expression (including homophobic and biphobic bullying), and transphobic bullying should be examined together because these elements of sexual bullying intersect and interact. In addition, research on sexual bullying needs to go beyond examining its prevalence and effects, to exploring young people's awareness, understandings and experiences of sexual bullying. We would argue that it is also important to gather information from both young people and those who work with them, recognising the expertise that young people bring based on their own experiences, as well as the best practice of those who work with young people who engage in or experience sexual bullying behaviours. These different types of information are essential if we are to develop interventions to prevent sexual bullying among young people. While the vast majority of research on sexual bullying to date has focused on individual countries, particularly the US or countries in Northern or Western Europe, the ASBAE project examined sexual bullying in under-researched regions, including Eastern and Southern Europe.



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The project adopted a participatory action approach (i.e. aimed to work collaboratively with young people). A Young People Advisory Group (YPAG) in each of the five European countries provided us with locally relevant input and feedback on each stage of the project over the two-year period. Each partner organisation was also involved in the design, implementation and analysis of the research, while the project's steering group provided advice on ethical issues, recruitment, and the research materials and findings.

Over the course of the research, we gathered data from 253 young people aged 13-18 via focus groups (eight in each country) and questionnaires. Nearly all of the participants were in school, training or other education, and three-quarters of the participants lived in an urban area. Most of the young people identified as being White, though other ethnicities were represented too, and nearly three-quarters of the participants were Christian, with the remainder identifying as Muslim, Sikh, other or having no religious affiliation. The majority of the young people identified as being attracted to different sex people (i.e. as being heterosexual), and a quarter of the participants were in a relationship when the focus groups were conducted. The focus groups used a schedule of discussion items which were arranged into three topic areas: expectations and difficulties in peer relationships, awareness and understandings of sexual bullying, and suggestions for tackling and preventing sexual bullying. The discussion of these topics was interspersed with other activities, including the presentation and discussion of relevant sexual bullying media clips from TV films and anti-bullying campaigns, and an opportunity to individually complete an anonymous questionnaire about their personal experiences of being subject to, and also of enacting, sexual bullying. The questionnaire featured a series of closed questions examining the frequency of different types of sexual bullying experiences, as well as open questions that invited young people to provide written accounts of two of these experiences and accompanying related information.

We also gathered data from 37 professionals who worked in child education and protection by conducting a further focus group in each country. Nearly half of the professionals worked for a charity or non-governmental organisation; the remainder worked for the government, schools or colleges, youth centres, other organisations or multiple organisations. More specifically, the participants identified as social workers, youth group organisers, counsellors or psychologists, or professionals involved in safeguarding and the prevention of sexual exploitation and gang violence. Most of the participants were women, and they reported an average of nine years' experience in working with young people, spending nearly a third of their working time on sexual bullying issues. The focus groups used a schedule of discussion items that were arranged into three topic areas: background/rapport-building, understandings of sexual bullying and experiences of working with young people who experience/enact sexual bullying, and tackling and preventing sexual bullying.

All focus group discussions were digitally recorded with participants' permission and then transcribed and anonymised. The resulting transcripts, and open-ended written accounts from the questionnaires with young people, were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ethical approval for the research was gained from Leeds Beckett University's Faculty of Health and Social Sciences' Ethics Committee at the outset.



10



3. Findings

The focus groups and questionnaires generated a lot of data and analysis. Here we present the key findings as follows:

- Headline statistics from the quantitative questionnaire data;
- Key themes and quotes from the focus groups with young people;
- Key themes and quotes from the focus groups with professionals.

3.1 Quantitative questionnaire data

We divide this section into three subsections: experiences of being bullied; experiences of bullying others; relationships between being bullied and bullying others.

3.1.1 Experiences of being sexually bullied

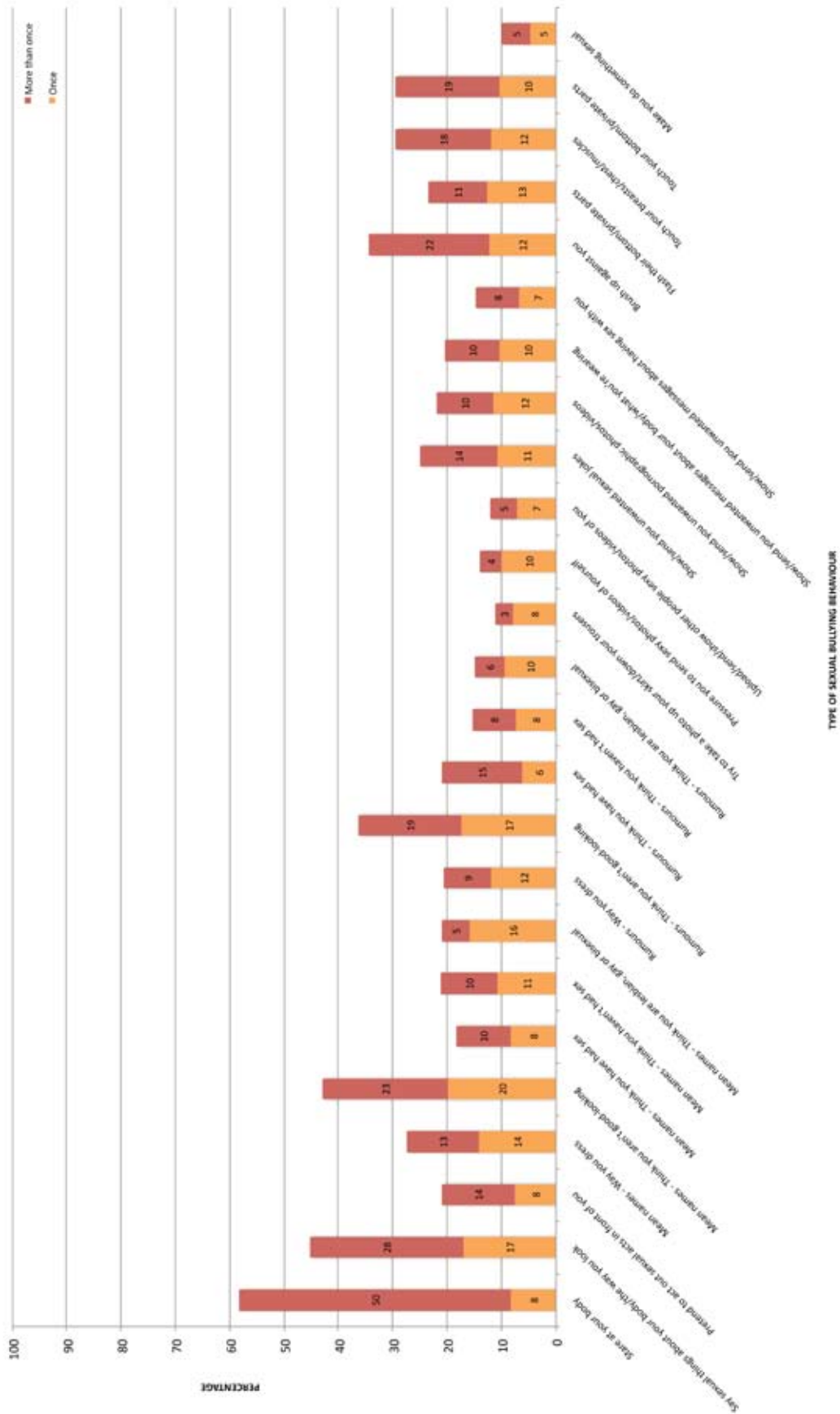
The questionnaire asked young people how often they had experienced 25 different sexual bullying behaviours from 0-*Never* to 4-*Often* (see Appendix 1). Nearly three-quarters (73%) of the young people reported experiencing one or more of these sexual bullying behaviours on more than one occasion. This prevalence rate was similar across the five countries. The most common reports involved someone staring at their body or brushing up against them in a way that made them feel uncomfortable, making sexual comments about their body or appearance that offended or upset them, or someone calling them names that suggested they were unattractive (see Figure 1).

Across the five countries, most participants reported that they had experienced sexual bullying behaviours on the odd occasion, while a minority of participants reported experiencing sexual bullying more regularly. Overall, young women experienced sexual bullying more frequently than young men, though there were differences according to the type of sexual bullying (see below).

Our analysis identified five main types of sexual bullying experiences. In order of most frequently experienced to least frequently experienced, these were:

- **Appearance-based bullying** (e.g. mean names and rumours about their body, the way they dressed, the way they looked or their attractiveness);
- **Physical sexual bullying** (e.g. having their breasts, chest, muscles, bottom or genitals touched when it was not wanted);
- **Sexual harassment** (e.g. being sent sexual jokes, being brushed up against, photos taken up their skirt/down their trousers, pressured to send sexual photos/videos);
- **Sexual experience** (e.g. receiving unwanted messages about having sex, mean names and rumours because they have had sex, sexual photos/videos of them being shared without permission);
- **Pressure to be heterosexually active** (e.g. mean names and rumours about being lesbian, gay or bisexual or not having had sex).

Figure 1: Types of sexual bullying behaviours that participants experienced



Examining each type of sexual bullying by sex showed that:

- Young women experienced appearance-based bullying, physical sexual bullying and sexual harassment more frequently than young men;
- Young women and men experienced similar frequencies of pressure to be heterosexually active;
- Bullying about/for sexual experience was more frequent for young women than young men in the Italian sample, but (perhaps surprisingly) the frequency was similar for young women and young men in the other countries. Further analysis suggested that this may be because, in the majority of the remaining countries, young men experienced one particular item more frequently than women (*"They use mobile phones or the internet to upload, send or show other people sexy photos or videos of you without your permission"*). There are a number of examples of this in the qualitative data and these tend to take the form of situations where young men film other young men talking about or doing embarrassing things and then circulate the video as a joke (see the example in Section 3.2.2.1).

Examining each type of sexual bullying by country showed:

- The frequency of appearance-based bullying, physical sexual bullying and bullying due to pressure to be heterosexually active was similar across countries.
- There were differences between some countries but not others for sexual harassment. It was more frequent in the Slovenian sample (Average = 0.70) than the Latvian (Average = 0.25) and Italian (Average = 0.14) samples. It was also more frequent in the UK sample (Average = 0.42) than the Italian sample (Average = 0.14). There were no other statistically significant differences between countries for sexual harassment (Bulgarian average = 0.41).
- There were differences between some countries but not others for bullying about sexual experience in young men. It was more frequent for Bulgarian (Average = 0.66), UK (Average = 0.47) and Slovenian (Average = 0.22) young men, than Italian young men (Average = 0.04). It was also more frequent for Bulgarian (Average = 0.66) and UK (Average = 0.47) young men than Latvian young men (Average = 0.08). There were no other statistically significant differences between countries for bullying about sexual experience in young men. Furthermore, there were no significant differences between countries for bullying about sexual experience in young women.

Experiencing one type of sexual bullying was related to also experiencing other types of sexual bullying; for example, those who experienced appearance-based bullying were also likely to experience physical sexual bullying and sexual harassment.

3.1.2 Experiences of sexually bullying others

The questionnaire asked young people how often they had engaged in the 25 different sexual bullying behaviours against others (from 0-Never to 4-Often) (see Appendix 1). On average, over two-fifths (45%) of young people had engaged in one or more of these sexual bullying behaviours on more than one occasion. This prevalence rate was higher in the Italian sample (75%) and lower

in the UK sample (23%), and similar (40% - 43%) in the remaining countries. Most often the bullying involved staring at a young person's body in a way that made them feel uncomfortable or calling a young person mean names about their dress or attractiveness (see Figure 2).

Across the five countries, most participants reported that they had engaged in sexual bullying on the odd occasion, while a minority of participants reported sexual bullying others more regularly. Overall, young women and young men engaged in sexual bullying behaviours with similar frequency, though there were differences according to the type of sexual bullying (see below).

Our analysis identified two main types of sexual bullying behaviour that the young people engaged in. In order of most frequently instigated to least frequently instigated, these were:

- **Appearance-based bullying** (e.g. mean names and rumours about the way they dressed or their attractiveness);
- **Sexual harassment** (e.g. making someone do something sexual, pressuring someone to send sexual photos/videos of themselves, taking photos up someone's skirt/down their trousers, sending messages to someone about their body/what they're wearing).

Examining each type of sexual bullying by sex showed that:

- Young women and men engaged in appearance-based bullying with similar frequency;
- Young men engaged in sexual harassment more frequently than young women.

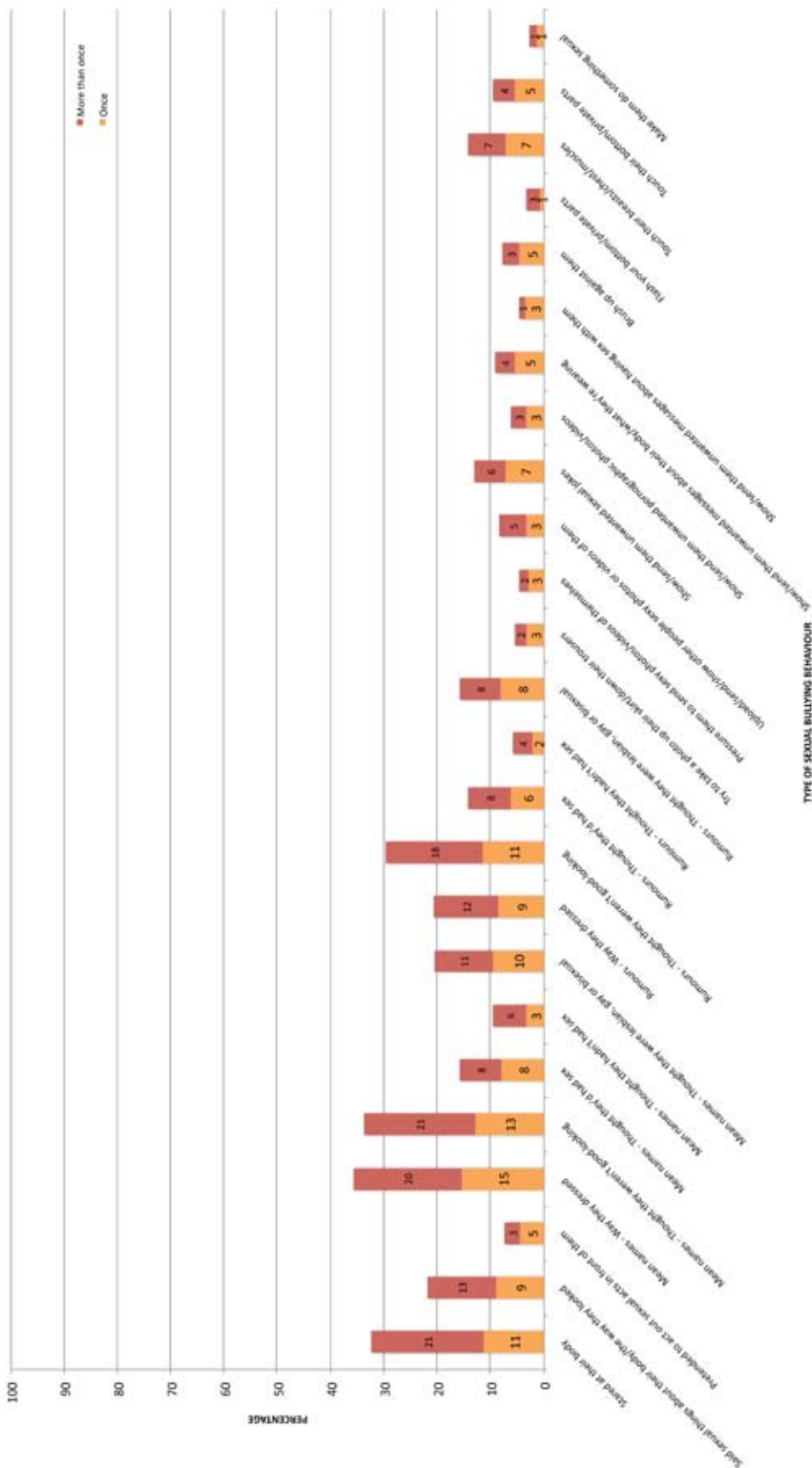
Examining each type of sexual bullying by country showed that:

- There were differences between some countries but not others for appearance-based bullying. It was more frequently engaged in by the Italian sample (Average = 0.84) than the Slovenian (Average = 0.35) and UK (Average = 0.33) samples, but there were no other statistically significant differences between countries (Bulgarian average = 0.52, Latvian average = 0.49).
- The frequency of engaging in sexual harassment was similar across countries.

Therefore, it can be seen that the higher prevalence of sexual bullying overall for the Italian sample (noted above) is actually due to the higher frequency of appearance-based bullying in particular, rather than the frequency of sexual harassment.

Engaging in appearance-based bullying was related to also engaging in sexual harassment, and vice versa.

Figure 2: Types of sexual bullying behaviours that participants engaged in



3.1.3 Relationship between being bullied and bullying others

Nearly two-fifths (39%) of the young people reported being bullied and also bullying others (i.e. experiencing one or more sexual bullying behaviours on more than one occasion and also engaging in one or more sexual bullying behaviours on more than one occasion), while 35% reported only being bullied and 6% reported only bullying others. Only one-fifth (20%) of young people reported neither experiencing nor engaging in sexual bullying behaviours on more than one occasion. Furthermore, being bullied more frequently was associated with bullying others more frequently, and vice versa; for example, those who experienced appearance-based bullying regularly also engaged in appearance-based bullying regularly. Thus, it was relatively common for young people to occupy the position of 'bully' and 'victim' at the same time.

3.2 Focus groups with young people: Key themes

Based on our thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts, and young people's written accounts in the questionnaire, we identified five themes (with subthemes) that were common to all five countries:

1. *Sexual bullying as pernicious*
 - i. Pervasive yet unrecognised
 - ii. Damaging impact
2. *Technology-mediated sexual bullying*
 - i. Publicising the personal
 - ii. Remote sexual pressurising
3. *Sexual bullying as a highly gendered phenomenon*
 - i. Binary understandings of young men and women
 - ii. Sexual experience: Gendered reputations and responsibilities
 - iii. Female objectification
 - iv. Homophobic bullying – a male problem
4. *Explaining – and mitigating – sexual bullying*
 - i. Sexual bullying as biologically or developmentally driven
 - ii. Reacting to 'difference'
 - iii. Revenge and retaliation
 - iv. Bullies as victims
 - v. Sexual bullying as 'innocent'
 - vi. Victim-blaming
5. *Prevention – opportunities and challenges*
 - i. Ambivalence about reporting
 - ii. Peer support
 - iii. Awareness-raising activities
 - iv. Internet regulation

We now briefly summarise each theme in turn.

3.2.1 Sexual bullying as pernicious

When the young people were first asked about sexual bullying, they typically had a very limited awareness of what it entailed. As the focus group discussions progressed, however, young people highlighted how sexual bullying practices were widespread, and had a negative impact on those being bullied. In this sense then, sexual bullying can be seen as prevalent and harmful, yet largely unrecognised, and therefore a pernicious feature of young people's lives.

3.2.1.1 Pervasive yet unrecognised

At the beginning of the focus groups, few young people were familiar with the term 'sexual bullying', and most initially assumed that it referred to extreme physical examples such as sexual assault and rape. However, over the course of the focus group, young people began to identify various examples of sexual bullying from their everyday lives, including bullying someone because of their appearance (e.g. "What tits!" – Italy) or sexual orientation ("Teasing him that he is gay" – Slovenia), sexual harassment ("Like texting you saying 'you're hot, send me a picture' and you're like no – and it's constant" – UK), and blackmail over sexual images or videos ("If he takes a picture of you in an inappropriate position and he threatens you, that he would spread the photos if you don't do something" – Bulgaria).

Young people's understandings of what might constitute sexual bullying therefore changed and developed throughout the focus groups:

I didn't know that calling people 'skets' [sluts] and stuff is sexually bullying. I didn't know that groping people was sexual bullying. I thought it was just like, I don't know, just being sexual and annoying. I didn't really class it as sexual bullying but now I definitely know what lies under sexual bullying and what doesn't.
[UK focus group]

This reinforces the potential of group discussions (which can include media clips, interactive exercises, etc.) to raise awareness of sexual bullying (for further discussion see Section 3.2.5.3).

Once young people had a broader understanding of the kinds of behaviours that might constitute sexual bullying, they reported that these behaviours were commonplace - 'normal' (Latvia) or 'standard' (Italy) - something that they encountered a lot in their everyday lives:

I find at my age you automatically get called a slag or a slut and you get bullied a lot for being broken up with. [UK focus group]

I don't know anybody that doesn't have such difficulties, it's normal.
[Latvian focus group]

Thus it appears that perhaps young people are, in part, prevented from perceiving these behaviours as bullying, precisely because they have become such a taken-for-granted part of their everyday experiences.

3.2.1.2 Damaging impact

Young people often spoke about the potential for sexual bullying to negatively impact on those who are being bullied. In particular, young people emphasised the psychological effects of sexual bullying, especially for non-physical forms of bullying (e.g. where another person is criticised or ostracised):

Verbal or psychological bullying is often worse than physical, because it cannot be seen, and people are not aware of it, that this can be awful for someone.

[Slovenian focus group]

Sexual bullying was seen as leading to isolation, humiliation and low self-esteem:

Sometimes, when I'm around, they look at my tits and it does not make me feel very well ... I feel ashamed, embarrassed and disgusted.

[Italian questionnaire response]

which in more extreme cases could potentially culminate in self-harm or suicidal thoughts or attempts:

Closing in on yourself, lost in a bad mood, depressed, some people come to self-harm.

[Bulgarian focus group]

There's a huge rumour going around about me saying I had sex, I didn't, it's not fair, everyone calls me a whore, a slut, a sket, I've had enough, I want to die, I even cut myself.

[UK questionnaire response]

3.2.2 Technology-mediated sexual bullying

In all of the focus groups the young people talked about instances of sexual bullying mediated by smartphones and social media. They described how personal information shared in confidence with a peer could subsequently be modified, uploaded and distributed rapidly to the wider community. They also talked about the use of technology (mainly by young men) to pressurise others (mainly young women) for sexual contact or material.

3.2.2.1 Publicising the personal

Many examples were cited where formerly private content was made public. Participants described how personal information, whether fabricated or authentic, was sometimes uploaded and distributed widely. For example, private text conversations were captured and posted online without the person's knowledge:

A girl once had a conversation via text message with a guy, covering another boy she liked. The boy then took a picture of the conversation and posted it to Facebook so that everyone could read it. [Italian questionnaire response]

or information shared between friends was recorded and distributed more widely:

We had this party at the end of the school year, where one boy got really drunk and others asked him personal questions about the length of his penis and if he would prefer to have sex with boys than with girls and so on, and they recorded him, and then showed it to others later that summer. [Slovenian questionnaire response]

Young people discussed how these remote forms of bullying can afford those bullying others a sense of anonymity, protection or distance that may encourage them to say and do things that they would not otherwise say or do:

Because you can't say it [while looking] in the eyes of that person but you can write anything online. So it happens that sometimes someone writes something and afterwards we say 'come and say it in front of me' and he cannot say it, he is sort of ashamed. [Latvian focus group]

Young people observed that the ubiquity of smartphones and internet access ensured that any information made publicly available reached a far greater audience than more traditional, face-to-face forms of bullying:

It was all the same before [the use of technology became so prevalent], it is just... it didn't spread... it was between one and another, and nobody knew anything, but now it simply spreads, the rumours. [Latvian focus group]

It was also recognised that once online, personal content (and the reputational damage that ensues) may well endure, available for others to view at any time:

Sexual bullying on the internet – you can't control the spread to other people and sites, and it's permanent. It gets out of control because you can't take that back, it's like once people see it, you can't take it out of their eyes, so it's like once it's on the internet, it's on the internet forever. [UK focus group]

3.2.2.2 Remote sexual pressurising

Young people also highlighted how technology could be used to pressurise others for sexual contact or material. For example, young women described being pestered for sexual activity via social media:

I think sexual bullying like among peers isn't just like in school and stuff, it also continues again to social networks. Like a lot of the time I think you can, like a lot of the boys in our year asked for sexual [contact], like from me or from peers, and you can tell that's not right, but because it's on social media you don't really know how to like say 'go away'. [UK focus group]

Unsolicited sexual requests (e.g. for naked photographs) came from peers as well as unknown others online, or from peers via mobile phone, with most young women having had some experience in this regard:

At the beginning of school, she [the participant's friend] met a 16-year-old boy, while she was 14. Initially, they [were] only texting but later he asked her several times to send him a video in which she was undressing and bikini photos. [Italian questionnaire response]

All sorts of strangers write to me. They tell me how beautiful I am, ask me to send photos, offer to have sex with me, ask for my address, for my telephone number. [Bulgarian focus group]

Where young women were reluctant or refused to comply with these requests, this sometimes resulted in them being threatened:

There was a boy I know from school, kind of cute, he is like a year older, and my friend gave him my number, so he started texting me... Then he sent me [a] MMS message of his upper body parts without clothes and then demanded from me to return pictures of me to him. But I didn't want to, so he was upset and texted me and threatened me and so on. [Slovenian questionnaire response]

Young people also highlighted that, if young women did agree to respond to these requests, the messages or images could subsequently be altered or used as a form of blackmail:

Somebody could make in Photoshop a picture with your face and share it. [Bulgarian focus group]

An example would be that if I am in possession of a photo of a naked girl, I can go blackmail you, saying I [will] put it on Facebook. [Italian focus group]

It was recognised that sexting could be performed by young men for a variety of reasons, including entertainment; for example when another boy's phone is commandeered by peers:

My (male) school mates often steal each other's phones and then send text messages to girls in the phone book with sexual content: mostly they write about girls' breasts and bottoms. [Slovenian questionnaire response]

3.2.3 Sexual bullying as a highly gendered phenomenon

The young people generally regarded young men and women as different in character and behaviour, including the sexual bullying practices that they engaged in. Typically, the young people's talk reinforced conventional notions of masculinity and femininity, and highlighted gendered ideas around reputations and responsibilities as leading to different pressures and

different forms of sexual bullying for young men and women. There were frequent examples in the data of female objectification and instances of this leading to sexual bullying for young women, while homophobic bullying was portrayed as a 'male problem'.

3.2.3.1 Binary understandings of young men and women

Young men and women were almost universally constructed as opposites. For example, young men were presented as physical, direct and rational while young women were presented as more 'two-faced', 'bitchy' and emotional.

These perceptions about young men and women's characteristics and behaviour were also reflected in talk around sexual bullying, where young men were described as deploying direct verbal comments, gestures and touching, while young women were perceived to operate more psychologically via gossip about individuals and relationships behind the scenes:

I mean usually when it's between boys they do just come out and say it, you wouldn't make a whole meal about it. [UK focus group]

When a girl dresses some way they [girls] are like 'oh my God look at her hair, it's disgusting'. They take it to heart and she's like 'oh my God she cussed my hair' and they will start bitching about it, telling everyone on Facebook and everyone on BBM and making it into some big thing. [UK focus group]

In addition, when confronted with sexual bullying attempts, young women were portrayed as overly sensitive, while young men were thought to remain calm and 'laugh it off':

I think that girls are victims. Boys play [it] down and they don't get angry. Girls get angry even if it's a joke. [Italian focus group]

3.2.3.1 Sexual experience: Gendered reputations and responsibilities

Young people also noted gender differences with regard to sexual reputations and responsibilities. They pointed out that whilst sexual activity was regarded as an achievement and source of status for young men, young women were under pressure to maintain 'respectability' and manage the risk of being 'labelised' (UK). In other words, in order to enhance their reputations, young men were required to be seen as (hetero)sexually active:

*My brother once got in a fight with one guy because he said to him that he is gay, because he still hadn't had any girlfriends and hadn't had sex so far.
[Slovenian questionnaire response]*

and as actively pursuing further sexual activity with women:

A certain boy would ask for sex despite the fact he had a girlfriend - constant persistence of messages and requests for photos. [UK questionnaire response]

Whilst in order to protect their reputations, young women were required to be sexually attractive but not 'easy':

- P1* For example, there are now Facebook pages where you can anonymously insult someone or something, for example, a girl kissed many boys at a party, then people call her a slut at school.*
- P2 She was asking for it.*
- P3 She went with 10 boys...*
- [Italian focus group] * P1 = Participant 1

That young women tend to be targets of this form of sexual bullying was decried as unfair by some young women:

- P1 This boy likes this girl and they get into a situation. We said the boy is harassing her. If they switch roles, the girl grabs him, then she is a whore in your opinion, is there any such name for the boy?*
- P2 Nooo, he can't be a man whore because...*
- P3 He's a man whore... (a lot of the participants laugh)*
- [Bulgarian focus group]

Here, the sexual double standard is emphasised with reference to the lack of negative labels for young men who pursue sex; the suggestion of 'man-whore' is treated as humorous, thus underscoring the absence of judgement for young men who seek sexual activity.

3.2.3.3 Female objectification

There were frequent examples in the data of young women being objectified (i.e. viewed and judged with reference to their appearance). Young women's bodies and particular body parts (e.g. breasts, bottom) were often the focus of male attention:

There is this girl, right, who has large body features and the boys sometimes shout at her 'Double D'. [UK focus group]

and in some cases, this extended to young women's bodies being recorded and images circulated without their consent or knowledge:

My good friend thinks it's funny to take pictures of girls during gym classes, when they don't wear their bra. He [has] already posted and tagged some girls on Facebook with their nipples clearly seen. [Slovenian questionnaire response]

Apart from comments directed at young women's bodies, young men may also feel entitled to touch young women inappropriately, causing resentment:

Having male friends, they act a bit like 'pigs' and they begin to touch me against my will. Whatever I say, they do not stop. Not only my friends touch me. People say that I have a nice

butt. Then many try to unhook my bra and many times they succeed... [Italian questionnaire response]

Examples are also presented concerning some young men's preoccupation with, and attempts to control, their girlfriend's appearance:

I see a pattern in relationships that I just don't like in people whether there's too much control and it... often the male is dominant over the female... I think for me, being controlled by a man and being told what to wear, how to act, that kind of thing, is something that I would find really unattractive in a relationship and something I try and avoid. [UK focus group]

3.2.3.4 Homophobic bullying – a male problem

The focus group data indicated that homophobic bullying is common among young people. Young people did not refer specifically to biphobic bullying and for the most part lesbian young women were not problematised – in contrast to young men known to be, or perceived to be, gay:

I'm going to be honest - if you're a lesbian in my school all the boys love you, because lesbians are like a hot thing if you're a boy (laughter). It's true! But if you're a gay, oh my God I feel sorry for you, please come to me, I will hug you. Like, stuff like, boys like have to put up with just for even appearing to be gay – all the grief they get, I just think – no, not fair. [UK focus group]

Thus young men were typically cast as the main culprits in bullying other young men about their (actual or perceived) homosexuality, while young women typically expressed sympathy towards the young men being bullied ('I will hug you').

Criteria for 'gay' behaviour tended to converge on those practices which were perceived to be 'feminine':

And like, some boys behave more like girls, or just act differently, and they are often getting called, "hey you queer" ... [Slovenian focus group]

We were in the company of friends and then we started to make fun of a guy because he had a way of talking... a bit 'gay'. So all together we started to call him "gay", etc. [Italian questionnaire response]

So, for these young people, 'acting gay' seemed to equate with 'acting like a girl', and this in turn, attracted bullying.

Despite critical assessments of male homosexuality by young men, many sought to dispel any charge of prejudice by stating that they were accepting of male homosexuality as long as certain 'conditions' were met:

Most of the people don't even find them disturbing, if they don't impose their sexuality, and they leave you alone. If there is no forcing, usually they don't have any problems. [Slovenian focus group]

3.2.4 Explaining – and mitigating – sexual bullying

Throughout the focus groups, young people volunteered many explanations for sexual bullying. Whilst these varied in terms of whether the ‘cause’ was deemed to be biological, developmental or social, and also in terms of where responsibility and blame were seen to lie, a common feature of the explanations was that they tended to construct sexual bullying as inevitable or as an unavoidable consequence of certain situations or circumstances.

3.2.4.1 Sexual bullying as biologically or developmentally driven

Young people’s explanations of sexual bullying sometimes focused upon biology. For example, when talking about the causes of sexual bullying, some young people constructed male sexuality as biologically driven, uncontrollable and insatiable:

I think when puberty kicks in...once those hormones kick in, boys, like, the testosterone... [UK focus group]

In reality now, nowadays, it [sex] is what, I don’t know, 60 – 65 % of men think about. All they need – it is sex, they sleep with one [person] and later go to their best friend and say “that blonde was better than the brunette” - that is normal. And [he] goes to the next one. Or... he says that he loves his girl so much and this and that, [and then] he goes to Old Riga and simply sleeps with a new girl every week. [Latvian focus group]

This construction of male sexuality arguably functions to ‘naturalise’ sexual harassment (e.g. young men touching or staring at young women; young men pressuring young women for sex or for naked/semi-clothed photographs) by suggesting that men are ‘biologically programmed’ to behave in this way.

Sexual bullying was also linked to age or to particular developmental stages:

In primary school there are more beatings and threats, there was a lot of it. Here, now in high school, what do I know, people just somehow grow up. This doesn’t happen anymore. [Slovenian focus group]

When people are like teenagers they are less mature so like if you are gay and you have feelings for like boys or girls or whatever, they want like, the other people will make fun of you because they don’t understand as much, because they are not as mature. [UK focus group]

It can be argued that an implication of this talk is that bullying is just a ‘normal’ part of young people’s development and is something that they will ‘grow out of’.

3.2.4.2 Reacting to 'difference'

Sexual bullying was often tied to a perception (and rejection) of diversity, which in turn was sometimes linked to gender and sexuality:

One of our girl-classmates looks more like a boy, short haircut, she doesn't have any boobs or ass, she's more like, well, a boy. And, like, she often gets called a lesbian. [Slovenian focus group]

You are treating them badly because they are different. [UK focus group]

If something is wrong to somebody, if someone is different, if they don't know anything about it, they are gonna say um something bad about it... so calling someone gay or lesbian is just because they don't know anything about that, they think it's wrong because it's different. [UK focus group]

I just want to add that there are also people with strict views about how one should be and if someone falls out of these standards, then – I don't like you. There will always be such people. [Latvian focus group]

In some instances where this explanation was drawn upon, the implication appeared to be that it was the difference itself that was the 'cause' of the bullying (i.e. if people were not different they would not be bullied), whilst in others, it was people's intolerance to difference that was highlighted.

3.2.4.3 Revenge and retaliation

Young people gave numerous examples of young men or women sexually bullying each other after a relationship break-up:

A friend broke up with his girlfriend because she was just too annoying and possessive. After that, I think out of revenge she told everyone at school he was more interested in boys. [Slovenian questionnaire response]

My classmate and her best friend as well have sent naked pictures of themselves to their boyfriends. Then they had a fight with [the] boys and my classmate's boyfriend published [the] pictures on the internet. [Latvian questionnaire response]

They also gave examples of young men sexually bullying young women following the rejection of their sexual advances:

Sometimes if the guy asks out a pretty girl and she rejects him then he might start to say, well, things like she's frigid and stuff. [UK focus group]

Here, the bullying is constructed as a form of revenge or retaliation, which arguably downplays its problematic nature by presenting it as a reaction to some kind of provocation.

3.2.4.4 Bullies as victims

In discussing the reasons why young people might engage in sexual bullying, participants pointed to personal, familial and social problems - downplaying individual choice and, to some degree, empathising with the difficulties that the 'bully' might be experiencing. For example, it was suggested that those who bully others may have experienced violent family backgrounds:

I think these people have complexes... at home they have observed tension in their family relations, the parents have argued in front of the child, and then he comes to school or is among friends and behaves badly with someone... learned behaviour is the reason I think... [Bulgarian focus group]

Peer influence was also implicated:

The environment. For example, since he was 4 years old he has been friends with the local district boys and they have done everything [together]... all sorts of mischief. For example, parents haven't paid enough attention [to them], they have grown up as animals or something like that, so to speak. Simply developed in a way which seems natural for them. [Latvian focus group]

Such explanations are limited in the sense that they construct sexual bullying as something engaged in only by those who have experienced hardship/abuse or whose upbringing has been 'lacking' in some way. In addition to placing the blame on particular (arguably already marginalised) groups, this fails to acknowledge the extent to which many young people both engage in and experience it as part of their everyday lives.

3.2.4.5 Sexual bullying as 'innocent'

In explaining why sexual bullying happens, young people often constructed bullying as either harmless (e.g. 'just a bit of fun') or unintentional (e.g. misplaced or ill-judged but not intended to be mean or abusive).

Young men in particular were regarded as engaging in acts which might be construed as sexual bullying for reasons of entertainment – the behaviour was seen as a 'joke' rather than something that could impact negatively on another:

I think it doesn't happen like a lot on purpose, but some people may say something to someone not knowing that it's bullying and actually say it as an innocent joke or do it as a joke but they don't understand how it is like making that person feel. [UK focus group]

Sometimes, just to make a joke, you say 'shut up faggot', but you don't mean anything bad with this. [Slovenian focus group]

Whether actions were deemed to be sexual bullying or not appeared to vary depending on the context. For example, behaviours that were seen as harmless fun amongst close friends were seen as unacceptable when they were enacted by those outside of young people's friendship groups:

- P1 *I think it is funny when you are with your friends but sometimes there is a line between like how much of a close friend you are.*
- P2 *...I didn't really know him that well, and it's like, and even on the first day I spoke to him for about less than an hour and then suddenly he started acting all sexual and I just thought to myself 'whoa I don't know you'. [UK focus group]*

Similarly, actions were sometimes deemed to be acceptable if carried out by someone that the young person liked, but unacceptable if carried out by someone they did not like:

...if someone who tells me so, is one whom I know, and I like him - it is a joke, but if [I] don't like him, that is harassment for me. [Bulgarian focus group]

Sexual bullying behaviours were also sometimes excused on the grounds of misplaced affection:

I was at this summer camp right, and there was one boy with a laser, this pointer, and one girl was just passing by, and he pointed the laser at her bottom. And she told him, 'what are you doing, stop it', and he said, 'this is fine what I am doing, there is nothing wrong [with it]'. He didn't mean anything bad, he just wanted to express that he likes her. [Slovenian focus group]

An important implication of young people's tendency to dismiss sexual bullying behaviours as either harmless or unintentional is that, if these explanations are widely accepted, this arguably undermines young people's right to feel upset or offended by such behaviours, and to challenge or report them.

3.2.4.6 Victim-blaming

Both young men and young women sometimes implied that those experiencing sexual bullying were (at least partially) to blame for what was happening:

It is their own fault that they do not think with their heads before sleeping with someone. They need to think for themselves. [Latvian focus group]

In the quote above, the responsibility for preventing or avoiding sexual bullying is placed firmly with the person who experiences it (i.e. if they had not had sex with someone, the bullying would not have happened). Similarly, in the quote below, the person experiencing the bullying is constructed as complicit in their own 'victimisation' because they repeatedly returned to a problematic situation against peer advice:

I know someone who brought it on themselves and they kept going back into that situation and you can't really tell them anything. If it's in their mind to go back into that situation then no-one can help you. [UK focus group]

Such explanations obscure the responsibility of the person doing the sexual bullying and perpetuate the idea that bullying is an inevitable, understandable or acceptable consequence of behaving in certain ways.

3.2.5 Prevention – opportunities and challenges

While young people felt that it was important to tackle sexual bullying, there was a lot of discussion about the potential problems associated with reporting it to adults. Peer support was therefore seen as being particularly important in responding to sexual bullying incidents. Awareness-raising amongst young people was seen as key to preventing sexual bullying, and internet regulation was also identified as an area where more could be done.

3.2.5.1 Ambivalence about reporting

Owing to the personal and sexual dimensions of sexual bullying, young people variously mentioned embarrassment and shame as barriers to disclosing bullying experiences to others. In addition, there was a degree of scepticism about the anticipated (lack of) response from adults and institutions:

Yes, everyone says - go only to the teachers, speak to the teachers... and very often the teachers think that we have to deal with our problems ourselves.

[Latvian focus group]

and a fear that reporting it could actually exacerbate the problem:

P1 Even if it is not all the people in the class against you, even if it is only 10 against one... you will tell the teacher, the teacher will talk to these 10 people... and what next? It will be even worse. 'Did you tell? What have you done?!'... My friend at school... well, it is in a Russian school... they have a social worker that is ready to help you but it does not change anything... it is the same as if you tell the teacher – it does not help.

P2 Everyone is saying 'yes it would be cool if we had a psychologist in school'. But if we had the psychologist nobody would ever go to them.

P3 How can you go if [you are] surrounded by your peers?

[Latvian focus group]

In particular, many did not feel comfortable at the prospect of talking with their parents, who might 'overreact'; instead preferring other trusted adults/professionals, who were more likely to be calm and effective:

What I'd probably do is like seek professional advice. Like not like professional, like go to a therapist straight away, but like go to your form tutor - someone who's not going to go overly big. Like your parents love you, they are going to want the best for you, but don't go like overly big like 'oh my God my daughter is being bullied...' – no, you don't really want that do you? So go to a teacher - someone who is going to deal with it properly. They care about you enough to do the best but they are not going to go over the top. So yeah, I'd go to someone like that.

[UK focus group]

In some instances, young people felt that individual or private coping strategies were preferable; for example, where they felt that none of the adults they knew could be trusted, or for young men, where asking for help might be seen to 'compromise' their masculinity.

It's a question of honour. If I reported something, I'd be considered a weakling. I feel sure countering and managing it by myself. [Italian focus group]

3.2.5.2 Peer support

Participants often believed that young people themselves would be particularly well situated to provide support to members of their peer group (i.e. other young people) who had experienced or were concerned about sexual bullying:

P1 They [peers] might think that you understand them because you are like almost the same age as them so you might have been through that as well, they might like look up to you as it were.

*P2 I think they would be in their comfort zone with someone their age and would probably understand [it].
[UK focus group]*

If you have an ally who thinks the same way as you do, your friends can support you with [their] thoughts. [Latvian focus group]

Such peer support could extend to seeking out adult experts or services so that more specialist input could be provided:

I would support them with like... I would have to know the situation first, but if it is something I can't deal with, I'm obviously going [to] tell them that there are people that are specialists at this, they know how to help. Then I will try my best to find them. [UK focus group]

Others indicated that they would offer help and support only if the situation became serious:

If you see that the victim cannot cope and becomes more fearful, then I can intervene. [Bulgarian focus group]

3.2.5.3 Awareness-raising activities

The participants identified that awareness-raising activities were needed for all young people so that they were more aware of what sexual bullying is and how it could be tackled. For example:

I How can it [sexual bullying] be prevented in the first place?...*

P More awareness... Cos I think awareness is so powerful because a lot of things have been solved in society through awareness, like... terrorism for example, like around buses if you see anything suspicious.

...

- I So what would you want people to be more aware of?*
P The fact that people can be bullied. Bullying has already been [covered elsewhere] but sexual bullying could be more identified and highlighted.
 [UK focus group] *I = Interviewer.

The young people in our sample reported enjoying the focus group discussions and said that they had learned a lot about sexual bullying through considering the media clips (which illustrated different sexual bullying scenarios) and discussing different perspectives, personal observations and experiences. This led the young people to suggest that similar activities could be used to raise other young people's awareness of sexual bullying:

I think they should introduce more groups like this cos it's like some awareness group and the consequences and that sort of stuff. [UK focus group]

- I You talked about greater unity. How can that be promoted?*
P Well, like here we all sit in a circle now. To talk with each other, understand each other.
 [Latvian focus group]

There was particular enthusiasm for the role of videos and drama in raising awareness of sexual bullying and how to tackle it:

In my opinion, it is necessary to make psychological movies in which bullying is pictured, afterwards - consequences from different angles. I found such a video on YouTube not long ago. I came across this topic and what was showed was a girl that was bullied and different solutions to the situation – what would happen if she told her mother, what [would happen] if she closed in on herself and what [would happen] if at least one of these 10 people defended her. [Latvian focus group]

3.2.5.4 Internet regulation

A few young people suggested some form of internet regulation to prevent or tackle sexual bullying, such as banning sexual advertisements from third parties or more careful verification of the viewer's age on pornographic websites:

- P1 Regulations on internet companies.*
P2 You know, bans on ads... websites allowing ads from third party websites...
P3 Right, you know 'cos it is outrageous. I have had little cousins, my nephew, my niece and they are just bombarded with sexual images every day and not knowing how to react to it properly, just can see it and not speak about it.
P4 It's disgusting. How can I be just watching a movie and then some guy comes and he is doing, or there are live chats and a lady is undressing herself. [UK focus group]

Young people also suggested greater regulation of social networks, such as stronger restrictions on creating fake accounts and more moderation of bullying content:

- I *What could the owners of Facebook, Draugiem and other social networks do?*
 P1 *Stricter... so they do not create fake accounts.*
 P2 *There are no fake profiles and photo tracks on Draugiem now, but speaking about Facebook – it's impossible to keep track... On Ask.fm you can write something anonymous, the administrators also do not care...*
 [Latvian focus group]

3.3 Focus groups with professionals: Key themes

As outlined in Section 2, one focus group discussion was conducted in each country with approximately 7-8 professionals working in education and child protection. While the focus groups with professionals were a smaller aspect of the research overall (5 focus groups, as opposed to the 40 focus groups conducted with young people), they were important in terms of learning more about professionals' understandings of sexual bullying, their experiences of working with young people who have been bullied or were bullying others, and identifying best practice in tackling sexual bullying. Analysis of these focus groups generated five key themes:

1. *Normalisation of sexual bullying*
2. *Enabled by technology*
3. *Engendered by a culture of sexualisation*
4. *Rooted in interpersonal context*
5. *Prevention - overcoming the barriers*

As can be seen, there was clearly some overlap with the themes identified from the focus groups with young people. We now briefly summarise each theme in turn, with a particular focus on the themes that were emphasised by the professionals.

3.3.1 Normalisation of sexual bullying

The professionals from all five countries were unanimous in viewing sexual bullying as a widespread problem - exacerbated by a culture of acceptance and tolerance - that has become normalised by young people:

We could say that, simply because sexual bullying is so common nowadays, that young people, well for the most part, already accept violent acts as something they just have to tolerate.
 [Slovenian focus group]

A big thing for me... is the whole sort of normalisation of... sexual bullying... and the fact that the young people that we are working with, a lot of them don't even see it as an issue, don't flag it up. [UK focus group]

They suggested that the ubiquity of sexual bullying may make it difficult for young people to identify problematic behaviours as sexual bullying:

Most of them consider that teasing, inappropriate touching and obscene words with sexual aspects are something natural and do not see these as a kind of sexual abuse. [Bulgarian focus group]

3.3.2 Enabled by technology

The professionals suggested that one of the main reasons for the common occurrence of sexual bullying related to young people's easy access to the internet via mobile phones, which meant that sexual bullying could be conducted remotely, in any place and at any time:

It is just happening all the time wherever they are, on the bus, in the school, at home, out on a day with their families, out at the shopping centre, because it is just constantly there, tweeting and the whole thing, so to say it happens here or at a youth club or on the way home from school or on the bus, I think we have passed that a little bit, and it actually is very nebulous because it is out there in the ether and that's what they are having to deal with so I think... there is no let up because they never switch their phones off because they are always wanting to know what's going on there, so there is no break from it. [UK focus group]

The professionals positioned young people as experts in the field of new and mobile technologies, with the implication being that this know-how enabled them to perform acts of sexual bullying at a distance, either anonymously or by using false identities to cover their tracks:

The conflict often arises on the internet because it is easier for them to speak openly on account of anonymity. All these factors make it easier to start and feed the conflict. [Bulgarian focus group]

This climate was considered difficult for professionals, parents and services to penetrate:

Young people are always one step ahead. With that I mean, that sometimes we [professionals] don't even know or are not aware of some communication channels that youngsters use, where different forms of bullying, forcing and coercive relations take place. [Slovenian focus group]

I worry sometimes that we as a society, as adults, abdicated the lead in technology to children because they are the ones who seem to want to play with it and somewhere along the line we have lost, there is a disconnect between us and what young people now see as something that's theirs. [UK focus group]

3.3.3 Engendered by a culture of sexualisation

In contrast with the young people, the professionals placed more emphasis on how a culture of sexualisation could contribute to sexual bullying:

I think the original question was that, you know, how many children do you think have experienced this? Well actually I am sitting here, I am thinking the media, they are sexually bullying our children into it. [UK focus group]

There was particular concern about the role of pornographic content, whether it was sought out by young people or they were indirectly exposed to it:

Boys are watching porn at boy parties... The age is 12, 13, 14 years. And they try to bypass the age restrictions and break passwords in different ways. [Latvian focus group]

P1 About the web, porn plays a significant role; nowadays, if you can use Google when you're 14, you can see, visit ANYTHING.

P2 But accidentally, too! When I was young I happened to come across a porn magazine; nowadays while you download a song, you bump into a [picture of a] naked woman or penis.

[Italian focus group]

Though the professionals also highlighted the role of other media, including TV programmes, video games and magazines:

The violence is present in all media: the internet, playing video games, on television, even radio. This is what is being sold today. With the perception of violence in the media, youngsters learn new ways of aggressive behaviour, also their brakes loosen up with already learned forms of aggression. [Slovenian focus group]

I think... programmes like 'The Only Way is Essex' [a reality TV show], where it is just all completely about the guys... cheating on their girlfriends all the time... I think there's a lot of messages are sent out to young people about how girls and boys should act in relationships and none of it is being challenged really. [UK focus group]

If we take American cartoons... all the tabby cats have wide eyes, so very sexualised, that a child is programmed since an early age... And also the mass media... girls compare themselves with open magazines, it doesn't matter which one we take – she sees, she wants to be like that... All advertisements [also] go through sex – cigarettes, alcohol, I don't know... tampons... The more nudity the better. [Latvian focus group]

3.3.4 Rooted in interpersonal context

Aside from 'macro' changes in society that helped to foster sexual bullying (technology, sexualisation), the professionals (like the young people) also pointed to more 'micro' factors, including the influence of family members:

That girl who was violent, she also had a violent family model and she had apparently adopted the behaviour of the aggressor. [Latvian focus group]

And upbringing:

The parents aren't protecting their children because they don't want to say no. I mean I was talking to somebody today and... the child in question is 8 so the mum has set up a Facebook [account for her], and I am saying "you can't sign a contract until you are 18" but she doesn't want to say no because she feels bad and also she is scared of saying no to her children. [UK focus group]

As well as interpersonal factors, such as young people's desire for status and acceptance amongst their peers:

Last summer I worked with teens; they are 'animals'! They follow an 'alpha-male logic'; they want a leader, usually, a hetero, powerful man/boy, often stupid! 80-90% of bullies are this kind of alpha-male. [Latvian focus group]

It's also about wanting to be accepted and if everybody is doing a certain thing, you don't want to be seen as the goofy one or the odd one out, you want to be part of that because nobody likes to be different. [UK focus group]

3.3.5 Prevention - overcoming the barriers

The professionals highlighted a number of barriers to the effective prevention of sexual bullying and discussed strategies for overcoming these. They suggested that a whole-community approach to sexual bullying should be adopted, involving work with young people who bully others, young people who experience sexual bullying, teachers, school counsellors, social workers, parents and government, as well as partnerships between institutions from different sectors (such as education and health):

I think... we need to educate young people about [the] consequences of their actions and we really need to put something in place where we can share this with the wider community. We need to deal with sexual bullying, its perpetrators and victims, and we also have to lobby the government to also deal with the over sexualisation of children. [UK focus group]

Inter-institutional cooperation is poor in some areas... a person is left alone with their problem. There are municipalities where custody court and social services can't [help]... there are mutual struggles. As a school we are often hostages of the situation... It is not working that well on a state level. [Latvian focus group]

The professionals also highlighted the need for mandatory sex and relationships education in the primary prevention of sexual bullying, as well as a consistent and regulated approach to tackling sexual bullying incidents that do occur:

P1 Sexual education was not taught then and is not taught now... and that's why the child develops an unhealthy interest... well, the interest is healthy but the way he gets information is unhealthy. Then it is our responsibility that someone goes and talks

about what happens to boys and girls, how to build relationships and also sexual relationships.

*P2 And health subjects still have the status of optional subjects and nothing is moving forward with this.
[Latvian focus group]*

Schools are in an awkward position though aren't they? Because depending on what school you go to and how they deal with sexual bullying... I sit on a panel whereby students who are at risk of exclusion come to these meetings and you will get a school who will bring a child, young man about 13 [who is] going to be permanently excluded for cupping a young girl's bottom, where a lot of people around the table felt that wasn't really bad, but [he] was actually charged and given a caution from the police from it, to the other extreme where we have got obviously sexual exploitation of young women and they [the school] will do everything to avoid a permanent exclusion, so it's really quite, there is no norm amongst schools either. No consistency in schools. [UK focus group]

Finally, the professionals also identified that some schools were reluctant to admit that sexual bullying occurred within their school environment for fear that their public image would be damaged:

[If] you are excluding, schools have to use the terminology 'sexual assault' and they don't want that on their records because, you know, at the end of the year, the records are published. [UK focus group]

4. Recommendations

4.1 Recommendations for designing and delivering sexual bullying prevention programmes

Based on the research with young people and professionals, we provide 12 recommendations for designing and delivering primary prevention programmes for sexual bullying.

Prevention programmes should:

1. Raise awareness of what constitutes sexual bullying and stress that it is not limited to extreme or physical examples.

In the focus groups young people initially defined sexual bullying with reference to sexual violence; further discussion and viewing of media clips raised their awareness of the broad range of behaviours that constitute sexual bullying.

2. Highlight and address the full range of sexual bullying practices that young people experience.

Our questionnaire analysis and focus groups discussions identified a number of different types of sexual bullying, including appearance-based bullying, physical sexual bullying, sexual harassment, bullying someone about or for sexual experience and pressuring someone to be heterosexually active. Sexual bullying could take many forms - verbal, physical, cyber, non-verbal - with the latter being particularly common (e.g. staring at the person's body). We also found that young people rarely experienced just one type of sexual bullying; for example, those who had experienced being called names had also experienced being touched inappropriately and being stared at.

3. Discuss technology-mediated forms of sexual bullying and how young people can take steps towards protecting themselves and others from sexual cyberbullying.

This should include discussing who young people can trust with their personal messages and photos, the importance of asking the sender's permission before sharing messages/photos, the rapid spread and permanency of online content, and the practical means by which young people can take steps towards protecting themselves and others from sexual cyberbullying. Young people and professionals discussed numerous instances of technology-mediated sexual bullying, indicating that sexual material of a personal nature (e.g. images, messages) was often shared by young people via smartphones and social media without permission.

4. Discuss differences between joking and bullying, and the emotional impact and consequences that sexual bullying can have for those being bullied.

Young people in the focus groups discussed the damaging impact that sexual bullying can have, and on occasion, they also recognised that behaviours that were intended to be jokes could have negative effects or consequences. However, there were other instances where young people seemed to downplay the potential for harm by suggesting that sexual bullying behaviours were harmless or 'just a bit of fun'.

5. Question and challenge prejudices and stereotypes around gender and sexuality that can give rise to and perpetuate sexual bullying.

This should include discussing young people's ideas about gender and sexuality, how these ideas might be linked to sexual bullying, where these ideas might come from, and questioning and challenging these ideas. Our analysis of the focus group data from young people highlighted how various prejudices, norms and expectations relating to gender and sexuality could contribute to or help to perpetuate sexual bullying. For example: prejudices against young men who were - or were perceived to be - gay; norms such as the sexual double standard (leading to a perception that young men should be heterosexually active and women should be sexually attractive but not sexually available); and expectations that young men and women should always look and act in ways that might be considered 'masculine' or 'feminine' respectively.

6. Examine and critique the role of the media in creating and sustaining appearance-based bullying and the sexualisation of young women.

Our questionnaire analysis indicated that appearance-based bullying was the most common form of sexual bullying, and the quantitative and qualitative analyses showed that both young women and young men could be very critical of a young woman's appearance. Furthermore, the professionals highlighted concerns about the role of the media in this form of sexual bullying, as well as the wider sexualisation of young women.

7. Discuss and challenge victim-blaming so that young people's experiences of sexual bullying are not rationalised, downplayed or dismissed by their peers.

Young men and women in the focus groups often suggested that those who had experienced sexual bullying were at least partly responsible for what had happened through their actions or inactions, appearance, or perceived difference.

8. Acknowledge and address young people's concerns about reporting sexual bullying to adults.

Many of the young people expressed concerns about coming forward to report sexual bullying to an appropriate adult or service. In particular, they expressed a degree of scepticism about the anticipated (lack of) response from adults, and a fear that reporting it could exacerbate the problem.

9. Provide information on what to do if a young person experiences sexual bullying and what sources of appropriate advice and support are available within their school/ youth organisation and wider community.

Young people expressed a need for awareness-raising activities on how to tackle sexual bullying. There was also some debate between young people concerning which adults or services should be approached, and concerns that reporting incidents to adults within the school, in particular, might directly make the problem worse. The professionals highlighted how sexual bullying policies and services were stronger in some schools than others, indicating that there are likely to be instances where young people might need to seek help further afield.

10. Capitalise on young people's eagerness to help and support each other by providing guidance on safe and effective bystander intervention.

Young people discussed how peers could be particularly well situated to provide support to those who experience or are concerned about sexual bullying.

11. Include young people in the co-delivery of the programme.

Young people suggested that they would feel more comfortable discussing these issues with their peers than adults and that their peers were more likely to understand them due to their similarity in age and experience.

12. Include training for both young people and adults facilitating the programme.

In particular, this might include the young trainees sharing their knowledge and experiences of sexual bullying with the adult trainees so that the adults are aware of contemporary forms of sexual bullying and technology-mediated sexual bullying. Our analysis highlighted a concern among professionals that adults could not keep up with the technology used by young people and the way in which this is used to bully others.

4.2 Wider policy and practice implications of the findings

Our research suggests that sexual bullying is a significant issue for many young people. It requires interventions with young people, but also policy changes with respect to the education and wellbeing of young people, as well as changes to practice (e.g. staff training). Thus our wider policy and practice recommendations are addressed to a range of stakeholders, including schools, other professionals working with/for children, and internet service and site providers. We provide 11 recommendations for these stakeholders:

Schools

1. A whole school approach should be employed, incorporating head-teachers, teachers, school counsellors, parents, and young people themselves.

The professionals emphasised the importance of informing and engaging all stakeholders to tackle and prevent sexual bullying most effectively. This might take the form of developing specific anti-bullying policies on sexual bullying, providing interventions on sexual bullying for young people, and providing information and training on sexual bullying (including technology-mediated sexual bullying, the 'signs' to look out for, and information on how to respond to it) to teachers, counsellors and parents (see below).

2. School anti-bullying policies should cover sexual bullying and sexual cyberbullying specifically and make clear the reporting procedures and how incidents of sexual bullying will be dealt with.

The professionals emphasized the need for a clear, consistent and regulated approach to sexual bullying in schools.

3. Schools should engage in primary prevention programmes with young people that: raise awareness of sexual bullying; challenge the prejudices and stereotypes about gender and sexuality that can give rise to it; discuss technology-mediated forms of sexual bullying and how young people can take steps to protect themselves and others from sexual cyberbullying; highlight the effects of sexual bullying on those being bullied; and empower young people with the knowledge and skills to respond to sexual bullying acts that they might witness or experience (e.g. by employing the ASBAE project's 'ACT pack').

Prevention programmes that aim to reduce the number of new cases of sexual bullying should be delivered to all students within the school (or other youth environment).

The questionnaire data, as well as the focus group discussions with young people and professionals highlighted that sexual bullying is a pervasive issue among young people. Our questionnaire data also showed that nearly two-fifths of young people both experienced and enacted sexual bullying, thereby highlighting that prevention programmes aimed at only 'victims' or only 'bullies' would be problematic. The design and delivery of the prevention programme should be in line with the recommendations made above.

4. Schools should provide Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) classes to all students, which should include discussion of how to develop and maintain healthy, respectful relationships (including sexual relationships) with peers.

The professionals emphasised that sex and relationships education in schools is an important primary prevention tool that should be made mandatory. In addition, during the focus groups, young people said that they valued having a space to talk about these issues and saw it as important.

5. Classroom lessons (e.g. Information Technology, PSHE) should focus on responsible and safe use of locally relevant technologies and social networking sites.

The prevalence of technology-mediated sexual bullying was highlighted by both young people and professionals. Our data also indicated that different online services and sites are popular in different communities, and that young people are not clear about how to protect their personal material from misuse (e.g. from becoming public).

6. Teachers should be provided with training on sexual bullying, its forms and prevention in order to lead provision around sexual bullying issues.

The professionals expressed concerns over adults' unfamiliarity with technology-mediated forms of sexual bullying. Furthermore, young people highlighted concerns that teachers might not always respond to sexual bullying incidents, or if they did, might not do so adequately.

Professionals working with/for children

7. Inter-agency co-operation is required to ensure a coherent and consistent response to sexual bullying situations.

The professionals emphasised that the complex, multi-dimensional nature of sexual bullying necessitated shared understandings and 'joined up' responses and practices.

8. Ongoing training is required to ensure that professionals are knowledgeable about the most current forms of sexual bullying among young people in their community.

The professionals in our study expressed concern about the changing pace of technology and related forms of sexual bullying.

9. Community-based, trained professionals should be visible, available and active in working with young people around sexual bullying.

Young people were ambivalent about approaching their parents for advice or support. In some cases, they were also ambivalent about the effectiveness of approaching teachers and concerned that accessing help at school could present a risk of being exposed by their peers and exacerbate the problem. Young people highlighted the importance of being able to approach other trusted adults, including specialist services.

Internet service and site providers

10. More secure and effective controls on access to pornographic websites.



The professionals identified how young people were bypassing age restrictions and breaking passwords. A few young people also suggested that more careful verification of the viewer's age was needed on pornographic websites.

11. Greater regulation of the content of third party pop-ups.

Both the young people and professionals highlighted the potential for unintentional exposure to sexually explicit material or content via third party pop-ups on websites.



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6. Appendices

Appendix 1: Method

The ASBAE project adopted a participatory action approach. A Young People Advisory Group (YPAG) was set up in each of the five countries to provide us with locally relevant input and feedback on each stage of the project over the two-year period. For the research phase of the project, this included consultation and feedback on: the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form for young people; the interview schedule for the focus groups with young people; the media clips used to generate discussion; and the questionnaire on young people's experiences of being bullied and bullying others. The YPAGs also advised on recruiting young people for the research.

Eight single-sex focus groups were conducted with young people in each country; four with 13-15 year olds and four with 16-18 year olds. Within this, we aimed to include young people from both urban and rural areas. Both parental consent and young people's assent were obtained. (Typically two) trained members of staff from the in-country partner organisation conducted the focus groups. The focus groups started by welcoming participants, reiterating key ethical information, establishing ground rules for the session and running a brief rapport-building exercise. This was followed by discussion of three topic areas:

1. Expectations and difficulties in peer relationships;
2. Awareness and understandings of sexual bullying;
3. Tackling and preventing sexual bullying.

Media clips of sexual bullying scenarios, taken from television films and anti-bullying and anti-abuse campaigns, were used to facilitate discussion during topics two and three. An average of 2-3 clips were used per focus group (from a choice of six).

Between topics two and three, the young people individually completed an anonymous questionnaire about their experiences of sexual bullying. Participants were asked to indicate how often they had been subject to 25 different sexual bullying behaviours on a scale of 0- *Never* to 4- *Often*, and invited to provide a written account of one of these experiences via a series of open-ended questions covering what happened, who was involved, what they were 'thinking/feeling' at the time and what they thought the other person was 'thinking/feeling' at the time. The same set of questions (closed and open) were subsequently repeated in relation to the participant's experiences of enacting sexual bullying against others. When providing the written accounts, participants were given the option of writing about a sexual bullying act that a friend had been subject to/enacted, if they preferred. Based on feedback from the YPAGs, the questionnaire was positioned here to help break up the session and limit the likelihood that participants would be too tired to complete the writing tasks.

We also conducted one focus group with professionals in each country. The professionals worked in child education and protection. The focus groups covered three topics:

1. Background/rapport-building;
2. Understandings of sexual bullying and experiences of working with young people who experience/enact it;
3. Tackling and preventing sexual bullying.

All focus groups were recorded with permission and transcribed. The transcripts, and open-ended written accounts from the questionnaires with young people, were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was led by the Leeds Beckett team. All partners received training and support in thematic analysis and produced their own in-country research reports. These individual reports then informed the production of the European-wide research report.

Full wording for quantitative questionnaire items

How often does a young person or group of young people do these to you...?

When we say ‘young person’ we mean someone 18 or under. Please tick only one box for each statement (Never, Once, Rarely, Sometimes or Often).

A young person or group of young people...

		Never	Once	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
1	...stare at your body in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable					
2	...say sexual things to you about your body or the way you look that offend or upset you					
3	...pretend to act out sexual acts in front of you that offend or upset you					

They call you mean names (to your face, by mobile phone or using the internet) because...

4	...of the way you dress					
5	...they think you aren't good-looking					
6	...they think you have had sex					
7	...they think you haven't had sex					
8	...they think you are lesbian, gay or bisexual					

They spread mean rumours about you (behind your back, by mobile phone or using the internet) because...

9	...of the way you dress					
10	...they think you aren't good-looking					
11	...they think you have had sex					
12	...they think you haven't had sex					
13	...they think you are lesbian, gay or bisexual					

		Never	Once	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
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They use mobile phones or the internet to...

14	...try to take a photo up your skirt or down your trousers when you don't want them to					
15	...pressure you to send sexy photos or videos of yourself to them					
16	...upload, send or show other people sexy photos or videos of you without your permission					

They use mobile phones or the internet to show/send you unwanted...

17	...sexual jokes					
18	...pornographic photos or videos					
19	...messages about your body or what you're wearing					
20	...messages about having sex with you					

They...

21	...brush up against you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable					
22	...flash their bottom or private parts to you when you don't want them to					
23	...touch your breasts, chest or muscles when you don't want them to					
24	...touch your bottom or private parts when you don't want them to					
25	...make you do something sexual when you don't want to					

How often have you done these to another young person...?

When we say 'young person' we mean someone aged 18 or under. Please tick only one box for each statement (Never, Once, Rarely, Sometimes or Often). YP = young person.

Either on your own or with a group of young people, how often have you...

		Never	Once	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
1	...stared at a young person's (YP's) body in a way that you knew was making them feel uncomfortable					
2	...said sexual things to a YP about their body or the way they looked to offend or upset them					
3	...pretended to act out sexual acts in front of a YP to offend or upset them					

Called a YP mean names (to their face, by mobile phone or using the internet) because...

4	...of the way they dressed					
5	...you thought they weren't good-looking					
6	...you thought they'd had sex					
7	...you thought they hadn't had sex					
8	...you thought they were lesbian, gay or bisexual					

Spread mean rumours about a YP (behind their back, by mobile phone or using the internet) because...

9	...of the way they dressed					
10	...you thought they weren't good-looking					
11	...you thought they'd had sex					
12	...you thought they hadn't had sex					
13	...you thought they were lesbian, gay or bisexual					

		Never	Once	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
--	--	-------	------	--------	-----------	-------

Used mobile phones or the internet to...

14	...try to take a photo up a YP's skirt or down their trousers when they didn't want you to					
15	...pressure a YP to send sexy photos or videos of themselves to you					
16	...upload, send or show other people sexy photos or videos of a YP without their permission					

Used mobile phones or the internet to show/send a YP unwanted...

17	...sexual jokes					
18	...pornographic photos or videos					
19	...messages about their body or what they're wearing					
20	...messages about having sex with them					

You have...

21	...brushed up against a YP in a way that you knew was making them feel uncomfortable					
22	...flashed your bottom or private parts to a YP when they didn't want you to					
23	...touched a YP's breasts, chest or muscles when they didn't want you to					
24	...touched a YP's bottom or private parts when they didn't want you to					
25	...made a YP do something sexual when they didn't want you to					

Appendix 2: Research participants

Over the five countries, 253 young people participated. This included approximately equal numbers of young women ($n = 125$; 49%) and young men ($n = 128$; 51%). The average age of the participants was 15.27 (*Standard deviation* = 1.64). Participants mostly commonly identified as being White (85%), though other ethnicities were represented (8% Black, 5% Asian, 2% Mixed ethnic background). Nearly three-quarters of the sample were Christian (71%), with the remainder, Muslim (11%), Sikh (<1%), other (1%) or with no religious affiliation (17%). Nearly all (98%) were in school, training or other education and 4% were in paid employment. The majority identified as being attracted to different sex people (96% heterosexual) and a minority identified as being attracted to same sex people (2% gay) or both different and same sex people (2% bisexual); a quarter (26%) of the participants were currently in a relationship. Three-quarters (74%) of the participants lived in an urban area. Partners recruited young people by approaching organisations that were already in their networks; participants for nearly half of the focus groups (46%) were recruited from schools/colleges, with the remainder recruited from youth centres (27% of focus groups), non-governmental organisations (17% of focus groups) and other organisations (e.g. volunteer firefighters' brigades, football clubs; 10% of focus groups).

A total of 37 professionals who worked in child education and protection also participated. The professionals were predominantly female (78% women; 22% men), with an average age of 37.27 (*Standard deviation* = 8.51). Nearly all participants identified as White (97%; 3% Black). Participants were recruited from a wide variety of organisations through partners' existing networks; nearly half of the participants worked for a charity or non-governmental organisation (46%) and the remainder worked for the government (16%), a school or college (16%), youth centres (16%), other organisations (3%) or multiple organisations (3%). The Bulgarian participants included three social workers, a psychologist, a lawyer, an outreach worker, an educational consultant, an educational mediator, a careers counsellor, a multi-ethnic support consultant and a Director of Prevention. The Italian participants were all youth group organisers. The Latvian participants included five psychologists and one manager of an NGO who was also a gender equality expert. The Slovenian participants included three counsellors and one youth centre trainer. Finally, the UK participants included a wide variety of professionals who were predominantly involved in safeguarding, and the prevention of sexual exploitation and gang violence. The majority of the professionals worked with young people who were subject to sexual bullying, as well as young people who enacted sexual bullying (83%), who averaged between 10 - 18 years of age. The participants reported an average of 9.07 years' experience (*Standard deviation* = 7.16) in working with sexual bullying clients, and they typically spent 29.91% (*Standard deviation* = 23.86) of their working time focusing on sexual bullying issues.

Appendix 3: About the ASBAE project and the ACT pack

The ASBAE (Addressing Sexual Bullying Across Europe) project was funded by the European Commission's Daphne III programme (which aims to protect children, young people and women against all forms of violence), as part of its funding priority 'empowerment work at grassroots level'. The project was led by Leeds Beckett University and included partners from NGOs in Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, Slovenia and the UK:

- Leeds Beckett is a British higher education institution. Situated within the Centre for Applied Social Research, the team has expertise in, and a commitment to, understanding marginalisation, victimisation, dominance and power.
- Pepita is an Italian NGO that aims to help children and young people develop their skills and potential through the means of peer education projects.
- MARTA Centre is a Latvian NGO that aims to provide support to women, including non-citizens and migrants, women with low income and unemployed women, and female victims of human trafficking and of domestic violence.
- Demetra is a Bulgarian NGO working on issues particularly relevant to women and children, including domestic violence, trafficking and discrimination.
- Papilot is a Slovenian institute for the development and enhancement of quality of life, with a focus on social entrepreneurship, education, training and guidance for youth, the unemployed, the elderly and people with disabilities.
- Leap is one of the UK's leading experts on youth and conflict. They work with young people to help prevent the escalation of everyday conflict into destructive behaviour and violence.



The ASBAE project ran for two years (January 2013 - January 2015). Throughout the project, the team benefitted from young people's knowledge, expertise and creativity. Year 1 was devoted to research with young people and professionals, and Year 2 to the development of a peer-to-peer intervention designed to enhance young people's awareness of, and skills to protect themselves and others from, sexual bullying. The development of the peer-to-peer intervention drew on the findings from the research in Year 1, as well as development events with 120 young people across the five countries. The resulting *Awareness, Co-operation, Tackling (ACT) to stop sexual bullying pack* ('The ACT pack') was then piloted with a further 120 young people before it was finalised for wider release.

The ACT pack incorporates all of the recommendations made in Section 4.1 of this report. It includes:

- An introduction to sexual bullying, the ASBAE project and why sexual bullying needs to be addressed;
- An overview of the ACT pack, its goals and intended outcomes, and the steps that need to be undertaken to secure its success;
- A process for identifying and recruiting young and adult facilitators;
- Information for adult facilitators;
- Information for young facilitators;



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- A training programme for peer teams - young and adult facilitators;
- The ACT workshop on sexual bullying;
- Further information and resources.

The ACT workshop is structured around five main themes: awareness of sexual bullying, gender and sexuality, sexting, effects of sexual bullying, and tackling sexual bullying.

The ACT pack can be downloaded for free from www.asbae.eu.