Situation Analysis:

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of Adolescents in Cyprus

EEA Project: 'I'M SET!' – Implementing Mandatory Sexuality Education for Teens in Cyprus

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Notes

EEA Grants

Table of Contents

I. Definitions

Adolescents/Youths/Young People: The World Health Organization defines young people as individuals between the ages of 10 and 24 years old. Adolescents comprise the 10-19 year-old age group and youth the 15-24 year old age group. Adolescence is a key stage of the life course that affects health, opportunities and development for the rest of life. It is a time of physical, mental, social and emotional change accompanied by an increasing definition of sexual identity and social status. Managing these changes to achieve optimal health and personal development is challenging and is profoundly affected by social experiences.

Human sexuality is a natural and integral part of every human being from the moment of birth. For this reason, learning about sexuality is a lifelong process, since messages about sexuality are transmitted either directly or indirectly, through social interactions and experiences. Sexuality encompasses sex, the identities and roles of gender, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, reproduction, self image and body image. Sexuality is experienced and expressed through thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality may include all of these dimensions, all these are not always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors[1].

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)* refer to a wide range of issues, which support the freedom of every person to enjoy their sexuality and reproductive capacity, within a framework of equity, mutual respect and equal rights. This term includes sexual health, sexual rights, reproductive health and reproductive rights.

Sexual Health is a state of physical, emotional and mental well-being related to sexuality, not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or disability[2].

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1 World Health Organization: sexual health (2008).
www.who.int/reproductivehealth/gender/sexualhealth.html
2 World Health Organization: sexual health (2008).
www.who.int/reproductivehealth/gender/sexual_health.html

Sexual Rights* are the rights of all people to decide freely and responsibly on all aspects of their sexuality, including safeguarding and promoting their sexual health, while both their sex life, as well as their decisions are free from discrimination, violence and coercion. In their sexual relationships they have the right to expect and demand equality, consent, mutual respect and equal responsibility[3].

Reproductive Health is a state of complete physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system, its functions and operations and not just the absence of disease, dysfunction or disability[4].

Reproductive Rights* are the rights of couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly whether they want to have children, how many children they want to have and when to have them and to have the information, education and means to be able to take this decision. Also they include the right to enjoy a high level of sexual and reproductive health, as well as the right to free decision-making, without discrimination, persuasion, coercion or violence, on issues related to reproduction[5].

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is "human rights based approach aiming at equipping young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values required to make informed decisions and enjoy their sexuality physically, emotionally, individually, and in their relationships. It approaches sexuality holistically and within the frame of emotional and social development"[6]. In order for CSE to be successful, information is needed on: gender, sexual and reproductive health and STI's (including abstinence and developing competencies for the prevention of high-risk behaviour), sexual and reproductive rights* and sexual identity, enjoyment, pleasure, violence, diversity, relationships. Thus CSE can help to delay the debut of sexual intercourse, reduce the frequency of unprotected sexual activity, reduce the number of sexual partners and increase the use of protection against pregnancy and STIs during sexual intercourse.

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3 www.icw.org/files/SRHR-ICW% 20fact% 20sheet-06.doc
4 www.who.int/topics/reproductive_health/en/
5 www.icw.org/files/SRHR-ICW% 20fact% 20sheet-06.doc
6 International Planned Parenthood Federation (2006), Framework on Sexuality Education. For more information: 'Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Informing IPPF Synthesis Report', (2005), London, IPPF. http://www.sgga-assa.ch/cms10/images/stories/sgga/dokumente/infos/0806IPPF-guideline-eng.pdf
*sexual rights are human rights created with adults as a point of reference and adjusted to apply to children through the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC)

Sex refers to biological characteristics that men and women are born with. They are universal and generally permanent, e.g. men cannot breastfeed, women menstruate etc.

Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women by society. Their socialisation is influenced by their families, peers, communities and institutions such as the media. **'Gender'** is not biological - girls and boys are not born knowing how they should look, dress, speak, behave, think or act. We are influenced by our families and friends as well as by our education and our culture, including the music we listen to, the films we watch and all the advertising we see on a daily basis. Society as a whole sends out messages about the characteristics and roles of girls and boys. Basically, society puts us all in 'gender boxes'.

Gender roles have become more equal in recent decades so that there are fewer differences between girls' roles and boys' roles, but traditional gender roles still have a lot of influence. Even if we don't always realize it, there is a great deal of pressure on us to conform to them. Many people think that gender roles are just 'the way things are', but the reality is that gender roles are created, imposed on individuals and change over time and from place to place.

Gender Norms are created by our culture, not by nature and can change over time. A few decades ago, for example, it would have been highly unusual, if not unthinkable, for a man to choose to give up work in order to stay at home and look after his children. Despite many advances in equality of opportunities and rights between women and men, 'traditional' or 'rigid' gender norms remain pervasive in Europe and across the world amongst both adults and young people. Gender norms can be so ingrained that people often accept them as 'the way things are' and fail to recognise the power they have to shape expectations and behaviour[7].

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any kind of discrimination or harmful behaviour which is directed against a person on the basis of their (real or perceived) gender or sexual orientation. GBV may be physical, sexual, psychological, economic or socio-cultural. Its root causes need to be understood in the context of

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7 Carroll, J. L. (2010) Sexuality Now: Embracing Diversity. Third Edition, Wadsworth – Cengage Learning Publishers, Pacific Grove, CA.

gender norms, values and beliefs which support unequal hierarchies of power between women and men but also among men and among women. These hierarchies of power not only make gender-based violence possible, in some cases they create an environment where GBV is tolerated and even considered acceptable. Perpetrators may include family or community members and those acting on behalf of cultural, religious or state institutions. Gender-based violence affects both women and men but disproportionately affects women and girls, reflecting their subordinate status in society. Different groups of women and men, such as those belonging to sexual minority groups, are also likely to be disproportionally affected by gender-based violence.

Forms of Gender Based Violence: Violence is a complex issue, and categorising different 'types' of violence can never be precise. Violence can be distinguished into five inter-related types: physical, verbal, sexual(ised), psychological and socio-economic. In reality, some or many forms can be present at the same time, particularly in abusive relationships. All forms can occur both in the private sphere (in families and intimate relationships and in the public sphere, committed by unknown individuals in public space, or by organisations, institutions and states[8]. It is also important to stress that, for the purpose of this report, we will focus on the following forms of GBV:

Psychological and emotional forms of GBV include acts such as gender-based bullying, sexual harassment, stalking, isolation, ridiculing, put-downs and offensive name-calling, intimidation, controlling who a person can see or what they can wear, sexual innuendos, and jokes about the sexuality of boys and the sexual availability of women. Psychological violence can be perpetrated by people both known to the victim (e.g. a partner, family member, pupils in a school or colleagues in a workplace) and unknown (e.g. offensive remarks made by strangers in the street).

Domestic Violence: violence committed within a cohabitation/familial context, or between persons who were previously cohabiting, including spouses, partners, parents, children, or any person residing with any of the aforementioned. Violence is any act, omission or behaviour that causes physical, sexual or mental injury to any member of the family by another member of the family, including violence used for the purpose of

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8 Council of Europe (2007). Gender Matters: A manual on addressing gender-based violence with young people. (Retrieved by http://eycb.coe.int/gendermatters/)

having sexual intercourse without the consent of the victim and violence exercised with an intention to restrict the freedom of a member of the family. Violence exercised in the presence of a minor member of the family, despite whether it is directly aimed at them, is included as domestic violence, since this could cause the child mental injury[9].

Sexual violence refers to all forms of forced sexual acts including forcing sexual activities against someone's consent and any unwelcome, usually repeated and unreciprocated, sexual advance or unwanted verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. It includes rape (date rape, gang and marital rape, rape as a weapon of war), child sexual abuse, sexual harassment and the trafficking of women, girls or boys for sexual exploitation.

Sexual Exploitation of Children. The term refers to the sexual exploitation of children with the production and reproduction of visual material.

- Production of Child Pornography
- Provision of Information for Child Pornography
- Distribution of Child Pornography
- Promoting Child Pornography
- Possession of Child Pornography
- Invite the Child to Child Pornography

Harmful traditional and cultural violence includes practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), honour related violence, wife and property inheritance, early and child marriage, forced sexual exposure and training, and dowry or bride price abuse. On the basis of scientific criteria FGM is undoubtedly harmful to girls as it deprives them of vital sexual organs necessary for their health and holistic development. The fact that the cutting happens to minors who have no true powers of consent is a violation of their human rights under the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Economic violence can include property grabbing, deprivation of basic necessities, controlling the earnings of victims, forbidding them employment and excluding them from decision-making processes. In many countries economic violence is legitimised in

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9 http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/upload/publications/criminal_offence_yellow_en.pdf

legislation e.g. laws that give a husband full rights over his wife's property or that exclude specific groups of people from voting in elections.

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious lasting problems[10].

Cyberbulling- refers to practices of harassment and humiliation, in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner, especially among adolescents using the latest digital technology and mobile phones. Often accompanied by the report or threat report privacy of the victim, in order to terrorize and humiliate them. This is an increasingly common event among young people[11].

Cyberstalking - molesting another person on-line using websites, email, GPS, intrusive software, or any other electronic tools. It's a method in which child molesters, develop and establish deceptive relationships with minor victims, with view to sexual harassment and exploitation. The acquaintance with child victims starts through chat rooms (chat rooms, blogs) which ensure easy communication with minors, and the illusion of anonymity and security.

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10 http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/definition/index.html; http://eycb.coe.int/gendermatters/
11 http://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it/index.html

II. Executive Summary

Purpose of this document is to provide the most up to date scientific information on the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of adolescents in Cyprus, in order to highlight the necessity for mandatory Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) at all levels of school education.

SRHR is a general term, which we break down into specific areas so that the most recent data for each area can be given. This document is structured in a way that illuminates relationships between specific outcomes of SRHR and factors that affect those outcomes. This is important because many factors that critically influence SRHR outcomes are not obvious, direct or measurable but must be recognized and addressed; for example, how gender bias influences the use of contraception which in turn influences the outcome of unwanted pregnancies is important to understand. Thus, in this document firstly we look at the **outcomes** of the current SRHR situation in Cyprus on young people, secondly, we identify **factors** that are **directly** related to these outcomes, and thirdly, we identify **indirect risk and protective factors**. Finally, **policies and laws** that are related to young people's SRHR are discussed, including, **school education interventions** through the Health Education Curriculum (2010).

Sexuality is a very important part in the lives of adolescents; the great changes of puberty are related to sexual and reproductive maturation, and a majority are active before the age of 18[12]. In recent decades, both boys and girls enter puberty sooner than generations of the past[13]. Young people in Cyprus, Europe and the world face gender bias including gender violence, restrictions in family planning options and sexual orientation discrimination[14]. Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's) continue to be a very serious threat against young people's health all over Europe, especially for the age

12 Cyprus Youth Board (CYB) & Intercollege Research and Development Centre, (2002). Research on Leisure, Work, Relationships, Perceptions, and Problems of Young People. CYB: Nicosia. www.youthboard.org.cy
13World Health Organization, (2003). Very Early Adolescence the Hidden People, Geneva. www.who.int/childadolescenthealth/New_Publications/NEWS/NEWS/_20Participants_background.pdf
14 YouAct,(2008).European Charter of Young People for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights:A Rights-Based Perspective.
http://www.youact.org/publications/small_img/Charter%20Sexual%20and%20Reproductive%20Health%20and%20Rights%20of%20Young%20People.pdf

group 15 - 24[15]. STIs including HIV/AIDS affect young people disproportionally causing long term or permanent complications such as sterility and various forms of cancer while they increase the financial, physical and psychological burden on both people and health systems[16]. Despite all of this, in many countries, the prevailing mentality is that adolescents needn't know or ask about sexuality and should not have any sexual activity. This may create an environment within which young people's sexual activity is considered as something negative that must be eliminated. In this context, young people face greater obstacles in accessing valid information and sexual and reproductive health services. At the same time, young people are constantly bombarded with messages with sexual content and have access to multiple sources of inaccurate and biased information[17].

Children and young people are crucial to the improvement of sexual health in general; beyond this, they have the inalienable right to sexual health as human beings in their own right. They need to know about sexuality in terms of both risk and enrichment, in order to develop a positive and responsible attitude towards it. In this way, they are enabled to behave responsibly not only towards themselves, but also towards others and they are given the opportunity to make the appropriate decisions for their actions[18]. Today, the right to pleasure and enjoyment is often omitted from the discussion, focusing on problems and diseases. Sexuality, under conditions of mutual respect, freedom and equality is an enjoyable experience and this aspect must be emphasised[19]. In conclusion, the safeguarding of sexual and reproductive rights is crucial for all ages, especially for those most vulnerable and dependant on adults.

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15 Dehne, K & Reidner, G,. (2005). Sexually Transmitted Infections among Adolescents: the Need for Adequate Health Services, WHO: Geneva.

16 YouAct, (2008). European Charter of Young People for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: A Rights-Based Perspective. 7

17 Advocates for Youth, (2008). www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/factsheet/fsglobal.pdf

18 WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA, (2010). Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe, Cologne

19 YouAct, (2008). European Charter of Young People for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: A Rights-Based Perspective. http://www.youact.org/publications/small_img/Charter%20Sexual%20and%20Reproductive%20Health%20and%20Rights%20of%20Young%20People.pdf

III. Outcomes

1 STIs including HIV/AIDS

Combating the spread of HIV/AIDS remains a major public health concern in Europe. Data from 2012 show that within the European Union, 29 381 HIV diagnoses were reported by 30 EU/ EEA countries, with a rate of 5.8 per 100 000 population[20] and in Cyprus, the rate of newly diagnosed HIV infections for 2011 was 6.4 per 100 000 population[21]. In the EU in 2012, the male-to-female ratio was 3.2, and *young people aged 15 to 24 years accounted for 10.6% of all HIV diagnoses reported*[22]. In recent years in the EU a trend persists, with the highest proportion of HIV diagnoses reported in men who have sex with men (MSM) (40.4%), followed by heterosexual transmission (33.8%).

In Cyprus in the year 2010 alone, 41 HIV cases and 10 AIDS cases were reported. The majority (83%) of newly diagnosed HIV cases were male. All of the newly diagnosed HIV infections with information about transmission mode (90%) were attributed to sexual contact (59% to sex between men and 41% to heterosexual contact[23]). Sexual contact remains the main mode of transmission of the virus[24], with, more than half of the reported HIV cases in Cyprus in 2012 amongst MSM[25], thereby confirming that this trend also persists in Cyprus. Data (2010) shows that in Cyprus, amongst men, the

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20 European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO Regional Office for Europe (2013). HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2012. ECDC: Stockholm.
21European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2013). A Comprehensive Approach to HIV/STI Prevention in the Context of Sexual Health in the EU/EEA. ECDC: Stockholm.
http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/HVI-STI-prevention-comprehensive-approach-in-the-context-of-sexual-health-EU-EEA.pdf
22 European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO Regional Office for Europe (2013). HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2012. ECDC: Stockholm
23 World Health Organization, (2011). HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2010 . Country Report, Cyprus.
http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/191069/Cyprus-HIVAIDS-Country-Profile-2011-revision-2012-final.pdf
24 UNAIDS. (2010). Country Progress Report: Cyprus.
http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/en/dataanalysis/knowyourresponse/countryprogressreports/2010countries/cyprus_2010_country_progress_report_en.pdf
25 European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO Regional Office for Europe. HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2012. ECDC: Stockholm

main mode of transmission is MSM (49%), whereas, amongst women, the main mode of transmission is heterosexual contact (95%)[26].

HIV infection affects mainly young people: around 67% of all the infected permanent residents in Cyprus were between the ages 20-39 at diagnosis[27]. However, due to the long asymptomatic phase of HIV infection, it is expected that some persons who have been infected are not aware of the fact and remain unreported for a certain period of time. For this reason the actual number of cases is considered to be higher than that of the diagnosed cases[28]. It is important that adolescents have the knowledge and capacity to protect against HIV/AIDS and other STI's, which may not be mentioned as often as HIV/AIDS but disproportionately impact young people. Ministry of Health statistics on other STIs from 2001 report 88 cases of HPV, of which 56% concerned people aged 17-30, and 141 cases of genital herpes, 11% of which concern people aged 15-30[29]. More recent health and hospital statistics show that in 2011 there were 39 cases of people seeking treatment from the public hospitals for 'other infections with a predominantly sexual mode of transmission', of which 31 were people in the 15 to 44 age group distributed unevenly between males (5 cases) and females (26 cases)[30]. These statistics suggest that STIs in general, as well as HIV/AIDs in particular, are issues of particular relevance to young people.

2 Unwanted Pregnancy & Abortion

There is no data for the prevalence of abortion in Cyprus. Statistics on induced abortion are neither collected by the public sector nor the private sector for any age group. According to a review article on terminations of pregnancy in the EU (2011) 'The frequency of terminations of pregnancy is an important public health indicator, relating primarily to legislation and attitudes towards termination both in society and among individual citizens. Low rates are generally associated with good access to high-quality

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26 Ministry of Health, Republic of Cyprus (2010). National Action Plan for the Prevention of HIV/AIDS in Cyprus, 2011 – 2015.
27 UNAIDS. (2010). Country Progress Report: Cyprus.
http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/en/dataanalysis/knowyourresponse/
countryprogressreports/2010countries/cyprus_2010_country_progress_report_en.pdf
28 ibid
29 Republic of Cyprus, Ministry of Health (2004). Health and Hospital Statistics. Retrieved from the Statistical service of the Republic of Cyprus http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf
30 Republic of Cyprus, Ministry of Health (2013). Health and Hospital Statistics. Retrieved from the Statistical service of the Republic of Cyprus http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf

sexual and reproductive health services, and good availability and appropriate use of effective methods of contraception. The official termination of pregnancy rates also reflect the accuracy of reporting, which varies from country to country'[31]. Of all the countries of the EU, the review omitted data from three countries with no reporting systems – Cyprus, Austria and Luxembourg - emphasizing the need to develop basic reporting systems in these countries.

In light of the connection between low abortion rates and access to contraception, it is worth noting here, although it will be discussed in more detail elsewhere in this document, that there are no formal statistics on prevalence of contraception use or access to contraception amongst young people (or any other age group). With no reporting systems for abortion, contraception use and unwanted teenage pregnancy, it is difficult to identify what is going on in Cyprus albeit easy to ignore the issue or pretend that there is no issue. The picture painted by data gathered from other sources shows that initiation of sexual activity in Cyprus occurs around age 16[32] however, adolescents seem to know little about contraception, do not habitually use contraception and/or consider it a sin[33],[34]. The only formal data the Cyprus government collects on adolescent pregnancy is the adolescent birth rate, which is 5.5 per 1000 women 15 to 19 year old (data from 2011), which, when compared to the other 29 countries in the European Economic Area (EEA) is actually fourth lowest[35].

To sum it all up, there is no data on abortion in Cyprus, the little data on contraception use shows that adolescents have serious limitations in access and contraceptive use, yet, the birth rate amongst adolescents is the fourth lowest in the EEA. This means that, contrary to evidence, adolescents in Cyprus do not engage in sexual intercourse, or, if

31 Gissler, M., Fronteira, I., Jahn, A., Karro, H., Moreau, C., Oliveira da Silva, M., Olsen, J., Savona-Ventura, C., Temmerman, M. & Hemminki, E., (2012). Terminations of pregnancy in the European Union. BJOG: International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology 119:324–32
32 Cyprus Youth Board and Cyprus Institute of Reproductive Medicine, (2006). Relationships and Sexuality of Youth. Cyprus Youth Board: Nicosia. www.youthboard.org.cy .
33 Lesta, S., Lazarus, J., Essen B. (2008). Young Cypriots on sex education: sources and adequacy of information received on sexuality issues. Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning, 8 (2), 237 – 246
34 Kouta, C., & Tolma, E. L. (2008). Sexuality, sexual and reproductive health: an exploration of the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of the Greek-Cypriot adolescents. Promotion & education, 15(4), 24-31
35 European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2013). A Comprehensive Approach to HIV/STI Prevention in the Context of Sexual Health in the EU/EEA. ECDC: Stockholm. http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/HVI-STI-prevention-comprehensive-approach-in-the-context-of-sexual-health-EU-EEA.pdf

they do they use contraception much more than studies show, or, there is quite a high rate of abortion amongst this age group. Without the data, there is no way to know. The permissive yet restrictive abortion legislation in Cyprus (see section V.I 'Legal Framework') provides a large window to access abortion which enables abortion (as a practice) to occur quite frequently, while abortion (as an issue) to remain outside public discourse, so that blame/stigma may continue to be assigned to the individual rather than to the social context which is clearly implicated[36].

3 Gender Based Violence (GBV)

A cross-national survey (2008) of 1,850 girls aged 18-24 in Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Lithuania and Latvia found that between 10-16% of all respondents reported being subject to some form of unwanted sexual experience during a date including rape or attempted rape[37]. The same study demonstrated that many teenagers, the majority of which were girls, do not recognize psychological forms of violence within their intimate relationships (such as controlling behaviours or pressure to consummate a relationship) and consider these behaviours as 'normal'[38]. In another study conducted with 1668 adolescents in Cyprus a quarter of participants reportedly face psychological problems in relation to their intimate/sexual relationships, the majority of whom are girls. Many stated that they do not enjoy sexual intercourse[39]. Finally, a study undertaken in 2012 with 1000 Cypriot young adults (18-25 years old) exploring interpersonal relationships and violence found that 70% of the participants had opinions and attitudes that are conducive to violence such as 'victim blaming', the belief that violence in relationships is a 'private' matter, and the belief that the use of violence is acceptable under certain circumstances, such as to 'correct' certain behaviours[40]. Taken together these findings indicate that attitudes conducive to gender based violence are normative amongst adolescents, girls bear the brunt of gender biased attitudes in general and within their

36 Kumar, A., Hessini, L. & Mitchell, E. M. H., (2009). Conceptualising Abortion Stigma. Culture, Health & Sexuality, 11, 625-639

37 Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies, (2008). Date Rape Cases among Young Women: Strategies for Support and Intervention, University of Nicosia Press: Nicosia. http://medinstgenderstudies.org/past-projects/daterape-cases-among-young-women/ http://goo.gl/6JFxi

38 ibid

39 Cyprus Youth Board and the Cyprus Institute of Reproductive Medicine, (2006). Relationships and Sexuality of Youth. Cyprus Youth Board: Nicosia. www.youthboard.org.cy

40 Andronikou, A., Erotokritou, K., & Hadjiharalambous, D., (2012). *First Pancyprian Survey: Violent Behavior in Interpersonal Relationships of Young Adults in Cyprus aged 18 – 25.* National Machinery for the Rights of Women: Ministry of Justice, Republic of Cyprus.

intimate relationships, and that behaviours of gender violence are often considered acceptable.

Domestic Violence

Reports of domestic violence have risen dramatically in recent years[41]. Separate data on domestic violence is kept by the Cyprus Police Department (Ministry of Justice), the Social Services Department (Ministry of the Interior) and the NGO 'Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family' (APHVF). According to police statistics there were 6,161 reported incidents of domestic violence in the period 2004-2010, out of which 5054 were reported by women/girls[42]. The call centre of the APHVF has answered 10,076 incidents of domestic violence during the years 2000-2011 of which 80% of victims were women or 92.5% were women and children. The rise in incidents of domestic violence recorded by the APHVF during this period is 120%[43].

Most domestic violence reported and pursued through the judicial system is physical abuse, which is four times more reported than psychological abuse, while sexual abuse constitutes a fraction of the cases reported to authorities[44]. Most domestic violence reported to the APHVF (2004-2009) involves psychological abuse (60.29%), then physical abuse (37.68%), while sexual abuse is a fraction (2.03%). This suggests that it is more likely for cases of psychological abuse to be reported to the APHVF than the police. Anastasiou-Hadjicharalambous & Essau (2012), in discussing the few studies conducted on domestic violence in Cyprus, note that '...a common observation of all of the above studies was that certain forms of violence are not recognized as such, it may well be that the extent of violence against children as well as adults in Cyprus might be much higher than what the reports indicate'. Regarding homicides, the Cyprus Police Office for Serious Crime reports 20 percent of all homicide cases to be domestic, of which 85% of the perpetrators were men, and 15% were women, whereas, 64% of the

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41 Apostolidou, M., Mavrikiou, P., & Parlalis, S., (2012). Extent, Frequency, Nature and Consequences of Domestic Violence Against Women in Cyprus. Advisory Committee for the Prevention & Combating of Family Violence.
http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/cgibin/hweb?-A=971&-V=research
42 Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (APHVF).
www.familyviolence.gov.cy/upload/20120127/1327678127-23793.pdf .
43 ibid
44 Anastasiou – Hadjicharalambous, X. & Essau, C.A. (2012). The phenomena of violence and abuse in Cyprus. In Browne, M. A. (Ed). Violence and abuse in society: Understanding a global crisis. Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger.

victims were women and 36% were men.[45] Where children are involved, they are often witness to and subject to much of this abuse, and there is a significant correlation between domestic violence and the mental, physical and sexual abuse of children[46].

Harmful traditional and cultural violence

Data on harmful traditional and cultural violence is generally lacking, especially regarding ethnic minority and migrant communities. Furthermore, honour related violence (HRV) and forced marriage (FM) are not recognized as forms of gender based violence in the Cypriot context, either legally or otherwise, making it impossible to distinguish such crimes from the data available. FGM is a form of violence against women and a violation of human rights affecting an estimated 500,000 women and girls living in Europe. A very rough estimate of 1,500 women originating from countries where FGM is practised were living in Cyprus in 2010[47]. This estimate is based on a limited number of records collected from the Migration Department and Asylum Office. However, according to the Ombudsman's Office Report on FGM (2014) no representative prevalence studies have been carried out in Cyprus.[48]

Sexual Violence

Incidents of sexual violence have risen in Cyprus, with 101 reported rapes between the years 2009-2011[49]. Rape and sexual violence are among the most severely underreported forms of violence in Cyprus, as elsewhere in Europe. From the available figures one can also note that although there are variations year on year, there is a shocking trend of increased reporting rates over the last two decades. 117 rapes and 7 attempted rapes were reported from 2010 until 2013. Despite the increasing reporting rate there is a very low conviction rate for rape in Cyprus. *There are no rape helplines, rape crisis centres, or specialized resources for rape or sexual assault in Cyprus for either adults or adolescents.*

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45 ibid

46Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (APHVF). http://www.familyviolence.gov.cy/upload/publications/criminal_offence_yellow_en.pdf

47 www.endfgm.eu

48 Office of the Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman), of the Republic of Cyprus, (2012). Position on Female Genital Mutilation (ΑΥΤ Α/Π 2/2012), http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy

49 The Cyprus Police. www.police.gov.cy/police/police.nsf/All/93254FC38F3C8CA1C22579F40021BEFD/$file/sovaroeglimagr.pdf

A national study on date rape cases among young women in tertiary education in Cyprus aged 18-24, revealed that although the attempts of date rape (1.3%) and date rape cases (1.9%) percentages seemed to be small in this study, 12.2% of women who answered the questionnaire claimed to have had an 'unwanted sexual experience'. Of this number, the majority claimed to have given in to sexual acts due to overwhelming pressure by their partners and fear of their partners leaving them if they did not consent[50].   The inconsistency between the numbers of reported/attempted rapes with 'unwanted sexual experiences' could be due to young women not recognizing rape as such. This assumption is consistent with the focus groups discussions that were part of the study that demonstrated that young women still hold traditional beliefs that reinforce patriarchal attitudes toward women and sexuality. The focus group discussions confirm that gender stereotypes as well as societal expectations with regard to women and men's behaviour (gender roles) can contribute to an atmosphere where date rape is possible and indeed acceptable. What emerges is a picture of extensive abuse that affects many girl's and boy's lives, but is systematically underreported to the authorities[51]. In a study for the APHVF utilizing a sample of 913 children aged 12 -18, 10% of the sample reported having experienced some form of sexual abuse, girls having experienced more severe forms relative to the boys[52].

On a European scale, one in 10 women has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 15, and one in 20 has been raped. Just over one in five women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence from either a current or previous partner, and just over one in 10 women indicates that they have experienced some form of sexual violence by an adult before they were 15 years old. Yet, as an illustration, only 14 % of women reported their most serious incident of intimate partner violence to the police, and 13 % reported their most serious incident of non-partner violence to the police.[53]

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50 Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies (2008). Date Rape Cases Among Young Women and the Development of Good Practices for Support and Prevention. University of Nicosia Press: Nicosia
51 Anastasiou – Hadjicharalambous & Essau, C.A. (2012). The phenomena of violence and abuse in Cyprus. In Browne, M. A. (Ed). Violence and abuse in society: Understanding a global crisis. Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger.
52 ibid
53 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, (2014). Violence Against Women: An EU Wide Survey, Main Results. Publication Office of the European Union: Luxembourg.

Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

According to the Council of Europe[54] one in five children in Europe will be the victim of sexual violence. Preliminary data shows that this holds true for Cyprus as well[55]. In particular, 23.8% of young Cypriots aged 15 to 22 responded having experienced some form of sexual violence, and only 14% reported it to any sort of authority, including parents[56]. Every day, countless children around the world are sexually abused and exploited, and images and videos of the abuse are circulated. Already in 2005, an estimated one million child sexual abuse images were online. 50.000 new child abuse images are added each year. More than 70% of reported images feature children below 10 years of age[57].

In 2005, it was estimated that child porn generated over $US 3 billion annually[58] and over 100,000 websites exist with the primary purpose of selling child porn to others[59]. Moreover, about 20% of the youths who frequent the internet claim they have received sexual solicitations while online, and 89% of those who engage in online chat rooms say they have received such solicitations[60]. Police estimate that anywhere from 25% to 50% of individuals viewing and trading cyber child porn have also committed acts of child sex abuse. Police further estimate that over 50,000 children worldwide are abused and used as child porn actors[61]. In addition to the rampant explosion of child pornographic material, children themselves are exposed to pornography from early on. The average age of a child's first exposure to pornography is 11. A total of 90 percent of children

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54 Lalor, K., & McElvaney, R. (2010). Overview of the nature and extend of child sexual abuse in Europe. In Protecting children from sexual violence - A comprehensive approach. Council of Europe.

55 http://www.sigmalive.com/news/local/227406/ena-sta-4-paidia-thymata-seksoualikis-parenoxlisis-stin-kypro

56 ibid

57 http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/organized-crime-and-human-trafficking/global-alliance-against-child-abuse/index_en.htm . Retrieved on 19.09.2014

58 Schell, B. H., Martin, M. V., Hung, P. C. K., & Rueda, L., (2007). Cyber child pornography: A review paper of the social and legal issues and remedies—and a proposed technological solution. Aggression and Violent Behavior, 12(1), 45–63.

59 http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics-pg4.html Retrieved 19.09.2014

60 Schell, B. H., Martin, M. V., Hung, P. C. K., & Rueda, L. (2007). Cyber child pornography: A review paper of the social and legal issues and remedies—and a proposed technological solution. Aggression and Violent Behavior, 12(1), 45–63.

61 ibid

ages 8-16 have viewed pornography online. Pornographers use many character names that appeal to children such as "Pokemon."[62]

The prevalence of child sexual abuse and exploitation in Cyprus is unknown, as there is no data on the matter. There are some indications that sexual abuse of children and adolescents does indeed occur through reports made to the various departments and services dealing with such issue, however, seeing as this phenomenon has not been adequately examined, there is a gap in our knowledge of the extent and content of sexual abuse of children and adolescents. In order to rectify this situation research is currently being carried out to determine the characteristics of sexual violence against children in Cyprus[63].

The Commissioner for Children's Rights (CCR) in Cyprus has received complaints of sexual abuse of children by other children, so that, it is important to note that although sexual abuse of children occurs mostly by adults, children themselves may be learning and adopting violent and coercive sexual behaviours which they exercise over other children. In 2013, after an incident of sexual violence against an adolescent girl by a group of adolescent boys was reported and became public, the Commissioner publicized her concern about such forms of violence, the gender dimension that characterizes such forms of violence, and the preventative measures which must be taken to eradicate it[64]. The Commissioner emphasizes that, according to the Lanzarote Convention[65] for the protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse, education, especially sexuality education, is an absolutely essential preventative tool. In the context of her systematic meetings with a Young Advisors Team (comprised of children aged 13 – 17) , and within the context of a more general communication with children from all over Cyprus, the Commissioner receives information that shows the disappointment of adolescents who do not receive systematic or comprehensive sexuality education within the school system, and concludes that children seem to have

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62 http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics-pg5.html. Retrieved 19.09.2014
63 Commissioner for Children's Rights, Cyprus (2014). Position on the inquiry into the sexual abuse amongst underage children without having to acquire parental consent to involve them in the research (2014, April 7). Nicosia. www.childcom.org
64 Commissioner for Children's Rights, Cyprus (2013). Position on the recent episode of sexual abuse of an underage girl by her underage peers (2013, Oct 02). Nicosia. www.childcom.org.cy
65 http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/children/default_en.asp

a major lack of basic information about sexual abuse and exploitation of children/minors.

Due to the fact that much sexual exploitation of minors now occurs in cyberspace, it is important to provide some information on access and usage of the internet by Cypriot children. Statistics from the Cyberethics Cyprus Safer Internet Center within the scope of an EU survey (2010) of 9 to 16 year olds show that Cyprus is in the first place in Europe in the use of mobile phones for access to the Internet (39%) and access through their bedrooms (62%). 59% of children aged 9-16 have a profile in a social network platform putting Cyprus in the fifth place in Europe. In terms of disclosing vulnerable information, the data shows that the children that state their real address/telephone number online is the lowest in Europe (6%), but it is third in Europe on children putting a fake age on their profile.[66]

In terms of exposure to sexual content, one quarter (24%) of Cypriot 9-16 year olds say that they have seen sexual images in the past 12 months, whether online or offline. This is close to the European average of 23%. As in Europe, the older children get, the more likely they will see sexual images, but in Cyprus this levels off by age 13-14. Therefore, we can safely say that the range of children who have been exposed to sexual content online is 13% of 9-10 year olds rising to 39% of 15-16 year olds. In terms of exposure to risk, 13% of Cypriot children have had contact online with someone they have not met face to face (a finding which is less than half the European average of 30%), while 6% have gone to an offline meeting with someone first met online (this is two thirds the European average, which is 9% across all countries).[67]

Finally, in terms of parental mediation, 27% of children stated that they wished more parental involvement on what they are doing on the Internet, a number that puts Cyprus in the first place in Europe. At the same time parents stated that they should be doing more (79%) in regards to the use of the Internet by their children and that puts Cyprus in

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66 Siitta Achilleos, G. & Aristodemou, E., (2012). Cyberethics GIII: Annual Report. (Laouris,Y. Spyrou, I.; Eds.)   Future Worlds Center (registered name: Cyprus Neuroscience & Technology Institute). www.eukidsonline.net
67 Laouri, Y. & Aristodemou, E. (2013). Risks and Safety for Children on the internet: the Cyprus report. Full findings from the EU Kids Online survey of 9 to 16 year olds and their parents. Cyprus Neuroscience and Technology Institute: Nicosia
www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/ParticipatingCountries/PDFs/CY-CyprusReport.pdf

the first place in Europe as well. More than half of the parents, have taken positive initiatives, such as to suggest to the child how to behave towards others on the web (56%), talking about things that may disturb the child (52%), and have helped their child when something occurred in the past (36%).[68]

4 Bullying

School bullying

The Observatory for Violence in Schools was established during the school year 2009-2010 by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoE). The Observatory records and evaluates data regarding the extent and the forms of violence in schools. As part of its activities the Observatory carried out a national survey concerning Victimization and the School Climate in 2011[69]. The survey targeted pupils and teachers of both primary and secondary education. The findings identified the types of bullying existing in schools, which is mostly verbal bullying, although physical bullying and sexual bullying occur as well. Importantly, the survey notes the appearance of cyberbullying in schools in Cyprus, as is the trend elsewhere.

A general account of the survey findings[70] shows that within secondary education in Cyprus, there is a serious lack of trust between students and school authorities. The school 'climate' - relationships, values within the school, the amount of justice perceived and felt, the feelings that dominate the particular school, degree of trust between stakeholders, clarity and uniformity of rule interpretation and application – which is implicated in the development of anti-social behaviors/youth delinquency is not experienced as positive by a vast number of high school students: 53,2% of high school students who were victims of violence did not report it to anyone; 39.8% of high school students feel that the teachers are offensive, whereas 36.2% of teachers feel that students have a lack of respect. These numbers clearly show a lack of mutual trust and communication between students and teachers in secondary schools. From a

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68 Siitta Achilleos, G. & Aristodemou, E., (2012). Cyberethics GIII: Annual Report. (Laouris,Y. Spyrou, I.; Eds.)   Future Worlds Center (registered name: Cyprus Neuroscience & Technology Institute). www.eukidsonline.net
69 Republic of Cyprus, Ministry of Education (2012). ANNUAL REPORT 2012. http://www.moec.gov.cy/en/annual_reports/annual_report_2012_en.pdf
70 Republic of Cyprus, Ministry of Education, Observatory for Violence in the Schools (2012). Pancyprian survey on victimization and school climate in primary and secondary education in Cyprus.

gender perspective, boys are the usual perpetrators of bullying, and both boys and girls are equally victims, showing once again that a gender dimension is vital to an understanding of the phenomenon of school bullying.

In terms of sexual bullying[71], in primary school, from 4.9% to 7.5% of children experience sexual bullying, whereas in secondary schools the number also begins at 4.9% and goes up to 12.3%. It is crucial to note that the survey finds a lack of a feeling of school safety amongst secondary school students, with a whopping 34% of secondary school students feeling little or no safety at school, which relates to the students' perception that the school authorities are unable to protect them from bullying/violence. The lack of a feeling of safety in the school is a serious concern, since any sexuality education program, in order to be effective, requires a safe and respectful context in which such a subject can unfold. In her report for 2013[72], the Commissioner for Children's Rights in Cyprus notes that children are not necessarily fearful of threats by their peers, but are mostly fearful of the inability of school authorities to protect them from such threats. The Commissioner notes that adults often ignore, misinterpret or ignore child behaviors that cause physical or mental pain, threat or intimidation to other children. Often, when informed of these behaviors, they intervene only superficially, or try to minimize the damage, without listening carefully to understand the causes and dimensions of the behaviors, to help bullies and victims, to prevent recurrence of such incidents by teaching children tolerance, acceptance, peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution.

The Commissioner, has received information that the frequency of school bullying has risen, and that more serious forms of bullying are appearing, such as sexual bullying. In her Annual Report (2013)[73] the Commissioner notes that the general opinion of adolescents is that the school is oriented to the transmission of knowledge and evaluation of the cognitive capacity of students, while neglecting serious needs and experiences of adolescents that have to do with social skills and the capacity to make correct choices and effectively solve conflict. The children express the notion that the school does not pay enough attention to bullying, and that all stakeholders (parents,

71 ibid
72 Commissioner Children's Rights, (2013). Annual Report 2013.
http://www.childcom.org.cy/ccr/ccr.nsf/DMLannualRep_gr/DMLannualRep_gr?OpenDocument
73 ibid

teachers, students) are not adequately informed or sensitive to the issue. Moreover, the children describe a very important element that sustains bullying, which is a lack of clear policies for prevention and handling of bullying so that incidents can be recognized and dealt with effectively.

Cyberbullying

As in all European countries, electronic harassment (cyber bullying) is stretching out its tentacles in Cyprus, too. The traditional form of school bullying, gave place to the new form of bullying via the internet, mobile phones or other digital technologies which is assisted by the extensive use of the internet by children and teenagers. For many children in Cyprus, internet use is now thoroughly embedded in their daily lives and everyday routines. Across the socioeconomic range, Cypriot children are gaining access to handheld devices for going online faster than across many European countries, especially among teenagers and boys[74]. Despite that, it seems that they lack key safety skills and therefore are exposed to online risks such as cyber bulling, cyber harassment and other form of cyber violence.

Not surprisingly, the incidents of electronic harassment have shown a tremendous rise over the last few years. In 2009 the helpline of the safer Internet Centre CyberEthics had responded to *one* call involving electronic harassment incidents (cyber bullying), in 2011 to *six* calls, in 2012 to *nineteen* while in 2013 (up to September) incidents rose to *twenty-nine*. Posting degrading photos on the internet and their dissemination via mobile phone, creating blogs or profiles on social networking websites with deliberately incorrect content, sending threats/obscene and offensive content, and the publication of photographs or videos without the consent of the individual, are just a few of the usual internet bullying incidents reported. This poses a new set of challenges for the multiple stakeholders working to make the internet safer for children in Cyprus.

Research[75] shows that the majority Cypriot youth (18 to 25 years old) are familiar with the term 'cyber violence', mostly learned through media. Only 34% learned about it from

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74 Laouris, Y. & Aristodemou E. (2013). Risks and safety for children on the internet, the Cyprus report: Full findings from the EU Kids Online survey of Cypriot 9-16 year olds and their parents. http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/ParticipatingCountries/PDFs/CY-CyprusReport.pdf

75 Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2014) Staying Safe Online: Gender and Safety on the Internet. http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/Anthology-FINAL-for-web-use.pdf

their parents/relatives (mostly women). Students are aware about the dangers and they don't feel secure when using the internet and they have concerns about the theft or misuse of their personal information (mostly girls). Despite that, a high percentage freely shares on the internet certain personal information such as name, date of birth, email address and personal photos. Men share more freely their place or residence and phone number too. Women are more sensitive about this issue and feel more strongly about inappropriate behavior on the internet.

Men are more likely to engage in risky behaviors on the internet. Women are more commonly invited to go out by strangers. 27.1% of Cypriot youth have been victims of cyber violence, whilst, women and students of age 23-25 were more likely to experience cyber violence. The main form of electronic harassment was annoying and constant phone callings or being humiliated, gossiped or offended via text messages, social media and chatting sites. Young women experienced concerns about their safety, whereas men experienced concerns related to online activities which harm their "social status" and reputation. Young women's feelings of worry, fear, anger, and vulnerability following cyber violence, are associated with their perceived safety, integrity and dignity, whereas young men's feelings of disgust, nervousness, and shame, are associated with the impact of online activities of violence on their "social status" and reputation. Students seem to react properly after an attack by blocking the person who put them at risk and change personal settings, but they rarely confide to their parents, especially men (only 5.9%) or call a helpline dedicated to such issues. Specific situations, such as text messages with sexual content, or invitation by strangers do not seem to be considered as cyber violence by the participants[76].

Aggressors are more likely to be males[77] and older students (21-25 years old); from the survey population 42.9% admitted that they had engaged in some kind of cyber violence at least once[78]. The main form of cyber violence performed was to humiliate, gossip or offend somebody, and to assume a fake identity, mainly via text messages and social media networks. Recent surveys conducted by internet safety organizations show that

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76 ibid
77 Floros, G., Paradeisioti, A., Hadjimarcou, M., Mappouras, D. G., Kalakouta, O., Avagianou, P., & Siomos, K. (2012). Cyberbullying in Cyprus--associated parenting style and psychopathology. Studies in health technology and informatics, 191, 85-89.
78 Safer Internet: Cyberethics. http://www.cyberethics.info/cyethics1

more than 50% of adolescents experience some form of cyber bulling. Many times, it begins as early as age nine. In the teen years, cyber bulling usually accompanies some form of sexual harassment.[79]

5 Eating disorders

Eating disorders and obesity share common risk factors including dieting, body dissatisfaction, *teasing and weight stigmatization*[80] *and sexual abuse*[81]. Body dissatisfaction among girls is manifested by concerns about weight loss, whereas for boys, image issues are directed towards increasing weight and developing muscularity. In a study published in 2012, a pathological drive to be thin was found in 8.7% of underweight and 23.4% (almost a quarter) of normal weight adolescent Cypriot females[82]. Drive for thinness has been acknowledged as one of the risk factors for the future development of eating disorders including anorexic and bulimic symptoms. However, the most striking statistic is that an even greater number of overweight and normal weight female adolescents in Cyprus had pathological scores for bulimia, which perhaps reflects how binge-eating behaviors are more widely adopted and accepted in the Cypriot population[83]. Maladaptive eating attitudes are common in Cypriot adolescents. Recently the first inpatient clinic for the treatment of eating disorders was established in the Pediatric Clinic of the public health sector in Cyprus, and is filled to capacity. In the US and EU, an average of 20 percent of teens are affected by eating disorders, so the Cyprus rate of 35 percent is significantly higher[84]. Issues of body acceptance, selfimage and selfesteem are intricately linked to the changes of adolescence, the rapid developmental changes and the resulting preoccupation with appearance.

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79 ibid
80 Hadjigeorgiou, C., Tornaritis, M., Savvas, S., Solea, A., & Kafatos, A. (2012). Obesity and psychological traits associated with eating disorders among Cypriot adolescents: comparison of 2003 and 2010 cohorts. Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal, 18(8).
81 Department of Psychology, University of Cyprus (2009). Pamphlet: Sexual Abuse of Children.
82 Hadjigeorgiou, C., Tornaritis, M., Savvas, S., Solea, A., & Kafatos, A. (2012). Obesity and psychological traits associated with eating disorders among Cypriot adolescents: comparison of 2003 and 2010 cohorts. Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal, 18(8).
83 ibid
84 Fenwick, Sarah (2011). Cyprus Eating Disorder Rates, Higher vs. EU, US. [blog post]
http://www.cyprusnewsreport.com/?q=node/4014

IV. Direct Factors leading to Outcomes:

1. Low Condom and Contraception Use

Only half (47.3%) of young people in Cyprus aged 15 to 29 reported that they always use protection against an unwanted pregnancy[85]. In a 2003 study, 61% of students aged 13 - 15 stated that they had some or no knowledge of conception and contraception[86]. Thus, the majority of young people in Cyprus know little about contraception and do not habitually use contraception. Gender biased attitudes also effect condom and contraception use, and access is extremely limited. Youth under 17yrs cannot access contraception without parental consent, while a majority of adolescents (especially girls) are not likely to talk to their parents about contraception because they feel their parents would disapprove[87].

In addition, contraceptive options in Cyprus are limited, mostly to oral contraceptives which are available with a doctor's prescription and intrauterine devices (IUD's) which are applied by a gynaecologist. Some contraceptive methods such as the diaphragm, female condom, injective contraceptives and progesterone-only pills (POPs) are not available at all in Cyprus. The primary reason for this is that the consumer market for such products is small, due to the small population of the island, therefore, pharmaceutical companies do not to launch contraceptive options other than the ones on high demand. Also, some doctors do not usually recommend the methods mentioned above, mostly because they themselves lack familiarity with these options. Emergency contraception is available over the counter at pharmacies.

Contraception is not available through the public health sector - no family planning clinics or services are provided by the State. Contraception for adolescents below age 17, even if aware of sexual risks and contraceptive options, is not accessible, excepting condoms.

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85 Cyprus Youth Board (CYB) & Intercollege Research and Development Centre, (2002). Research on Leisure, Work, Relationships, Perceptions, and Problems of Young People. CYB: Nicosia. www.youthboard.org.cy
86 Kouta-Nicolaou, C. (2003). Sexuality, Sexual and Reproductive Health: An Exploration of the Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs of Greek-Cypriot Adolescents. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, School of Health and Social Sciences, Middlesex University.
87 ibid

2. Misinformation

Young people in our days often come up against conflicting messages on sex and sexuality. On one hand sexuality is portrayed in many instances as negative and dangerous associated with guilt, fear, and disease and on the other, it is overemphasised as positive and desirable. Even the media give and send distorted messages on sexuality. Such pressures may be exacerbated by exposure to misleading or inaccurate information, a lack of skills and awareness of young people's rights and by gender expectations. Whether sexually active or not, young people should feel comfortable with their bodies, sexuality and identity.[88]

According to research carried out recently in Cyprus, there is alarming ignorance and severe gaps on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) issues among young people[89]. Up to date scientific evidence also indicate a conservative paternalistic mentality where stereotypes, prejudice, and homophobia due to ignorance are prevalent[90]. Young people find that resources and services on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) are limited and sexuality education in schools and their environment is not adequate[91].

Although young people have some knowledge about sexuality, limited resources and services exist to reinforce that. Most young people learn about SRHR from friends (88% in the Astra sample) and a significant percentage (30%) from the media. In contemporary Cypriot society patriarchal taboos still exist, and gender differences are apparent, which impact the accuracy of information received[92].

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88 International Planned Parenthood Federation, European Network (2006). Sexuality Education in Europe – A Reference Guide to Policies and Practices.
http://www.ippfen.org/en/Resources/Publications/Sexuality+Education+in+Europe.htm
89 Cyprus Youth Board and Cyprus Institute of Reproductive Medicine, (2006). Relationships and Sexuality of Youth. Cyprus Youth Board: Nicosia. www.youthboard.org.cy .
90 Kouta, C., & Tolma, E.L. (2008). Sexuality, sexual and reproductive health: an exploration of the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of the Greek-Cypriot adolescents. Promotion & Education, 15: 24-31
91 Lesta, S., Lazarus, J., Essen B. (2008). Young Cypriots on sex education: sources and adequacy of information received on sexuality issues. Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning, 8 (2), 237 – 246
92 Kouta-Nicolaou, C. (2003). Sexuality, Sexual and Reproductive Health: An Exploration of the Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs of Greek-Cypriot Adolescents. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, School of Health and Social Sciences, Middlesex University.

The Commissioner for Children's Rights, through discussions with adolescents notes that, regardless of age, all children taking part in the discussions lacked basic information so they can recognize acts of sexual abuse and exploitation, and how to protect themselves. The Commissioner concluded that children have difficulty properly assessing whether an act constitutes sexual abuse or exploitation. In addition, the notion of consent to engage in sexual activity, equality between the two parties and the concept of coercion (especially when using other means than physical violence) are concepts that children have not had the opportunity to discuss in depth within the family or school. Children had even less clarity on the issue of sexual abuse in relation to underage persons who are in a romantic relationship; opportunities for children to be informed and aware of the issue in a way that is consistent with age and maturity are lacking.

3. Lack of Communication skills

Research shows that despite claiming confidence and empowerment, women and girls express that establishing boundaries in relationships is difficult either due to lack of confidence, fear of abandonment or guilt. It has been reported that women and girls also found it difficult to establish limits in cases where they had already had sexual relations with their date in the past. They stated that they felt the need to 'please' their partners or dates, as well as 'guilty' for not satisfying their partner or 'letting him down'. Notwithstanding, women felt that they had the right to stop sexual relations at any time. However, they also felt that the responsibility to control the situation lies squarely with the woman and her ability to 'communicate her needs' to her partner or date. Never during the discussions was men's role and responsibility in the matter questioned. One may argue that many young females are neither assertive nor self-confident enough to establish limits with their partners or to clearly state 'no'. This may be due to traditional gender roles and socio-cultural expectations of women in Cyprus, highlighting the importance of satisfying male sexual desires while females' desires are non-existent or less important.[93]

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93 Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies (2008). Date Rape Cases Among Young Women and the Development of Good Practices for Support and Prevention. University of Nicosia Press: Nicosia

4 Lack of Youth Friendly Services

Cyprus has few youth friendly services, thus, young people are exposed to lack of access to contraception but also to a lack of knowledge, since Sexuality Education was only just implemented in the school system in 2011-2012. Cyprus has several Helplines operated by non-governmental organizations or institutions and providing support and information on topics of interest to adolescents, such as drug abuse, relationships and domestic violence. The CFPA has a free Helpline for Sexuality (1455). The Cyprus Youth Board (CYB) has a free support and counselling line for general issues (1410).

Youth information centres, through the CYB, operate according to European standards and provide young people with general information and advisory services on matters that interest them. Information is provided in printed and electronic form, and through activities. At the same time, some centres house a program called "Protasi", where consultants provide consultative support to young people, couples and families on a variety of topics. Prevention centres of the CYB operate in Limassol, Nicosia and Larnaca, with the goal of development of psychosocial skills, strengthening of protective factors and reduction of risk factors relating to substance use and harmful behaviours. These services are offered free of charge.

In terms of clinical and medical services, the Ministry of Health operates a sector entitled Mental Health Services for Children and Adolescents, from 1990. Services are provided to children and adolescents up to 17 years of age with various psycho-emotional and psychosocial difficulties, and counselling on parenting issues for parents. Children and adolescents are referred for inpatient treatment/hospitalization from other government sectors once problems are manifest and interfere with functionality[94]. Youth friendly preventative/counseling services for sexual health are not available through the public sector, and, it is difficult to evaluate the extent to which private clinics and physicians are youth-friendly. There is no evidence of a unified code of practice; we can assume that whether a service would be youth-friendly is subject to the sensitivity of the individual medical practitioner. Affordability of services to youth is rarely, if at all taken

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94 Republic of Cyprus. Ministry of Health (MoH).
http://www.moh.gov.cy/MOH/MHS/MHS.nsf/index_gr/index_gr?OpenDocument

into account, as clinics tend to have fixed prices. This can be especially thwarting for youth, since prices in private medical clinics are generally considered high.

The possibility of voluntary HIV testing is available for free to all Cypriots in public hospitals, however, this option is often overshadowed by fear and denial, especially due to the lack of discretion and sensitivity around issues of sexuality and privacy. Public hospitals offer treatment for certain STIs, including syphilis and herpes. Unfortunately, these services are offered through different departments, like the Department of Urology and the Department of Dermatology and not through specialized centres friendly to young people. HIV/AIDS treatment and medication is also available through the public sector. The services offered by the Public Hospitals include, laboratory tests for diagnostic purposes, hospitalisation, medication and other treatments. These services are not youth-friendly, and cannot be accessed without parental consent

In many cases due to the refusal of either one or both parents, children are denied access to counselling services. The Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of the Child has made a public statement on the issue, acknowledging the seriousness of the lack of youth friendly services and access to those. A large number of complaints have been received by the Commission, regarding cases of children who are in need of psychological support and/or recovery, but, due to the refusal of one or both parents are denied access to such services. The Commissioner states that there is a degree of legal uncertainty which leads to the violation of children's rights, and concludes that children need to have access to counselling services, provided that they are necessary for their safety and wellbeing. The decision whether counselling will be dependent on parental consent should be made according to the age and maturity of the child and certainly in accordance with the principle of safeguarding the interests of the child, as determined and related to the child's right to participation and the right to survival and development.[95]

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95 Commissioner for Children's Rights (2014). Position on the Right of the Child to Access Counseling Services of the Cyprus Youth Board Without Parental Consent (2014, July 1). www.childcom.org.cy .

V. Indirect Risk & Protective Factors

1 Gender inequality

Cypriot society remains highly patriarchal as identified by a number of studies that point to the subordinate status of both Cypriot women and women of migrant background, as well as to the prevalence of rigid gender roles which contribute to maintaining this conservative gender order[96]. The repercussions of this subordination are evident in all areas of life including lack of representation in decision making bodies and politics, unequal wages and unequal access to the labour market, harassment in the workplace and the persistence of all forms of violence against women including domestic violence, rape and sexual assault. Discriminatory attitudes and treatment of women and girls of migrant background are also widespread in Cyprus. A recent study on the integration of young migrant female students in Cypriot schools pointed to the different forms of racial and gendered categorization that migrant girls are subjected to by their Cypriot and non-Cypriot peers, and the indirect violence that this maintains[97].

In order to understand the level and forms of GBV affecting teenagers in Cyprus, the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2012) conducted a study that examined the links between patriarchal gender attitudes and toleration/acceptance of GBV within teenage relationships. The research that was conducted among 453 high school students between the ages of 15-18 years old tried to explore young people's attitudes towards GBV, as well as the links between gender stereotypes and GBV and to expose tolerant attitudes among adolescents towards GBV and analyse them in light of the dominant socio-cultural context. The findings of the research show that the existence of patriarchal conceptions of gender in adolescents appears to enhance the tolerance shown by adolescents for gender-based violence. Particularly important is the fact that adolescents largely continue to adopt existing stereotypes, such as men must have a leading role in relationships, and in some cases, consider some forms of gender

96 Vassiliadou, M., 2004, Women's constructions of women; on entering the front door, Journal of International Women's Studies, Special Issue: Feminist Challenges: Crossing Boundaries, 5, 53–67.
97 Gregoriou, Z. and Christou, G. (2011), The Dubious Gift/Debt of Integration: Patriarchal Regimes, Ethnicity and Sexuality in the School Lives of Migrant Girls in Cyprus, in Young Migrant Women in Secondary Education: Promoting Integration and Mutual Understanding through Dialogue and Exchange. Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, pp.41-42

violence "normal".[98] However, the students emphasize the need for awareness among people of their age of issues of gender based violence and inequality[99].

Gender Construction: Masculinities/Femininities

It is important to consider the power relationships between different masculinities as well as their relationships with femininities, and to analyse how this socially reproduces, supports or challenges the distribution of power between women and men. Issues surrounding masculinity and what it means to be a man are increasingly complex, contradictory and confusing. From childhood males and females are bombarded with powerful messages about what it means to be a man and woman; most boys learn to act in a particular way, displaying aggressive forms of masculine behaviour and avoiding behaviours that may be considered effeminate. For many young males, the consequences of failing to live up to accepted standards of masculinity is to risk losing their masculine status, which can have disastrous effects upon male health and self-esteem.[100]

Clinging to stereotypical images of men and masculinity encourages young men to willingly jeopardise their health through engaging in high-risk activities. Research revealed that because young men were ambivalent about their masculinity, they felt enormous pressure to prove their masculinity to others. Subsequently, they were prepared to take risks as part of the price in the pursuit of manhood. The notion of risk is a recurring theme in young men's health statistics. This is evidenced by male risk-taking behaviours such as driving without a seat belt, eating snack foods, fighting, street violence, not visiting doctors, alcohol abuse, car theft, young men internalising their problems and increased suicide rates. Whilst the young men were aware of the dangers, they perceived risk-taking as a necessary component of male youth culture and as an important way in which males demonstrate their masculinity to others.[101]

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98 Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2012). Youth 4 Youth Violence in Relationships: Myths and Realities. University of Nicosia Press; Nicosia. http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/

99 Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2012). Youth 4 Youth Manual for Empowering Young People in preventing gender based violence through peer education. University of Nicosia Press; Nicosia. http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/

100 Council of Europe, (2007). Gender Matters: A Manual on Addressing Gender Based Violence Affecting Young People. Council of Europe, Directorate of Youth and Sport: Hungary. http://eycb.coe.int/gendermatters/

101 ibid

2 Media Portrayals

The Media is a powerful tool for awareness raising and for contributing toward the prevention of violence and inequality. The media can play a critical role in challenging gender norms and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality and violence against women. Despite this, the media in Cyprus largely portrays women in ways that support gender inequality and that reinforce negative gender stereotypes. This is particularly true when reporting issues related to violence against women. Most journalists and media professionals are not gender aware and often promote and perpetuate gross gender stereotyping and common myths associated with violence. Despite this, it must be acknowledged that in recent years journalists have taken an increased interest in human rights issues, including issues related to women rights and violence against women. Research finding by research centres and NGOs are published with more frequency than previously in the print media and are taken up by TV and radio programmes which have promoted increased awareness and public debate. Despite this, a lot more needs to be done to sensitize the media on gender equality issues, as well as to make full use of this medium in reaching a wider audience[102]

Research[103] shows depictions of gender on television portray the Cypriot woman dedicating most of her daily time to her private life, and she experiences a personal-home life that is possessed by negative sentiments particularly hostile ones towards the persons of her close familiar environment. The Cypriot woman appears to be isolated by the wider social environment, thereby living enslaved to, and absolutely dependent on, the "companion of her life". She never asks for a divorce, regardless of what happens in her marital life, while in cases of infidelity, she always blames another woman. Moreover, women restricted in the limited space of their house, in no case participate in decision making processes. Men's profile on television is mainly constructed on the principle of freedom of will and independence. Men, in contrast with women are presented as free beings, meaning that they are self actualised and present elements of

102 Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, (2011). React to Domestic Violence: Building a Support System for Victims of Domestic Violence. http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/REACT_ENG.pdf

103 Koutselini, M. & Agathangelou, S. (2008) The informal curriculum on gender identity, in Ross, A. & Cunningham, P. (eds.) Reflecting on Identities: Research, Practice and Innovation. London: CiCe, 531 - 540

personal life and of choices that are independent from the female gender. Concretely, they are the chiefs and masters. They attract women despite their age and their exterior appearance is not a criterion for women to choose them. Their power and value is straightforward related to their economic situation and not that much to their professional position. The economic wealth constitutes their main characteristic to the extent that it composes their masculinity. They show off their wealth and their material belongings (houses, cars) in order to show who they are. Superior education is not as valued as material wealth[104].

The astonishing majority of female roles (83%) are deprived superior education, while only four out of eleven women who are reported to work are presented in their professional spaces. Women are presented to have limited action in their public life and their educational background in the script is low. Consequently, it is realised that not only does public life constitute a field of action of men, but also, even the limited space that is lent to the female gender is presented as "alien" for women: professional life, pecuniary transactions and political concerns appear not to match with the female exemplar.

As the results of the study indicate, the hierarchical differentiation between the genders' profiles is so apparent, that a stereotypical picture for feminine behaviour is shaped. The present study shows that there is coherence between the gender stereotypes in students' perceptions and the ones promoted by the Mass Media in public life. The results show that while men's profile is constructed on the principle of freedom of will and economic independence, the Cypriot woman is represented to be economically dependent on men. This is related to the fact that she appears to be mainly a housewife with limited professional perspectives. The basic discrimination lies in the fact that the woman does not have her own "centre"; she constructs and readjusts her identity, from her youth to her old age only in relation with her children and spouse and reconstructs herself permanently in order to serve the altered requirements these relations have[105].

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104 ibid
105 Koutselini, M. & Agathangelou, S. (2006). Gender inequality in the Mass Media: Gender profile in public life. Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of the International Academy of Linguistics, Behavioral and Social Sciences. Volume 17. Newport Beach, California. Nov 2006.

3 Homophobia

The Cyprus Youth Board, which is the legal body that represents youth at a policy level in Cyprus drafted the first ever National Youth Policy (2004), in order to upgrade the role of young people in public life and decision making mechanisms[106]. The Youth Policy was reviewed by the Council of Europe Advisory Committee[107], and the following conclusions were drawn: "the international review team was interested in the potential for representation and participation by 'minority' groups of young people, such as young people with disabilities or gay, lesbian and bisexual young people. Throughout the international review team's two visits to the island, such groups (which are often prominent elsewhere) were conspicuous by their absence. The Cyprus Youth Board informed the team that there were 41 'youth organisations' for disability and illness, some run by such young people and some run for them. There was not, however, even one youth organisation dedicated to the needs of young people with alternative sexual orientations..." (p. 57).   The Review team makes a number of recommendations to improve the National Youth Policy in Cyprus, including, Recommendation 21: The international review team feels that the Cyprus Youth Board and others need to give greater attention to the specific needs of 'minority' groups of young people, such as those with disabilities or those with alternative sexual orientation. At the drafting of this Situation Analysis, there is now one youth organization that works to combat trans and homophobia[108].

Two Eurobarometer surveys took place in 2006 and 2008 across EU Member States and examined discrimination across the EU. The reports classified Cyprus in the lowest levels concerning tolerance of LGBT persons and conformity with same sex marriage[109].   In addition, in 2006 the Ombudsman organized a survey concerning homosexuality in Cyprus. The study illustrated that Cypriot society is still conservative with low level of tolerance towards different sexual orientation and concerned with

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106 http://www.youthboard.org.cy/default.asp?id=304. Retrieved 18.09.2014
107 Council of Europe. (2007). Youth policy in Cyprus: conclusions of the council of Europe international review. Council of Europe Publishing: Strasbourg. https://book.coe.int/eur/en/national-youth-policies/6044-pdf-youth-policy-in-cyprus.html
108 http://prezi.com/p-cp_abrzije/rainbowyouth-cyprus/ . Retrieved 18.09.2014
109 Kapsou, M., Christophi, A., & Epaminonda, M. (2011). A report on Sexual Orientation in Cyprus : Mapping the Sociopolitical Climate, Experiences and Needs. Cyprus Family Planning Association & accept-LGBT Cyprus: Nicosia.

protecting traditional principles concerning sexuality and gender roles. This openly homophobic attitude is the main reason why the great majority of LGBT persons in Cyprus prefer to remain "closeted" and fear "coming out". The text of law is also indicative of the situation confronted by LGBT people in Cyprus. The term "sexual orientation" is completely absent and when necessary it is only referred to as "gender orientation" (genetisios prosanatolismos). [110]

Although more young people today than in the past would agree that sexual orientation and lifestyle are a matter of personal choice of the individual and should not be subject to condemnation, few will choose to lead an open homosexual lifestyle[111]. In research conducted by the Cyprus Family Planning Association[112] a significant percentage of young people (42%) agree with the statement that "A sexual relation between two persons of the same sex is wrong", while in questionnaires given to students by the CFPA, 77% of people asked said that it's "not ok" to "have sex with someone of the same gender as myself". A comprehensive survey examining attitudes of the general population toward homosexual was recently conducted after requests by the ombudsman. Results were reflective of a very conservative stance, as an overwhelming majority of people interviewed claimed that sexual relations among people of the same gender are always wrong (54%) or mostly wrong (26%), with a mere 3% of respondents claiming that homosexuality is never wrong[113]. Older age groups appeared particularly intolerant of homosexuality. Also the majority of parents (85%) claim they would not approve of their child being friends with a homosexual person[114].

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110 ibid

111 Smith H., (2001). Cyprus Divided over gay rights, in The Guardian

112 ASTRA, (2006). Youth's Voice: Report on the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Youth of the Central and Eastern Europe and Balkan Countries.
http://www.astra.org.pl/youth/resources/publications.html

113 Psyllides G., (2002). Gays ruling 'too little, too late', in Cyprus Mail

114 Alexandrinou G. (2006). In European Cyprus Homosexuality is considered wrong, in Politis Newspaper

VI. Legal & Policy Framework for SRHR and Adolescents in Cyprus

SRHR are recognized as part of universal human rights in many international conventions[115], including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966 as part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[116], and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) adopted in 1989 at the UN General Assembly[117]. Despite the countless treaties and conventions to promote sexual rights as human rights for adults and children, which have been signed by Cyprus[118], in actuality sexual rights are often neglected and remain unaddressed in national legislation and policy, leaving children extremely vulnerable to sexual abuse, exploitation and countless other harms.

In this discussion on the legal/policy framework for SRHR and adolescents in Cyprus, we will rest our arguments on the primary international legal document for children, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which clearly makes reference to SRHR. Sexual and reproductive rights are an integral component of children's rights originating directly from a number of articles included in the UNCRC[119]. Paul Hunt (2004)[120], the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health, wrote that he had no doubt that the correct understanding of fundamental human rights principles, as well as existing human rights norms, leads ineluctably to the recognition of sexual rights as human rights. Sexual rights include the right of all persons to express their sexual orientation, with due regard for the well-being and rights of others, without fear of

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115 YouAct,(2008).European Charter of Young People for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights:A Rights-Based Perspective.
http://www.youact.org/publications/small_img/Charter%20Sexual%20and%20Reproductive%20Health%20and%20Rights%20of%20Young%20People.pdf
116 https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20999/volume-999-I-14668-English.pdf
117 https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/MTDSG/Volume%20I/Chapter%20IV/IV-11.en.pdf
118 United Nations Treaty Collection Database, http://treaties.un.org/Pages/Treaties.aspx?id=4
119 Convention on the Rights of the Child. (1989, November 20). Retrieved August 18, 2014, from United Nations Human Rights: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf
120 Hunt, P. (2004, February 16). United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to health. Retrieved August 18, 2014, from Economic, social and cultural rights: http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G04/109/33/PDF/G0410933.pdf?OpenElement

persecution, denial of liberty or social interference, based on the understanding that diversity is a fundamental characteristic of sexuality (UNESCO, 2009b)[121].

The UNCRC was ratified by the Republic of Cyprus from 1991 (after adoption of Law 243/1990) and has a superior force to any national law. The incorporation of the Convention on the Rights of Child into the Republic of Cyprus's municipal law is stated in Law 243 of 1990. In addition, to make sure the UNCRC is implemented, an independent body for the protection of the rights of the child was founded in Cyprus in 2007 with the appointment of a Commissioner for Children's Rights (CCR)[122]. Thus, the actual rights of children in relation to sexual health have been outlined and agreed upon (UNCRC) and the mechanism for safeguarding those (CCR) in Cyprus has been established. However, it is often the case that the principles derived from international human rights instruments are often not mainstreamed into national legislation, and as a result, their effective implementation is deficient. As stated in the *'Report of the Commissioner for Children´s Rights to the UN Committee On The Rights Of The Child' (September 2011):* various gaps have been noted in relation to '*the incorporation of international human rights instruments into national legislation and their recognition and respect in practice and their full implementation through practical measures that will make a difference to the lives of children in Cyprus'*.

I Sexual Rights in the Context of Children's Rights

In general, the contents of sexual rights - the right to sexual health and the right to reproductive health - are obviously and directly related to several articles of the CRC. The CRC provides that all children have **the right to life and development (Article 6)**, **freedom from sexual violence (Article 19), access to information aimed at the promotion of their mental and physical health (Articles 13 and 17),** and that **States have the obligation to develop preventive health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services (Article 24)**. It also provides that children have **the right to education that will help them develop their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities (Article 29).** The articles mentioned above should

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121 UNESCO. 2009b. International technical guidance: An evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators. 2 vols. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
122 http://www.unicef.org/crc

be implemented under the governance of the general principles of CRC: **non-discrimination (Article 2), child's best interest (Article 3), children's participation (Article 12) and freedom of expression (Article 13)** which further support and encompass the sexual and reproductive rights.

The particular threat to children's **Right to Life and Development (Article 6)** posed by HIV/AIDS is addressed in the Committee's General Comment No. 3[123] on "HIV/AIDS and the rights of the child": *"Children have the right not to have their lives arbitrarily taken, as well as to benefit from economic and social policies that will allow them to survive into adulthood and develop in the broadest sense of the word. State obligation to realize the right to life, survival and development also highlights the need to give careful attention to sexuality as well as to the behaviors and lifestyles of children, even if they do not conform with what society determines to be acceptable under prevailing cultural norms for a particular age group. In this regard, the female child is often subject to harmful traditional practices, such as early and/or forced marriage, which violate her rights and make her more vulnerable to HIV infection, because such practices often interrupt access to education and information. Effective prevention programmes are only those that acknowledge the realities of the lives of adolescents, while addressing sexuality by ensuring equal access to appropriate information, life skills, and to preventive measures."*

In General Comment No. 4[124] on "Adolescent health and development in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child", the Committee on the Rights of the Child proposes: *"In light of **articles 3, 17 and 24 of the Convention, States Parties should provide adolescents with access to sexual and reproductive information**, including on family planning and contraceptives, the dangers of early pregnancy, the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). In addition, **States Parties should ensure that they have access to appropriate information, regardless of their marital status and whether their parents or guardians consent.** It is essential to find proper means and methods of providing*

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123 Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 3, 2003, CRC/GC/2003/3, para. 11
124 Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 4, 2003, CRC/GC/2003/4, paras. 28 and 33.See also paras. 39 and 41. For full text of General Comments see www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/comments.htm

information that is adequate and sensitive to the particularities and specific rights of adolescent girls and boys".

Protection of Children against Sexual Violence (Article 19 of the CRC)According to the CRC, **Article 19,** children have the right to be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, **including sexual abuse,** while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child. Moreover, the State is obliged to take all measures (including provision of education) to prevent sexual violence and protect children from such. Even though there have been some efforts to review the current legal framework on the Welfare, Care and Protection of Children, which would modernize the relevant laws to come up to international and European standards, this revision and modernization is still pending, leaving some situations of violence against children unregulated. For instance, according to the Commissioner's Report to the UN[125], Section 54 of the Children's Law, which prohibits any form of cruelty against children under sixteen specifically provides that these provisions may not be construed as affecting '*the right of any parent or teacher or any person having the lawful control or charge of the child to administer punishment on him/her*'. Moreover, despite legislation prohibiting discrimination on various grounds (through the ratification of the Protocol 12 of the European Convention of Human Rights), there are numerous sector specific laws relating to children and young people which do not incorporate the general principle of non-discrimination. What appears to be challenging is the practical implementation of this principle, especially on school grounds. The fact that school bullying and intimidation on sexual grounds are on the rise only confirms this fact. This raises serious concerns about the effectiveness of the measures taken to tackle discrimination.

Protection of Children against Gender Based Violence (Articles 19 & 2 of the CRC)

One of the biggest challenges in combating violence against girls in Cyprus is the fact that the current legislative framework and policies are designed to combat 'family violence' only. Notably, Cyprus has a strong and very comprehensive legislative framework to combat family violence. A National Action Plan for the Prevention and

125 Report Of The Commissioner For Children´s Rights In Cyprus To The UN Committee On The Rights Of The Child :Supplementary Report To The 3rd And 4th Periodic Report Of Cyprus, Sept. 2011

Combating of Violence in the Family has also been in place for the period 2010-2013, including the development of Interdepartmental Procedures, which provides a framework for the cooperation of relevant departments in combating family violence. However, the system put in place for handling cases of domestic violence still faces many challenges. State services for the support and protection of victims of domestic violence do not adequately respond to the victims' needs, including children victims of domestic violence. From complaints submitted to the Commissioner for Children's Rights, it is evident that the implementation of the said legislation lacks in coherence, a truly multidisciplinary approach and an effective protection of domestic violence victims[126]. Moreover, the definition of violence in the family is gender neutral, resulting in women and girls not being recognized as the primary victims of such violence and disguising the gendered power relations at stake in violence against women and girls. As all public services work within this framework, as defined by law, there is a complete lack of a gender perspective in prevention and service provision.

Intimate partner violence (IPV), rape and sexual assault, are seldom present in public and political discourse and are absent from the political framework. Despite the importance of strategies to reach adolescents in prevention programs to address gender-based violence, primary prevention in this respect has largely been absent from policy and programs.   In the absence of any real government action in the area of primary prevention of gender-based violence, a number of NGOs (such as the Cyprus Family Planning Association and the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies) systematically work with young people in the education system to raise awareness and provide information on issues related to gender based violence

Protection of children against Sexual Abuse/Exploitation (Article 34 of the CRC)

According to the CRC, all children must be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. Specifically, **Article 34** states that 'for *these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:* (a) *The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity; (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other*

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126 ibid

unlawful sexual practices; and (c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

In addition to the ratification of the CRC, Parliament ratified the Lanzarote Convention of the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse[127] in November 2014. The Lanzarote Convention is the most advanced and comprehensive legally binding instrument at international level on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Article 23 of the Convention specifically criminalizes the solicitation of children for sexual purposes ("grooming"). This reflects the increasingly worrying phenomenon of children being sexually harmed in meetings with adults whom they had initially encountered in cyberspace, specifically in internet chat rooms or game sites.

National legislation on Combating Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings and Protection of Victims was passed in 2007, which includes provisions against the sexual exploitation of minors and child pornography. Despite the presence of these laws, there is no mechanism towards combating the sexual abuse and exploitation of minors. Moreover, following a recommendation by the Commissioner of Children's Rights, the competent Minister of Labor and Social Insurance has yet to proceed with setting up a National Committee which would bring together all relevant stakeholders in fighting sexual abuse and exploitation of children[128].

In July of 2014[129] national legislation amending the legal framework of sexual exploitation of children and child pornography was passed in Cyprus[130]. This amendment directly and clearly implicates the Ministry of Education and Culture in its responsibility to ensure that children in primary and secondary education are informed of the dangers of sexual exploitation and abuse, and are given the tools to protect themselves through a general education on sexuality, which corresponds to children's

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http://www.childcom.org.cy/ccr/ccr.nsf/All/B09F6FC8A799C597C2257BAC00283789?OpenDocument&highlight=lanzarote
128 Report Of The Commissioner For Children´s Rights In Cyprus To The UN Committee On The Rights Of The Child :
Supplementary Report To The 3rd And 4th Periodic Report Of Cyprus, Sept. 2011
129 http://www.childcom.org.cy/ccr/ccr.nsf/all/.pdf
130 Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Law, 2014 [L.91 (I)/2014]. Cyprus Gazette N.91(I)2014, pp. 681-712.

age and developmental stage. This law is very important in that it is the only legislation, up to date, that clearly obliges the Ministry of Education to deliver Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as part of prevention measures.

2 The Cyprus Government's Involvement in Promoting Children's Rights

The competent national body for drafting and promoting youth policy in Cyprus is the Cyprus Youth Board (CYB), which is under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture and is a semi-governmental organization founded in 1994. CYB plays an advisory role for the Parliament through the Ministry of Education and Culture[131]. In 2004 the first Political Text on Youth was drafted by CYB (the "White Text"). This document was adopted in 2005 by the Ministerial Committee of the Ministry of Justice as an official document for youth. The "White Text" was criticized by the Council of Europe, because it focuses on health issues relating to drugs, and does not pay adequate attention to other important issues, such as Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) [132]. Also, the Council of Europe recommends that the review of the White Text pays more attention to the needs of minorities or marginalized young people and refers specifically to young people with special needs and young people with alternative sexual orientation[133].

As regards the Parliament, there are no specific Standing Committees for Youth or SRHR. The existing standing committees at which certain SRHR issues could be examined are: 1) Education Standing Committee, 2) the Standing Committee on Human Rights and Equal Opportunities between Men and Women, and 3) the Standing Committee on Health. However the fact that there is no specific Standing Committee on Youth in the absence of a Ministry dedicated especially to youth issues creates a problem of strategic implementation of any policy that concerns young people[134].

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131 www.youthboard.org.cy
132 Country Sheet on Youth policy in Cyprus. Council of Europe. Youth Board of Cyprus www.youthboard.org.cy
133 Council of Europe (2007).Youth Policy in Cyprus: Conclusions of the Council of Europe International Review. Strasbourg, Council of Europe.
134 Council of Europe, (2009). Youth Policy Manual How to develop a national youth strategy. Printed at the Council of Europe

National Level Action Plans

Apart from an action plan of the Ministry of Health that deals with HIV/AIDS, there is no other national action plan or strategy to specifically deal with young people's SRH. The national action plan for HIV/AIDS (2010-2014) acknowledges that the group of people aged 15-24 years old is at high risk since half of the new HIV infections in the world (2008) occurred in this group. It reports that special emphasis should be given to this age group aiming at increasing the level of adopting safe sexual behaviours and supports that young people of this age group should " develop the skills needed to adopt a safe sexual and reproductive behaviour", in cooperation with interested parties such as parents and teachers[135]. It refers to information programs for young people aged 15-24 within and outside the educational system, and to the necessity of creating youth-friendly services. The national plan also stresses the need for data collection and reduction of prejudice around HIV/AIDS. This Action Plan is not implemented, and there are no reports of progress of implementation in Cyprus.

Unfortunately, there are no formal policies or action plans with regard to contraception, abortion, and SRH in relation to adolescents (or adults). Sexuality Education as well as gender issues (stereotypes) have been included in the 2010 – 2013 National Action Plan for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, although a gender based understanding of domestic violence is not mainstreamed within the document. Sexuality Education has been included as an important element regarding country goals concerning active ageing and increasing birth rate in the Draft Action Plan for Demographic and Family Policy, 2011 – 2015. Once again, this Action Plan is not implemented.

National Level Legislation - Legal ages for Sex, Marriage, and Abortion

Since 2002 the legal age at which one can have sex is 17. It is worth noting that this was changed from the previous legal age of 16 for heterosexual sex and 18 for homosexual sex, after activists' demands, citing discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. In order to rectify the situation, lawmakers opted to increase the age of consent for heterosexual sex from 16 to 17, rather than lower the age of homosexual

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135 HIV Strategic Plan 2010-2014, the Cyprus Ministry of Health. For summary
http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/pio/pio.nsf/All/CF448F565B5D3F99C22578B50027B5C3?Opendocument&print
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sex to match that of heterosexual sex[136]. Instead lawmakers harmonized the age of consent for sexual relations to 17 for both heterosexual and homosexual sex, getting rid of the discriminatory discrepancy in this way.

The legal age for marriage is 18 years, or 16 with parent or guardian's consent[137].

The legal age for abortion is not clearly specified in the law. In Cyprus abortion law is both permissive and restrictive. The Criminal Code as amended in 1986 (Law No. 186)[138], permits abortion if two medical practitioners are of good faith that continuance of the pregnancy would endanger the life of the pregnant woman, or that physical, mental or psychological injury would be suffered by her or by any existing child she may have, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, or that there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such serious physical or psychological abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped. The Criminal Code also permits abortion if the pregnancy resulted from rape. In practice, "mental and psychological injury" is generally interpreted as including socio-economic grounds[139].There are obvious discrepancies in these laws, which have been brought to the attention of the Law Commissioner, who is currently looking into the matter.

LGBT Rights

Cyprus was the last European country to decriminalize male homosexual acts between consenting adults - as late as 1998, and after great pressure from the Council of Europe. That was after a long legal battle, which started in 1989 with activist and head of the Cypriot Homosexuals Liberation Movement (AKOK) Mr. Alecos Modinos. The change in the law triggered great debate at the time, and was met with considerable resistance from the Greek Orthodox Church. Clerics and supporters of the church held demonstrations outside the Parliament for several days, opposing the decriminalization of the male homosexual act. The new law was still considered discriminatory, as homosexual intercourse was defined as "carnal knowledge against the order of nature", and this was amended after demands made by activists, in 2000. In 2002, the age of consent for homosexual relationships was lowered from 18 to 17, to match the age of

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136 http://www.cyprus-mail.com/July/12/news5.htm
137 The Marriage Law 2003.104(I)/2003
138 www.un.org/esa/population/publications/abortion/doc/cyprus1.doc
139 ibid

consent for heterosexual relationships (which was raised from the previous 16) [6]. The pre-1998 law made no reference to lesbian relationships. As opposed to male homosexuality, lesbian relationships have never been condemned, or even referred to in the Cypriot legislation.

Despite the changes made in the laws, not much has changed in terms of the everyday lives of homosexuals in Cyprus even today. Few homosexual individuals are actively demanding their rights, while the statement made by Alecos Modinos in 2001, that "[h]omosexuals, here, are so terrified of "coming out" that they are forced to lead unhealthy double lives, usually with lots of different partners,"[140] still applies today to a great extent. Public disapproval of homosexuality and pressure from the family to lead a (heterosexual) family-centered life remain strong forces[141]. The right to equal recognition before the law is still an issue, as legislation legitimizing Civil Unions has not been passed.

3 Interventions through the Health Education Curriculum

Comprehensive Sexuality Education

The recent Educational Reform (2010 - 2011) has brought about several changes in the Compulsory Education Curriculum on all educational levels that have been implemented in 2012. In Primary Education (ages 6-11) concepts and topics of Sexual and Reproductive Health are included in Health Education in the chapter *Creating and Improving the Social Self* (3.3). In Secondary Education, SRH topics are covered in Biology and Home Economics in the Health Education Curriculum, which has been fully adopted in Home Economics.

The new Health Educational material (which includes CSE topics) is based on a Health Promotion philosophy that views Health as a human right and a social, rather than, individual responsibility. Health Education attendance is mandatory in primary and secondary school (Gymnasium) for all students except for the Lyceum (highschool). Students in the first class of Lyceum do not have any mandatory lessons related to health and sex education. Students in the 5th and 6th form of high school (ages 16/17) may take as optional the Family Education subject taught in the framework of Home

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140 Smith H., (2001) Cyprus Divided over gay rights, in The Guardian
141 Psyllides G. (2002) Gays ruling 'too little, too late', in Cyprus Mail

Economics. CSE helps young people develop the skills to be able to acknowledge their rights and obligations regarding their Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and make decisions for the benefit of SRH and consequently for the benefit of the wellbeing of the wider Cypriot society. In this sense, CSE promotes an attitude of social accountability for sexual health, instead of individual accountability for healthy behaviour that may foster 'victim blaming' when healthy sexual behaviours are not individually undertaken. The introduction of Health Education in schools in Cyprus as of 2012 that includes SRH topics is an important step for the safeguarding of children's right to sexuality education. Other important aspects of CSE must be dealt with now such as establishing adequate teaching hours, ensuring the quality and content of sexuality education, provision by the competent Ministry of guidelines and policies for educators, provision of training opportunities to educators, and the supervision and assessment of the program and its results.

Adolescents (88%) state that when they have a question/problem related to sexuality issues they usually get information from friends, 30% of them receive it from doctor/nurse/specialist and only 14% receive it from an organization/clinic. Most important is that the doctor/nurse/specialist is recognized by them as the best way of getting correct information. The Commissioner for Children's Rights has publicized a position promoting the right of children to access information and counseling services regardless of parental consent.[142] Teachers who are adequately trained, can be a source of invaluable and scientifically accurate information for children, especially if they have enough teaching hours to cover the topics of sexuality education comprehensively. Also, there should be a flow from primary to secondary education so children are prepared incrementally, and have developed a familiarity with concepts and ideas related to sexuality education. This process starts in primary school with learning about the human body without shame/discomfort and ends in secondary school with the competency to develop health relationships.

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142 Commissioner for Children's Rights (2014). Position on the Right of the Child to Access Counseling Services of the Cyprus Youth Board Without Parental Consent (2014, July 1). www.childcom.org.cy

VII. Conclusions/Recommendations

The picture painted for the sexual health of adolescents in Cyprus is dire. Little research exists, but the limited research shows that adolescents are lacking knowledge about conception, contraception, sexual health, sexual violence, sexual rights and gender. They have no access to pharmaceutical contraception and medical services without the consent of parents, and no reliable source to talk to about these things. The only contraception available to adolescents are condoms, which are accessible on the market (namely at kiosks). There are no family planning services offered by the public sector. Children suffer sexual bullying in schools and are subject to homophobic violence, resulting in many children feeling unsafe at school. Child pornography is on the increase, with actual cases in Cyprus, as well as cases of child grooming and sexual exploitation via the internet. Children lack awareness in terms of recognizing acts of sexual abuse of children, and often experience difficulty to react in such situations and are unaware of which authorities are responsible in such cases or what their role and responsibilities are[143]. Children are subject to unrealistic stereotypes of beauty through the media, which influence body image and the prevalence of eating disorders (especially amongst girls); this occurs during teenage years, during the process of discovering and creating sexual identity. Moreover, the numbers of rape and domestic violence are increasing, which is indicative of increasing gender inequality in that these forms of crime are particularly gender based.

Youth Policy in Cyprus emphasizes health and prevention of drug use without making explicit ties to sexuality, so that often, the topic of sexuality and young people is often totally ignored. Despite the mandate of the Ministry of Education to provide comprehensive sexuality education, it has not yet effectively implemented it. Even though prevention of sexual abuse has been included as one of the objectives of Health Education in the school curriculum, the public school education system does not seem to be sufficient enough in providing children and teenagers with the necessary knowledge and skills to protect themselves from related dangers of sexual abuse[144].

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143 Office of the Commissioner for Children' s rights' report to the Council Of Europe with regards to 'One In Five Champaign'
144 ibid

Continuing to ignore the whole issue of sexuality in relation to children/adolescents, hoping it will go away, is no longer an option - especially with increasing use of information technologies and social media.

Indicative of the 'ignore it and it will go away attitude' is the fact that we lack statistics in Cyprus concerning important outcomes - we have little or no knowledge of the extent of unwanted pregnancy, abortion and the rate of sexual abuse of children by both adults and other children. Just because we do not collect data on these issues and therefore have no accurate knowledge of the extent of the phenomenon, doesn't mean that it doesn't exist, nor does it mean we can pretend it doesn't exist. The increasing number of cases of sexual exploitation of children (including the use of children in online pornographic material) raises questions as to whether existing legislative and institutional frameworks are adequately successful in protecting children against sexual exploitation. The lack of any available data is of serious concern. According to Stella Kyriakides, General Rapporteur on Children of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) *"in order to assess the situation in Cyprus, we have to review the existing methodologies, modalities and structures for data collection on child sexual abuse. Without accurate data we cannot guarantee that policy recommendations for legislative and institutional reforms are successful*[145]*'*.

Sexuality is a natural and integral part of all people as of the moment they are born. Therefore, learning about sexuality is a lifelong process; messages about sexuality are constantly sent directly or indirectly through social interaction and experience. It is important that this informal process of learning is supported by formal education that shall provide learning opportunities throughout the growth of persons. Young people need both informal and formal sexuality education. The two should not be opposed; they complement one another. On the one hand, young people need love, space and support in their everyday social environment to develop their sexual identity, and on the other hand they also need to acquire specific knowledge, attitudes and skills, in which professionals have an important role to play. The main professional information and education providers are the schools; educational books, brochures, leaflets and CD-

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145 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=4690&lang=2&cat=133

ROMs; educational sites on the internet; educational radio and television programs and campaigns; and finally (medical) service providers[146].

According to Kirby (1995)[147] effective educational programmes concerning sexuality education promote clear reinforcement of individual values and group norms appropriate to the age and experience of the pupils and provide opportunities to practice communication and negotiation skills to increase confidence. As in all areas of education, sexual education must be adapted to different age groups and cultures and in addition, teaching strategies must be differentiated and flexible to meet the differing needs of female and male students[148]. Information and education on sexuality must be available to children and young people of all ages and the interventions should be suitable to the age and maturity level of the target group. For example sexuality education for young children should be focused on aspects of sexuality relevant to their growth (e.g. emotions, what the body looks like and what is the role of the body)[149].

Although every human is a sexual being from birth, this should not, in any way, legitimize the sexualization of children for exploitation by adults. It is important to recognize that every human is a sexual being, including children, so that children's needs in relation to their developing sexuality are understood and addressed. As a society we have a responsibility to provide our young people with the information and skills they need to make informed decisions about their sexuality so we can help them create positive and respectful relationships[150]. Rather than feign ignorance, we need to actively design and implement interventions to protect the sexual health of adolescents. The most effective way we can do this is to ensure the implementation of the sexuality education module in the Health Education curriculum, as approved in the Education Reform, and legally mandated. Sexuality education is NOT about teaching children to

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146 WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe
147 Kirby, D. (1995). Sex and HIV/AIDS education in schools. BMJ, 311, 403.
148 Munoz, V. (2010, July 23). Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education. Retrieved August 18, 2014, from United Nations Special Rapporteur: http://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/UNSR_Sexual_Education_2010.pdf
149 International Planned Parenthood Federation, European Network (IPPF, EN; 2006). Sexuality Education in Europe – A Reference Guide to Policies and Practices. http://www.ippfen.org/en/Resources/Publications/Sexuality+Education+in+Europe.htm
150 Kirby, D.,Laris, B. A., Rolleri, L. (2005). Impact of Sex and HIV Education Programs on Sexual Behaviors of Youth in Developing and Developed Countries. FHI Youth Research Working Paper, No 2. Family Health International, Youth Net Program: Research Triangle Park, NC.

have sex; as a matter of fact, research shoes that children who receive comprehensive sexuality education delay sexual activity and have a lower number of sexual partners[151], as well as have increased knowledge and skills regarding contraception. Furthermore, increased use of contraception is related to lower abortion rates[152]. The question that arises, after all the evidence documenting the social and individual benefit of comprehensive sexuality education, is 'why is it not being implemented in Cyprus?' The answer is yet unknown.

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151 Kirby, D. (2000). School-based interventions to prevent unprotected sex and HIV among adolescents. In J. L. Peterson & R. J. DiClemente (Eds.), Handbook of HIV prevention. (pp.103-127). NY: Kluwer Academics/Plenum Publishers.
152 Kirby, D. (2001). Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

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