

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

NATIONAL FIELDWORK REPORT

Country: Slovenia

Researcher: Katarina Zupevc

Date: 07/05/2021

1. INTRODUCTION

GBV in universities and research organizations was only recently recognized as a problem that needs to be addressed, especially when the victims are students and perpetrators, the employees. Some cases of GBV among employees have occurred in the past years and were handled in the context of work legislation. However, recent cases with student victims that happened in 2020 and 2021 fueled a broad public debate and are interesting for numerous reasons. They showed that existent institutional approach to and institutional acts for handling cases of GBV are not sufficient (for example, *Rules on Measures to Protect the Dignity of Employees at the University of Ljubljana and Students at the University of Ljubljana*). Relevant institutions, therefore, reacted immediately, and some measures have already been implemented (for example, at the Faculty of Arts¹ and at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television² of the University of Ljubljana). Public debates and educational seminars have also been organized by different institutions. It has also been noted that a more holistic approach to handling this problem on a national level (legislation, policies, strategies) would be necessary. So far, the known cases of GBV against students are limited to the University of Ljubljana. However, students of another public university (University of Primorska) also drew attention to their experiences with GBV, showing that GBV is, unfortunately, the reality that is not limited to any institution in particular but is a general problem in higher education.³ This can also be concluded by the fact that even more victims of GBV shared their experiences on a web page of #MeToo movement, which collects narratives about GBV. However, it is not known to which extend GBV actually exists in HE institutions. Therefore it is of great value that a Research Group, Rezistenca organized a national survey about the prevalence and different forms of GBV experienced by students at Slovenian HE institutions. The Committee on Education, Science, Sport and Youth also proposed to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport to execute a national survey about GBV at HE institutions in Slovenia. The results of the survey should be available by the end of 2021.



1

2. MAPPING OF POLICIES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

¹ The Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana appointed trustworthy persons for victims of GBV in 2020; *Professional Guidelines for Prevention of Sexual and Other Harassment, Mobbing and Violence* were issued in 2021. Different round tables have been organized in the context of Days of Gender Equality.

² The Academy changed the protocol of practical lessons (at least 2 professors present); educational training for employees and students about GBV; foreseen conduct of behavior, trustworthy persons,...

³ All activities organized and measures implemented or foreseen are connected to the University of Ljubljana and its members. To some extent, this could be connected with the fact that the most recent cases of sexual harassment happened at the members of UL. However, it must be noted that, for example, the University of Maribor plans to make a GEP in 2022.

- The laws, policies, and strategies that exist at different levels (national level, regional level, RFOs);

So far, no national strategies, policies and particular laws concerning GBV in academia exist. RFOs do not have any policies to address GBV in academia. However, GBV in academia can be handled by different existent national legislations:

- Criminal Code – KZ-1 (2008) is relevant in cases of criminal offences against sexual integrity.
- Labor legislation covers relations among employees and among employees and superiors. It can be applied in cases of GBV (sexual harassment) – civil offences that are limited to the workplace (Employment Relationships Act – ZDR-1 (2013); Health and Safety at Work Act – ZVZD-1 (2011); Public Employees Act – ZJU (2003)).
- Discrimination based on numerous personal circumstances as civil offence is addressed in Protection against Discrimination Act – ZVarD (2016).
- Gender-based discrimination is addressed in Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act – ZEMŽM (2002).

- The main actors/stakeholders;

As already noted, GBV at universities and other HE institutions *per se* is not addressed at a national level. However, different actors are involved in addressing GBV in general and would possibly propose changes to existent legislations:

- National Assembly is the highest representative and legislative body, which (among other things) adopts laws, ordinances, resolutions, declarations, recommendations and decisions and would be in charge of adoption of any new legislation regarding GBV in academia.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (School Directorate) would be responsible for any national policies and strategies regarding GBV in academia. The Inspectorate of Education and Sport would monitor the implementation of policies/strategies.
- Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities is already in charge of work legislation. Labor Inspectorate monitors the implementation/violation of the legislation and prepares reports.
- Ministry of the Interior – Police is responsible for the prosecution of GBV, reported to the police.

- An expert assessment of the extent to which the national and/or regional as well as RFO policies have an impact on the organizational level of HEIs and RPOs in the country;

So far, no national and RFO policies about GBV in academia exist in Slovenia. But it has been noted that changes in this sense are necessary and inevitable.

- Other relevant activities to combat GBV in universities and research organizations (national and regional level, RFOs);



The first question that needs to be addressed is the prevalence of GBV in academia at a national level. Research group Rezistenca initiated a survey about sexual harassment of students at all public universities and higher vocational schools. Preliminary results are already available; the survey ends 25/05/2021. Some measures to combat GBV have already been implemented, especially provision information about available services for the victims and in a light of prevention (awareness-raising about GBV).

Another national research about the prevalence of GBV in academia has been initiated by Parliament Committee on Education, Science, Sport and Youth. The research will be coordinated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

No activities have been implemented by RFOs so far; at an institutional level (universities, faculties) different prevention measures have been implemented (especially awareness-raising activities, such as seminars, public debates, round tables).

- An expert assessment of the extent to which the national and/or regional as well as RFO policies have had an impact on the organisational level of universities and research organisations in the country;

The impact cannot be observed while no relevant policies exist in Slovenia.

- The role of RPOs in providing knowledge on GBV and whether and how GBV is included as a topic in relevant curricula and in teaching in universities (e.g., medicine, police and the army, etc.).

Based on the first report about the implementation of the Istanbul Convention - GREVIO, published in 2019 (Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2019), different educational activities for employees from relevant professions about GBV are organised regularly. For example:

- Police: employees who work on the prevention and prosecution of GBV on a regular basis are obligated to educate themselves about GBV at least 3 days a year (those who encounter GBV occasionally at least 1 day a year).
- Judicature: different seminars are organized for employees yearly by different institutions (for example, Judicial Training Centre, Society of Public Prosecutors, Peace Institute, Faculty of Social Sciences, Association for Nonviolent Communication,...).
- Schools and kindergartens: training for teachers and parents about GBV, organised by, for example, National Institute for Public Health, Ministry for Education, Science and Sport, National Education Institute, Ministry for Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities,...).
- Social Workers.

Relevant universities/schools include the topic of GBV into their curricula, for example:

- Violence against women and domestic violence is addressed at the Police Academy (subject criminology) through lectures, didactic exercises, seminars, interactive education,...
- GBV is included in curricula at a level of medical faculty in the context of specialization in Pediatrics and Primary Health Care.
- Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana.



Another activity related to disseminating knowledge about GBV its project *React – you are not alone*⁴, which has been developed for awareness-raising of the future teaching staff at the University of Primorska about different forms of violence, services for victims,... The web page of the project contains a lot of relevant information about different forms of GBV.

It can also be noted that the Commission for Equal Opportunities in Science summoned the Slovenian Rectors Conference and Coordination of Independent Research Institutes of Slovenia to organize education about sexual harassment and sexism for all employees as well as students.

Due to recent cases of GBV University of Ljubljana already organized round tables about GBV in academia for all employees and also for students in April 2021. The same was announced to be done by the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana.

3. DEBATES REGARDING #METOO AND THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

Slovenian #MeToo movement was organized in 2018, and one of its activities is also a web page that collects narratives about GBV in private and all public settings. After recent cases of GBV at University of Ljubljana numerous new narratives about experiences with GBV in academia were submitted.

The debate about Istanbul Convention was not directly linked to universities and research organizations (the Convention was, for example, only mentioned in connection with research about GBV organised by Research Group Rezistenca); however, the importance of the Istanbul Convention had stressed again in connection with recent events when Poland invited Slovenia to withdraw from Istanbul Convention.



4. PUBLIC OPINION ON GBV

No recent national public opinion survey about GBV in universities and research organizations has been found. Public opinion about domestic violence has been addressed, for example, in a university diploma *Public opinion on the domestic violence in Slovenia* from 2019. The research included 252 respondents who answered the web questionnaire. 74% of respondents recognized the rise of domestic violence cases; 75% of them would call the police in case of violence next door (19% would not know what to do). 92% of respondents find domestic violence unacceptable; on the other hand, 63% do not find it wrong to spank a child in case he/she does sth very wrong (Sirk, 2019).

Another university diploma can be mentioned in connection with public opinion on rape: *Some sociological aspects of social perception of rape in postmodern society* from 2013. 178 respondents answered the questionnaire, which has been disseminated via Facebook and email in 2013. Some of the findings are: 60% of respondents consider rape as the worst form of sexual violence and that 99% of perpetrators are men. A significant share of respondents considers that the responsibility for rape is on the side of the victim (12,9% blamed “provocative clothing” of the victim; 19,1% blamed “inappropriate and provocative behavior” of the victim); 54,5% of respondents consider alcohol and drugs as the main reason for rape; 69% of respondents also recognized the possibility of rape happening in relationship/marriage. 26,4%

⁴ <https://www.reagiraj.com/reagiraj.html>

of respondents also personally know one victim of rape; 7,9% know more than one victim) (Praprotnik, 2013).

The sociologist dr. Jasna Podreka observes high tolerance of GBV in Slovenian society. GBV, such as sexual harassment, is often not recognised as such, but as something "normal", "nothing special", which is a consequence of objectification of the female body. Relatively low reporting of sexual violence to the police in Slovenia is a consequence of victims not being confident to report such occurrences; they are often afraid that nobody will believe them, also of secondary stigmatization, which happens at institutions (courts, police). One of the very strong myths about GBV in Slovenia is also that rape cannot happen in a relationship (see Jager, 2018; also Vrečar 2019). It can be assumed that other myths about sexual violence exist in Slovenian society, while numerous others are being addressed on the web page of NGO Association for Nonviolent Communication:

- "it was not rape. It was just rough sexual intercourse",
- "sexual violence happens only if there was rape",
- "women say no when they really mean yes",
- "some women enjoy sexual violence",
- "some boys and girls enjoy sexual abuse; they don't oppose it; if it happens more than one time they must enjoy it",
- "women provoke men with their clothes",
- "women take risk when they go out alone,"
- "girls seduce older men",
- "victims of sexual violence come from deprived environments to problematic girls,...",
- "women make false reports out of revenge",
- "victims should speak earlier about what happened to them."⁵



High tolerance for GBV can also be observed in Slovenian public and political discourse. On the other hand, numerous public persons did condemn GBV at universities, which has been made public recently.

5. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DISCUSSIONS ABOUT GBV

Discussions about GBV in universities and research organizations are not connected directly to COVID-19. However, domestic violence has been recognized as a great problem at the time of the pandemic worldwide and also in Slovenia. The Institute of Criminology at the Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana, published a report on crime in the time of COVID-19 in April 2020. The report noted that the reporting rate of domestic violence is relatively low, which is worrying. Seeking help is much more difficult due to higher control of victims during the lockdown; schools and other public places have been closed, and victims were forced to spend more time at home, behind closed doors, with their perpetrators (Plesničar, M. M., Drobnejak, M., Filipčič, K., 2020). The Human Rights Ombudsman inquired about the availability and accessibility of helplines and shelters for women victims of domestic violence during the epidemic; some NGOs and social work centers noticed an increase in the number of calls, while others noticed no change due to the increased presence of an abusive partner. The Police and NGOs also warned about the relatively low rate of victims seeking help and made a public appeal to neighbours, friends,

⁵ <https://www.drustvo-dnk.si/o-nasilju/spolno-nasilje/34>

relatives of victims of domestic violence to provide help to them. The presence of information for victims of domestic violence in the media was increased, and alternative methods of communication have been established (Skype, Messenger, Facebook,...) (Human Rights Ombudsman, 2020).

6. CONCLUSION

Since the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2015, numerous activities to combat GBV in Slovenia has already been implemented, based on the GREVIO report. However, none of them was directly connected to higher education and research institutions. Until very recently, no cases of GBV at universities and research institutions with student victims were made public. After recent cases of sexual harassment of students, numerous narratives about sexual harassment were submitted to the web page of #MeToo movement; it has become clear that GBV is a problem at academic and research institutions in Slovenia. The only national research about the prevalence of GBV, in general, is more than 10 years old; therefore, new data is needed and will hopefully be available soon (two surveys are planned on a national level – one connected with academic settings, another about GBV in general).

Some form of national document (law, policy, strategy), that would be put into force by a national authority and would address GBV in academia is needed in Slovenia. But the change of legislation is only the beginning, although necessary. Institutional documents that exist now proved to be insufficient in reality (for example, the protocol of protecting the victims is unclear). In renovation and/or preparation of these/new documents, good practices from other countries could also be considered and moulded to the Slovenian context on a national level, that would consider specifics of Slovenian academic space, as well as to the context of individual institutions; many differences exist among academic institutions that need specific addressing (for example size of the institution; universities vs. research institutes,...).

GBV in general and especially sexual harassment is also relatively highly tolerated in Slovenian society. Therefore it is sometimes hard to detect and address it. Relativization and normalization of sexual harassment can be noticed in public discourse; victim blaming is also very common. Therefore the sensibilization of society as a whole is needed, and zero tolerance of GBV should be the goal. Media could play an important part in awareness-raising, but must also consider appropriate addressing and reporting about GBV, especially dedicating more media space to the experts. At an institutional level this can be done with systematic and regular (annual) training of employees and especially students with the aim to provide information about more elusive forms of GBV, such as sexual harassment, that is too often still understood as “normal” (for example sexist jokes, staring at someone,...) and even more important, about services available to victims of GBV at the institutional level. Based on preliminary results of survey by Research Group Rezistenca victims of GBV and especially sexual harassment often do not recognize these occurrences as GBV, on the other hand, they do not know how to address these occurrences, they are not familiar with relevant institutional acts,... Therefore intense awareness-raising to address this lack of information would be one of the necessary steps towards the elimination of cases of GBV in the future. A partnership among different academic disciplines as well as among academia, NGOs and GOs would bring the best results.

7. REFERENCES



Criminal Code (KZ-1). (2008). *Official Gazette RS*, no. 50/12 – official consolidated text, 6/16 – corr., 54/15, 38/16, 27/17 and 91/20.

<http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5050>

Employment Relationships Act (ZDR-1). (2013). *Official Gazette RS*, no. 21/13, 78/13 – corr., 47/15 – ZZSDT, 33/16 – PZ-F, 52/16, 15/17 – dec., US, 22/19 – ZPosS, 81/19 and 293/20 – ZIUPOPĐVE. <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5944>

Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act (ZEMŽM). (2002). *Official Gazette RS*, no. 59/02, 61/07 – ZUNEO-A, 33/16 – ZVarD and 59/19.

<http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3418>

Health and Safety at Work Act (ZVZD-1). (2011). *Official Gazette RS*, no. 43/11.

<http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5537>

Human Rights Ombudsman. (2020). *Written Contribution by the Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)*. https://www.varuh-rs.si/fileadmin/user_upload/CENTER_-_GREVIO/Written_contribution_by_the_Human_Rights_Ombudsman_of_the_Republic_of_Slovenia_on_the_implementation_of_the_Istanbul_Convent.pdf

Jager, V. (2.3.2018). Dr. Jasna Podreka, sociologinja, ki daje glas ženskam, ki so molčale. *Mladina*. <https://www.mladina.si/184414/dr-jasna-podreka-sociologinja-ki-daje-glas-zenskam-ki-so-molcale/>

Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. (2019). *First report of the Republic of Slovenia on the Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) for period 2017-2018*. <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MDDSZ/Enake-moznosti/GREVIOPorocilo2019.pdf>

Plesničar, M. M., Drobňjak, M., Filipčič, K. (2020). *Criminology in Times of COVID-19. Study*. The Institute of Criminology, Faculty of Law. <http://inst-krim.si/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Kriminaliteta-v-dobi-covid-19.pdf>

Podreka, J., Antić Gaber, M., Pihler Ciglič, B. and Kenda, J. (2021). *Professional Guidelines for Prevention of Sexual and other Harassment, Mobbing and Violence*. University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts. https://www.ff.uni-lj.si/sites/default/files/documents/Smernice%20UL%20FF_proti%20nasilju_24.%2003.%202021.pdf

Praprotnik, M. (2013). *Some Sociological Aspects of Social Perception of Rape in Postmodern Society* [Graduation Thesis, University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts]. <https://dk.um.si/Dokument.php?id=59158>

Protection Against Discrimination Act (ZVarD). (2016). *Official Gazette RS*, no. 33/16 and 21/18 – ZNorg. <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7273>

Public Employees Act (ZJU). (2003). *Official Gazette RS*, no. 63/07 – official consolidated text, 65/08, 69/08 – ZTFI-A, 69/08 – ZZavar-E, 40/12 – ZUJF, 158/20 – ZIntPK-C and 203/20 – ZIUPOPĐVE. <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO3177>



Sirk, K. (2019). *Public Opinion on the Domestic Violence in Slovenia*. [Graduation Thesis, University of Maribor, Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security].
<https://dk.um.si/Dokument.php?id=137436>

University of Ljubljana. (2012) *Rules on Measures to Protect the Dignity of Employees at the University of Ljubljana and Students at the University of Ljubljana*. https://www.ff.uni-lj.si/sites/default/files/documents/Pravilnik%20o%20ukrepih%20za%20varovanje%20dostojanstva%20zaposlenih%20na%20UL%20in%20s%CC%8Cstudentov%20UL%20%283%29_0.pdf

Vrečar, U. (19.1.2019). "Njihova največja bojazen je ta, da jim ne bodo verjeli." *24.ur.com*.
<https://www.24ur.com/novice/slovenija/toleranca-do-spolnega-nasilja.html>



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101006261.

The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Union.