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# Sexual harassment

*Material documented and presented by students:*

***Stanica Cristian Stefan***

***Gulian Aura Bianca***

***Badea Ana Maria Gabriela***

***Stefanescu Octavian Mihai***

*Coordinating teachers:*

***Birsan Sorin***

***Marc Alina***

**LICEUL "CHARLES LAUGIER"**

**CRAIOVA, ROMANIA**

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Sexual harassment is behavior in which the victim is induced to offer sexual favors, usually in the workplace, through intimidation, threats or coercion, the perpetrator abusing of its function or power to achieve its purposes. It may harm dignity or create a hostile, humiliating or offensive work environment. From this point of view, the harasser appears as an aggressor, and the harassed person as a victim. Sexual harassment can take many forms, from touching and caressing (physical harassment), unwanted comments about your private life (verbal harassment) to threats of job loss or rejection Promotion/salary increases in case of rejection of sexual advances (Quid pro quo harassment). It can be direct, through verbal and physical aggression, or indirect, through behaviors that isolate, discriminate or exclude the person in question on the grounds of gender role. Sexual harassment is manifested either through physical aggression or through behaviors that can isolate, discriminate or exclude the person on the basis of sex • In 2015, it was estimated that globally, at least 35% of women were physically and/or sexually abused. Between 40 and 50 percent of women in the European Union have been harassed at work. Bullies and rapists have no regard for education, age, gender, social class, or citizenship. Within the US military, data from the Department of Veterans Affairs shows that 30% of female soldiers have been raped and 90% have been sexually harassed. The US Department of Defense is well aware of the problem and believes that 90% of sexual assaults are not even reported.

In 2001, Romania was in first place among the countries of central and eastern Europe in terms of the incidence of assaults and sexual incidents at work, according to a UNICEF report. Out of 1000 women, 108 fell victim to sexual incidents, while another 41 reported at least one sexual assault at work. In May 2016, in France, a petition publicly signed by 500 female politicians and activists called for an end to the practice of self-imposed Omerta silence regarding sexual harassment. Surprisingly or not, the topic of sexual harassment is also used and discussed in fictional works of art such as the books Examples: Ecstasy through So much, Guide of sexual enlightenment, Manipulation of the opposite sex, The secrets of tantric sex.

Sexual harassment in schools and universities A study from October 2, 2023, showed that 55% of Romanian students who participated in the most extensive exploratory project regarding the phenomenon of sexual harassment were victims of this crime at least once, in high school or in university. Of these students, 41% of them were minors at the time of the abuse. The students who responded to the questionnaire mentioned cases of sexual harassment, kidnapping and rape, most of them coming from high school students. 11% of the students said that they received threats and were forced to have sex in order to be assessed

at school/university. In comparison, the teachers say that there are no cases of sexual harassment in schools, if there are, they are very rare.

How can the government combat sexual harassment? The adoption of normative acts and the assumption of responsibility is an important step towards combating sexual harassment. With all these things said, the Romanian government must go beyond the promises and give them substance by applying the legal stipulations, identifying and sanctioning the perpetrators when the cases are reported. In public spaces where the risks of sexual harassment such as: universities, hospitals, structures of public administration or police stations, effective solutions must be found to encourage the reporting of these behaviors which at the same time ensure the safety of the victim until the end of the cases. Regarding the situation from a moral point of view, we teenagers must contribute because the women who are sexually assaulted can be our mothers, our sisters, our girlfriends/wives or worse, our daughters.

Only through this fight against injustices can we work towards a better, safer and happier world not only for our relatives and for every person on earth.

Combating sexual harassment involves implementing clear policies and laws against sexual harassment. Education and awareness in communities and workplaces, support for victims and promoting a culture of respect and gender equality. This may include awareness campaigns, training staff to recognize and handle cases of harassment, facilitating access to legal and counseling services for victims, and appropriately punishing perpetrators under the law. In addition, it is important to encourage women to speak openly about their experiences and to provide them with a safe and sporting environment to do so.

Non-governmental organizations, government institutions and companies can work together to develop programs and policies that provide broad support and combat the culture of gender-based harassment and discrimination. It is also essential to encourage the involvement of men and provide them with education about the importance of gender equality and respect for all persons. In my opinion, harassment of women is unacceptable and is a serious violation of human rights and human dignity. It is a complex and deeply concerning societal problem that requires a broad approach and ongoing awareness to be effectively combated. It is crucial to promote a culture of mutual respect, consensus and gender equality, and to support victims by providing them with support and access to resources to regain control and seek justice. The phenomenon of sexual violence in Romania in 2022 is complex and concerning, with a significant number of solved and unsolved cases. As for the perpetrators, men predominate, while most of the victims are women, including

minor girls. The EU report highlights women's widespread fear of harassment and physical or sexual assault, with a particular focus on avoiding situations and places perceived as unsafe. Young people under the age of 30 are more exposed to these forms of violence, and access to the Internet is an important factor in this regard. In the context of the pandemic, violence and harassment are predominantly taking place online and in their own homes, with a negative impact on victims, and the justice system and access to support for victims of domestic violence is limited.

Non-governmental organizations and feminist activists are sounding the alarm about the need for more education on sexual harassment, improving the justice system and adopting stronger legislation to protect victims and punish perpetrators. In 2022, a total of 1773 cases of rape, 829 cases of sexual assault and 2125 cases of sexual intercourse with a minor were resolved in Romania. Unfortunately, a significant percentage of these cases were settled by settlement. Moreover, a large number of cases remain unsolved at the end of the year, including 2,628 cases of rape, 1,648 cases of sexual assault, and 4,445 cases of sexual intercourse with a minor. When it comes to perpetrators, 98% of individual defendants prosecuted for rape, sexual assault or intercourse with a minor are men. As for the victims, 92% of them are women, with 215 women and 1011 girls involved in these cases.

The European Union has published a report which points out that women are constantly in fear of harassment and physical or sexual aggression in most member states. According to the study, eight out of ten young women avoid situations where they feel unsafe, compared to 59% of men of the same age. Women over 30 are less cautious, but still, between 65 and 74% avoid such situations. The report reveals that women's fears are justified, as those who have already been victims of unpleasant experiences avoid risky situations more than those who have not been assaulted or harassed. About a quarter of the young participants in the study were victims of physical violence, and women are exposed to a risk of sexual aggression in public spaces 3-4 times higher than men. Bullying is more common than violence and affects 6 out of 10 young people, being more common outside the home.

Statistics show that men are the main aggressors, but a quarter of assaults against women are committed by other women. The situation in Romania is similar, and the lack of education and information contributes to the perpetuation of these harmful behaviors. Access to justice is limited for women, and traumatic treatment within institutions discourages reporting of incidents. Young women are more affected, but there is hope that changes in attitudes and access to information can help reduce these problems.

## ***Sexual harassment in Romanian universities***

**30%** of the young women said they had been **sexually harassed in college**.

Unwanted touching, sexual advances, indecent comments and proposals, humiliating names such as, "**doll**", "**rope**", whistling, pinching or even sexually explicit discussions are the most common cases of sexual harassment in universities.

**"I was approached by a college professor on social media. I received countless messages late at night with sexual overtones and indecent proposals."**

testified a young participant in the study.

**"He came up to me and put his hand on my leg"**

In many of the harassment cases, the victims or witnesses did not act in any way for fear of repercussions, and in the situations where they did take a stand, those who complained about the behavior of the bully faced defamation, criticism and pressure. not to file a complaint, the FILIA Center report also shows.

In the **five** years, just**1** case of sexual harassment was registered in the universities of the country!

Many times, students are afraid to report cases of sexual harassment to the Ethics Commission of the university where they study for fear of not being further away, of being victimized or for fear that there is too little objectivity in case analysis, draws the attention of the National Alliance of Student Organizations from Romania (ANOSR).

The representatives of the students in the country believe that an external committee would seem the ideal solution – the University Ethics and Management Council.

A first set of indicators we looked at was whether discrimination is mentioned in codes of ethics. In this regard, 94.11% of the ethics codes mention discrimination in general, and 75.29% mention gender discrimination. Although these percentages are high, it should be noted that in most cases, gender discrimination is presented extremely succinctly, through an enumeration of the type:

***Unequal treatment of a person in relation to others, treatment that aims at or leads to the violation or limitation of the respective person's rights, based on criteria of: gender, race, age, disabilities, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, religion, social category, status material or medium of origin.***

This formulation is standard, but concise. The notion of „unequal treatment” can be perceived as unclear without further explanation: what behaviors or facts would fall into this category?

A clearer definition is the one provided by law no. 324 of July 14, 2006:

***“In Romania, discrimination is defined as distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, social category, beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, non-contagious chronic disease, HIV infection, belonging to a disadvantaged category, etc.”***

Furthermore, we looked at whether the codes of ethics mention harassment, both in general, but especially sexual. In this regard, 63 codes, i.e. 74.11%, mention harassment in general and only 38 codes (44.70%) mention sexual harassment.

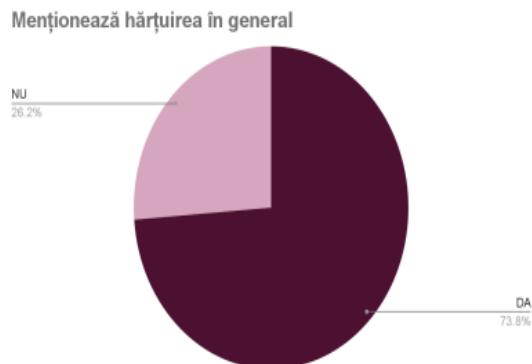
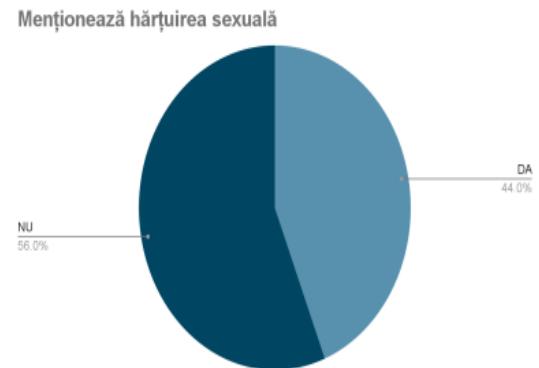


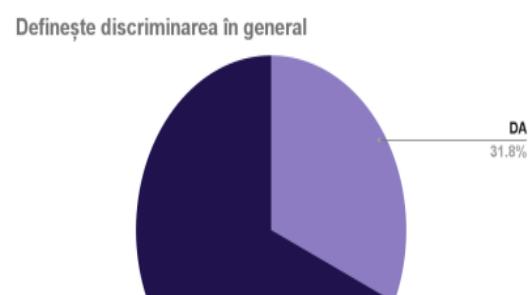
Chart 1: Percentage of ethics codes that mention harassment overall

Chart 2: Percentage of ethics codes that mention sexual harassment



If in the first part we looked at a minimal level of mention of discrimination or harassment - we also considered brief mentions, of a few words, then we asked ourselves how many codes of ethics go deeper into this theme.

In this sense, we find that only **21.17%** of ethics codes provide a definition of discrimination in general, and no ethics code defines gender-specific discrimination.



### Chart 3: Percentage of ethics codes that define discrimination in general

Regarding harassment, **27** of the codes (31.76%) provide a definition for harassment in general and only **12** (14.11%) for the sexual one. We can see, then, that gender-related forms of discrimination and harassment do not receive as much attention as general forms.

This can be explained by the lack of education and gender awareness in society.

Often we do not see the importance, at the structural and decision-making level, of approaching the gender theme, considering that a general explanation, which indirectly also includes these forms, is sufficient.

But gender discrimination and forms of violence against women, including sexual harassment, are specific forms that arise precisely from the inequality of power and rights between men and women.