



PERCEPTION OF GENDER RELATIONS AND INFLUENCE ON YOUNG PEOPLE

RESEARCH RESULTS
" PARTICIPATORY LEARNING AND ACTION (PLA)"
IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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AUTHOR:

Srđan Dušanić, PhD

DESIGN:

Riad Selimbegović

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Acronyms / Abbreviations

BiH - Bosnia and Herzegovina

FBiH – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

GBV - Gender-based violence

IPD - Institute for Population and Development

NGO - Non-governmental organization

PLA - Participatory learning and action

RS - Republika Srpska

WHO - World Health Organization

UNIFEM - United Nations Development Fund for Women

INTRODUCTION

According to statistics from numerous global studies, men are predominantly involved in various forms of antisocial behavior, such as homicides, violence against other men and women, alcohol and drug consumption, and more. Such behaviors are often conditioned by societal norms and expectations imposed on young boys and men. In most communities, there is an expectation for men to be dominant, strong, brave, protectors, willing to take risks, and to have as many sexual partners as possible, among other traits. This perception of men and the expectations placed on them steer men towards antisocial and risky behaviors, manifested through displays of physical strength in fights, substance abuse, reckless driving, asserting dominance over partners, etc. The aftermath is that young boys and men play a significant role in violence, homicides, thefts, substance abuse, and the transmission of HIV (Cincotta et al., 2003, Barker 2005).

These norms contribute not only to risky and antisocial behaviors but often lead to frustration and depression when a man cannot meet societal expectations. This was particularly evident during times of war and post-war periods, under conditions of mass social deprivation when most people struggled to provide normal living conditions for their families. Patriarchal attitudes and rigid forms of masculinity are often promoted through various spheres of society, within families, through media messages, in schools, and other public and private spaces. On the other hand, numerous social norms regarding women encourage their inferior position and tolerance for endured violence. Gender equality and violence prevention are linked to these norms, which often idealize different behaviors that expose young men and women to risks.

To ensure that healthy relationships based on equality and human rights form the foundation for human development, it is crucial to encourage young boys and girls to consciously reflect on these matters. Guided by this goal, the IPD Association (IPD - Institute for Population and Development), Care International, and other international and local partners have undertaken a series of projects and activities aimed at gender sensitization, deconstructing hegemonic masculinities, and raising awareness about how hegemonic gender norms and male socialization lead to self-destructive actions and unequal attitudes and behaviors towards women and girls.

In the following sections, we will present key theoretical constructs, an analysis of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the program itself, followed by the methodology and research results with recommendations.

Key constructs and concepts

DURING THE 1980s, gender and sex began to be studied as social categories. The main assumption of this approach is that society significantly influences the shaping of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of women and men (Ashmore, 1991). Sex refers to the biological and psychological characteristics that determine males (boys) and females (girls), encompassing sexual organs, hormones, the endocrine system, secondary sexual characteristics, chromosomes, etc. In contrast, gender is a social construction of biological sex, involving socially constructed roles and expectations that a given society deems appropriate for males and females. Gender roles can be described as a set of expectations about the behavior of women and men (Myers, 1993) and often manifest through psychological characteristics of femininity and masculinity (Deaux and LaFrance, 1998).

Gender identity is a category of identity based on belonging to the female or male gender, mostly derived from a person's biological sex (Cook, 1985, as cited in Marušić, 1994). Early emphasis on belonging to biological sex significantly influences the psychological development of a child and marks the beginning of the gender typing process, adopting behaviors, personality traits, and other characteristics that a particular society deems suitable for a specific gender (Bem, 1985, as cited in Marušić, 1994).

Gender norms represent societal expectations and roles assigned to a particular gender, often differing from expectations towards the other gender. In today's predominantly patriarchal and traditional society, these norms involve the belief that men should be brave, tough, resilient, risk-taking, capable of providing for the family, having multiple sexual partners to prove their "manliness," etc. In contrast, women are often expected to be gentle, vulnerable, sensitive, reserved, more oriented towards children, family, and household chores.

Masculinities and femininities are concepts encompassing numerous ways in which masculinity and femininity are socially defined in a historical and cultural context (Connell, 1994). These terms are devised to cover a broad range of possible meanings regarding "what it means to be male or female." Masculinities and femininities result from socially learned behaviors and form throughout life under the influence of complex social factors.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence represents the "intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation." The literature commonly mentions three types of violence: physical violence - intentionally causing bodily harm; emotional or psychological violence - often verbal (can also be non-verbal) forms of causing harm to someone's psyche; sexual violence - a specific form of physical and psychological violence consisting of unwanted sexual contacts or insults.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined by UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) as “violence involving men and women, where women are usually the victims and arises from the unequal power relationships between men and women within relationships.” Over the past decades, the international community has shifted towards using the term “gender-based violence” instead of “violence against women” to redirect the focus from women as victims towards understanding how gender/sex norms, inequality, and power dynamics within relationships increase the vulnerability of women to violence.

Analysis of the situation: Attitude towards gender equality and violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Institutional context

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a complex country in terms of its structure. It consists of two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS), as well as the Brčko District. As a result of this structure, some legal regulations are enacted at the state level, while others are enacted at the entity/district level, requiring the harmonization of some entity/district laws with state regulations.

Regarding institutional mechanisms for gender equality, the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Gender Center of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Gender Center - Center for Equality and Gender Equality of the Government of Republika Srpska have been established. Since BiH is a member of the United Nations and the Council of Europe, it has signed international human rights protection documents and is obligated to align its legislation with EU legislation. The Constitution of BiH is the main legal framework of the country, with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women from 1978 and the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women from 1957 being part of Annex 1 to the Constitution. In addition to international conventions, declarations, and the Constitution of BiH, the Criminal Code of FBiH, the Criminal Code of RS, and the Criminal Code of the Brčko District are other important laws regulating protection against gender-based violence. The laws of FBiH, RS, and the Brčko District on protection against domestic violence prescribe measures to protect against stalking and harassment. The Law on Gender Equality of BiH is also an important part of the legal framework in BiH. It regulates gender equality rights in a more general manner, while entities and cantons emphasize this issue in their legislation. BiH has ratified or acceded to several international obligations on gender equality, including: the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (2011), known as the Istanbul Convention, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995).

Results of earlier research

In 2013, the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH conducted a study titled “Prevalence and Characteristics of Violence against Women in BiH” (Babović, 2013). According to the results, nearly half of the surveyed women (47.2%) experienced one or more forms of violence in their youth, with young women (aged 18 to 24) being more exposed to violence than older women. The most common form of violence against women, in general, is psychological violence (41.9%), followed by physical violence (24.3%). Additionally, 20.8% of women aged 19-24 experience psychological violence, while 2.4% experience physical violence. The violence experienced by women is mostly perpetrated by their partners (39% of respondents). Regarding sexual violence, almost 10% of women aged 19-24 have experienced sexual violence committed by their partners or others.

In the “Images” study conducted on the initiative of the Institute for Youth Development and Community “Perpetuum Mobile” and the Promundo Institute, numerous concerning data were identified based on a representative sample of adults in BiH (Dušanić, 2012). Approximately 52% of men believe that a woman’s most important role is related to household chores and childcare, while 49% believe that a man should have a dominant role in making important decisions. Around 26.5% of men and 45% of women confirmed at least one (or more) forms of violence against women. Overall, about 23% of men fall into the category with extremely unequal gender attitudes, 41% are moderately egalitarian, and 36% fall into the category of gender egalitarian. About 75% of men express discomfort in the company of homosexuals. Approximately 58% of men and 18.5% of women consume alcohol.

Šahinović (2017) researched peer and gender-based violence in primary schools (sample of teachers, 126 women and 25 men) in three cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most participants in the study consider the family context as the primary cause of violence, followed by the role of media, video games, and the internet. Teachers emphasized that the most common form of peer and gender-based violence is psychological violence (35.5%), followed by verbal abuse at 27%, with physical violence estimated at 10%. 71% of teachers stated that violence is most often carried out individually. It was revealed that boys more often use physical violence, while girls mostly resort to verbal abuse. The research also shows that students often do not report violence (47.4%).

A study on the well-being and safety of women conducted by the OSCE in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018 shows that 14% of surveyed women experienced some form of physical or sexual violence after the age of 15. Additionally, 28% of women experienced some form of sexual harassment after the age of 15, with 15% experiencing the most severe forms of sexual harassment.

In collaboration with local partners, the organization Care has conducted a series of studies in the last 15 years, involving an analysis of the initial situation, preventive intervention, and concluding research. Summarized (presented in an unpublished text “Impact study research,” 2023), the results of the studies have indicated the presence of violence and psychoactive substances among young people, as well as gender stereotypical attitudes, with a reduction in gender stereotypes identified in the final research after the intervention program, emphasizing the importance and positive influence of preventive programs.

What is „PLA“?

The foundational basis for the overall work and intervention within the YMI program is the activity of “Participatory Learning and Action” (PLA). This involves a research approach used to encourage participants to share their knowledge and understanding of the community in which they live, along with its needs. The aim is to define ways to address these needs and build partners’ capacity to use this approach. The basic principles of participatory learning and action include:

- Conducting qualitative research through workshops and discussions on selected topics, followed by subsequent content analysis.
- Involving people in identifying and solving problems, enhancing their ability to act on their own behalf.
- Learning from people and their experiences, enabling individuals to analyze, present, and interpret the results of gathered information.
- Embracing an informal approach and flexibility in adapting it if necessary.
- Implementing fieldwork in a relaxed style, through listening and allowing everyone to express their thoughts.

The overall goal of PLA activities is to, based on the understanding derived from research, assist in identifying the current state of key issues that organizations plan to address in the future. Broad strategies are developed based on this information, aiming to contribute to the development of healthy lifestyles, violence prevention, gender-based violence prevention, and other risky behaviors.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF PLA RESEARCH

The primary focus and purpose of the PLA research are to identify attitudes and norms related to gender and masculinity that contribute to the development of violent and other risky behaviors among young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The goal is also to devise the most effective interventions based on this information to reduce levels of violence and promote gender-equitable behavior.

To achieve these objectives, the research is directed towards the following research questions:

1. What are the current social constructs, attitudes, and experiences prevalent among young people, especially regarding gender norms?
2. How do social institutions such as media, school, religion, family, and peers influence the social constructs of masculinity/femininity?
3. What is the range of attitudes among young people in their behavior towards individuals of the opposite gender?
4. How are social constructs of masculinity connected to the abuse of power through violence?
5. For young men who do not use violence, what are the influencing factors and consequences?

The key assumption is that examining and understanding personal attitudes toward gender relations can result in positive effects on a broad spectrum of cognitive and behavioral processes related to the perception of gender relations and how they determine attitudes towards violence and other risky behaviors.

The secondary focus of the PLA research was to continue supporting the developmental capacity of partner youth organizations to engage in activities and interventions related to violence prevention and gender-based violence in their local context. Staff from partner organizations participated in numerous activities to enhance their collective understanding of gender, sexuality, masculinity, and gender-based violence. Additionally, to effectively implement PLA activities, the staff of partner organizations received training to carry out the planned PLA methodology in the field. The report below provides details on the PLA activities, including the process, results, and their implications.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

The program was released with high school students in Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar. After the training and preparation of workshop leaders and researchers, the planned program was implemented with all groups for two days each. The implementation of the program was followed by the keeping of detailed minutes in which the key results and statements of the participants were listed. After the research, the collected data were analyzed in detail using the content analysis method.

Topics covered

Topics and techniques used in the PLA (Participatory Learning and Action) research were chosen based on previous experiences and identified needs. Data were collected with the aim of exploring numerous topics related to gender; socialization and perceptions of masculinity; forms, patterns, and consequences of violence; shifts toward change, etc.

Significant attention was given to the proper deployment of PLA tools used during the research and the sensitivity of information gathered during the two-day work with groups. The first day started with simpler exercises (such as 24-hour cycles, Venn diagrams, activities during a typical day, etc.) before progressing to more sensitive questions involving the exchange of personal experiences and feelings. For example, experiences with violence were addressed in the latter part of the research. Given that PLA is an interactive process, discussions on one question led to discussions on other issues. Below is a brief overview of the topics interactively addressed during the research.

Theme 1: Exploring youth culture. The purpose of this theme was to initiate exploration into what it means to be a young man and a young woman, understanding the role and importance of spaces where one resides. The first part involved a discussion on how young men spend their time during a working day and weekend compared to young women. The second part included mapping social spaces to understand the role of these spaces in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of youth regarding gender and gender relations.

Theme 2: Gender norms. Participants in this exercise created a three-dimensional image of a man and a woman using modeling clay. The aim was to understand the expected characteristics of “ideal” men and women in their society, according to the participants’ perceptions.

Theme 3: Socialization of masculinity and femininity. The purpose of this theme was to explore with young men and women what it means to be a young man or a young woman, understanding the role of social customs and institutions in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of young men regarding masculinity and femininity. This was achieved through mapping the influential social institutions by the participants.

Theme 4: Power and influence. A power map diagram was used to understand how power is constructed and used, and how participants feel and react when they have or do not have it.

Themes 5 and 6: Attitudes toward violence and forms of violence. The goal was to explore the attitudes of young people toward gender equality and violence, and to identify different forms of violence affecting young men and women. Participants engaged in an exercise where they expressed their agreement with statements related to gender relations and violence.

Theme 7: Root causes and consequences of violence. Participants discussed violence to identify the causes and consequences of different forms of violence. They talked about emotional, physical, and sexual forms of violence.

Theme 8: Moving towards change. In this theme, based on learning about gender and gender-based violence, participants actively engaged in shaping a vision of a positive future.

Data collection and analysis procedures

At the beginning, training for conducting Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) was held with the staff and leadership of local youth organizations, staff members experienced in similar projects, and local researchers. Participants learned about the project’s goals, research questions, and the PLA research implementation guide. In each city, the research team consisted of a project coordinator, workshop facilitator, and a local researcher who attended exercises and recorded important responses and research results. Data were collected in two ways: (1) through observation and note-taking, and (2) through visual products, i.e., based on photographs of research participants and their works. All research team members were responsible for taking notes on participant behavior and discussions. At the end of the PLA research, research teams analyzed the data according to research questions, correcting any shortcomings in the collected information. The collected materials were then forwarded to the principal investigator, who analyzed them collectively and used them to write this report.

Before commencing the research, research teams paid special attention to ethical standards and the procedure of obtaining informed consent from participants in the data collection

process. On the first day of the PLA research, participants read and signed informed consent forms to ensure voluntary participation in this research study, including the use of photographs in the report.

Research participants

Two-day research was held in all three cities (Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar) with two groups of young people each, one group of girls and one group of young men. Each group consisted of fifteen to sixteen young men or women. There was an even gender balance in every city. The total number of participants was 90, of which 48 were girls and 42 were boys. The participants were high school students aged 14-18. Most of the participants are from the urban parts of the cities where the PLA survey was conducted. They attend different high schools - such as gymnasium, medical, electrical, polytechnic, construction, dental, mechanical and traffic school, economic school and hospitality and tourism school. More detailed characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

	Female	Male	Total
Banja Luka	16	15	31
Mostar	16	14	30
Sarajevo	16	13	29
Total	48	42	90

Table 1: Number of participants in the PLA research with regard to gender and place of residence

RESEARCH RESULTS

Research results are presented by topic, with some related topics being treated together. As part of each topic, during the presentation of the results, the dominant statements were emphasized and explained. They are illustrated with characteristic quotes, without indicating the full identity (the place of residence is also indicated) of the participants, in order to preserve the anonymity of the research. The presentation of the results was done in a unified manner at the level of all cities, where differences were highlighted if they exist with regard to gender or place of residence. After presenting the results by topic, conclusions for five key research questions are presented.

Topic 1: Investigating youth culture

If we ask girls, in today's society, a young man is someone who doesn't pay much attention to hygiene, sleep, and even his overall appearance, unless it's the weekend and he's getting ready to go out. A young man's workday starts in a hurry; cigarettes are consumed before school, and classes are often not followed attentively. After school, they have no other obligations except watching TV, playing games, and spending time on TikTok until the evening when they go out with friends. Socializing significantly differs on weekdays and weekends. On weekdays, young men go to cafes, drink coffee, or beer. As for the weekend, they wake up around noon or later and do nothing significant during the day. The focus is on going out and consuming alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana. In addition, girls note that guys sometimes go to the gym. We can conclude that girls don't think that guys take much care of themselves (for example, girls brush their teeth more often than guys and eat at fast-food restaurants), nor do they do household chores, unlike girls, so they have more free time.

Girls describe themselves as much more caring, hardworking, and responsible ("I believe that most guys are irresponsible and careless compared to us girls, and they don't burden themselves like we do"). Their workday starts with getting ready for school. Before school, they apply makeup, take care of themselves, and even have time for coffee and breakfast, while guys just get out of bed and go to school, with minimal morning routine. In school, they either record TikToks (as mentioned by a group of girls from Sarajevo) or attend classes. After school, they go to the gym or for coffee with friends if they don't go home immediately. If they go home, they study or do household chores. Weekends don't differ much from guys' weekends in terms of relaxation and fun, but we can't conclude that it's the same routine. Girls mention that they don't wake up early like on weekdays, but they don't sleep until noon like guys. Some groups of girls mention how they relax in the evening with a book and a movie, spending the day with family. Others enthusiastically mention going out and getting ready to go out, which is much

more interesting for them than the actual clubbing. Around midnight, they go to a club where they hope to see someone they like. What is similar to guys (from their descriptions) is the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes.

From the girls' responses, we can observe that most of them believe there is a difference between guys and girls in terms of how they spend their time. There were also girls who did not think that all guys are as described by the rest of the group.

"I noticed that some guys often spend their weekends outdoors, riding bikes or playing soccer, while some boys like to spend more time at home playing video games. I think it's a matter of personal preferences, and I wouldn't generalize." (F, Sarajevo) "If I spend my time after classes studying and doing homework, I can't say that all guys just sleep, train, or play games. I believe there are those who really try and dedicate time to education." (F, Mostar)

The next topic of discussion was the space that influences how girls perceive and express their femininity, i.e., where girls spend most of their time, with whom, and how they feel about their femininity.

Most girls state that they spend the most time with their best friends, primarily in school, clubs, cafes, and some even mention the gym as a frequent gathering place. A group of girls from Sarajevo notes that all the places they frequent, in a way, shape how girls should behave and often dictate that they should act "ladylike." Girls from Banja Luka mention that not all girls can feel safe and part of society in these social spaces. They also say they often receive "suggestions" on how they should behave.

"Sometimes we feel like we have to be 'sweeter' or 'more decent' to fit in" (F, Banja Luka)

Although the common belief, both in person and in the media, is that women are each other's enemies, this research indicates that girls support and inspire each other, and it's crucial for them to have friends by their side. Family members, especially older sisters, also play a significant role in shaping femininity.

"We often hear comments like 'Girls dress up the most for other girls.' It's true that we focus on ourselves and our appearance, but we also admire and inspire each other." (F, Sarajevo) "We have to be aware that we learn the most about our femininity from our friends." (F, Sarajevo) On the other hand, when we ask boys how they spend their days, they would say their workdays start with getting up and preparing for school. In school, they use mobile phones, look at other girls, and get bored during classes. Some groups mentioned that guys sometimes skip class or get kicked out by teachers. After school, they have a lot of free time, mostly used for sports (basketball, football), playing games, sleeping, or going to a cafe with friends. After that, they go home, prepare for school, and sleep. Weekends are equally exciting as for girls. Boys mention that on weekends, they wake up around 10/11 AM and go to the gym.

One group mentioned that guys help their father wash the car. After the gym, preparations for going out follow. During outings, they mostly consume alcohol, and some use marijuana, staying in the club until dawn.

As for their perception of girls' days, they believe that girls wake up early for school to get ready. Boys think that girls spend too much time getting ready for school, with reasons being competition with other girls and proving themselves to boys. Some guys believe that girls take notes and pay attention in class, while others think they spend time on TikTok during lessons. After school, they go for coffee with friends, emphasizing gossiping. Each group mentioned gossiping at least twice as part of a girl's day. In the evening, girls go for a walk with a boyfriend, if they have one, and end their workday with nighttime skincare. Girls' weekends start earlier than boys' because they wake up early to help their mom with household chores. After that, they go to the gym or for a walk with friends. Then they have a family lunch, followed by getting ready to go out. During outings, alcohol and cigarettes are consumed.

When the facilitator asked boys about differences between boys and girls, most boys believe that there is a difference between the two genders. They emphasize that the situation for women is much better now than it was before, but some guys like these changes, while others do not.

"Differences don't exist, or they are diminishing... And that might not always be positive, for example, body shaving; more and more guys are shaving their bodies due to fashion" (M, Sarajevo)

"Women have achieved a lot today with their education and raising their voices, and I think the situation is much better than before" (M, Mostar)

Regarding the spaces that influence how young men perceive and express their masculinity, guys mention that these places are usually cafes, clubs, and gyms. Some groups also mentioned school as one of these spaces. We can conclude that guys feel most masculine in gyms. Additionally, guys didn't include other guys as "helpers" in finding their own masculinity.

"I think school is an important place for all of us, but I've also noticed that guys often use gyms to learn about masculinity. Also, clubs are places where they feel free to express themselves" (M, Sarajevo)

Both guys and girls believe that the most common places for socializing and meeting people are clubs and cafes. They state that everyone feels comfortable in these places, and it's possible to have a nice time together. Another similarity between guys and girls is the workweek-weekend dynamic.

On workdays, everyone has more responsibilities and spends more time at home, while on weekends, the main focus is going to the club, preparing for going out, meeting the opposite sex, and consuming alcohol.

There are parts of the report where stereotypes have clearly formed. Among guys, the belief is present that women only gossip and talk behind others' backs, as well as that they should help with household chores. Not a single group of guys mentioned helping their parents with household chores. Guys believe that a significant part of girls' days is spent on grooming and that they care too much about their appearance. Girls perceive guys as unserious and irresponsible, which is also one of the stereotypes. Similarly, participants believe that guys flirt much more with other girls, use alcohol and cigarettes to a greater extent, as well as marijuana, which girls do not use.

Topic 2: Gender norms

The participants were tasked with creating models of the ideal representative of their gender using clay. Through these models, we can observe how social and gender norms influence young people, providing greater insight into what is considered ideal for them and what they aspire to. First, the results of the girls will be presented, followed by those of the boys, and then they will be compared and analyzed.

While modeling the ideal woman, girls primarily focused on the physical characteristics, describing her in a similar manner. According to them, a woman should be feminine (not smoke, and if she does, then "feminine" cigarettes, i.e., long cigarettes) and take care of her appearance. It can be said that taking care of appearance and reputation is one of the most important aspects for women, as all groups talked about it. Some groups mentioned that the woman-model grooms herself to get more likes and attention on social media, some stated she grooms herself and records for TikTok, and others mentioned grooming to attract male attention. Girls from Sarajevo mentioned that women like TikTokers represented by their model inspire them a lot ("TikTokers like Azra inspire us to be ourselves"). Regarding physical appearance, a group of girls from Banja Luka mentioned that a woman starves and uses extreme diets to look slim. Groups of girls from Mostar and Sarajevo also mentioned money as an important characteristic that attracts men to a woman. One group wrote that a girl is well-groomed and looking for a guy with a lot of money, while another group stated that a girl carries a small bag because guys pay for everything ("Maja is a true gold digger, just looking for rich guys").

Participants were asked about the traits that women possess but couldn't represent with the model. Once again, girls responded with physical characteristics, mentioning breasts, hair, nails, and makeup. In addition, girls mentioned emotionality as a characteristic of women.

They consider themselves emotional beings, but this trait needs to be suppressed, as it is perceived as a weakness.

"Definitely, women are much more emotional and care a lot more about certain things, but it's as if it shouldn't be shown in public, because we come off as too weak and boring" (F, Mostar)
"Yeah, women are often more emotional and caring towards others, but it's not always easy to see" (F, Sarajevo)



Photos of female models

Regarding expectations from the environment, most girls state that women are expected to be successful in most aspects of life: family, physical appearance, and career. Girls did not mention the importance of self-care, friendships, or hobbies but focused on more stereotypical female roles. The dominant response was the care of the family, husband, and children, indicating the influence of social and gender norms. The primary characteristic of a woman throughout the ages has been seen as a homemaker and mother, as evident in these responses.

"Well, typically, women are expected to be super caring towards family and children, to be proper housewives and always available for men" (F, Sarajevo)

"Typical women are expected to be housewives, hardworking, mothers, and on top of all that, neat and tidy" (F, Mostar)

"I think women have to manage to do all the duties and even dedicate themselves to a man who cannot or does not know how" (F, Banja Luka)

The influence of media and recent movements, such as feminist movements, shows women that there is a choice. There is nothing wrong with a woman choosing to be a homemaker, mother, and dedicated to her husband, but there are also women who would like to focus on a career or something else. We can see this in some responses from girls, although there are significantly fewer of them compared to the first group mentioned.

“A woman’s power can be shown through her education, a series of successes in business, seeing a woman in a leading position is truly powerful” (F, Sarajevo)

If girls were to create a model of the ideal man, dominant responses were related to the physical appearance of the man. The ideal man is muscular because he often goes to the gym. He wears branded and expensive items, is tall, strong, and dominant.

“The gym is very important for them, and muscles are an indicator of dominance” (F, Banja Luka)

“The model of men would be totally different! Men should be super strong, big, and always dominant” (F, Sarajevo)

Girls stated that emotionality is a characteristic of women, but in the ideal man, it is quite the opposite. According to girls, a man should not show emotions or sensitivity. From this, we can see the presence of gender stereotypes. According to such a stereotype, the primary roles of a woman are mother and wife, and to be good at it, a woman must be sensitive and caring. “Feminine” qualities should not be attributed to men, as they are considered weaknesses, as seen in the responses. It is desirable for a man to be more dominant, colder, and unemotional.

“The model of men should show that they are in charge of everything, rich, and always wear suits. Emotions are for the weak” (F, Sarajevo)

“It would probably be made as a dominant personality in society compared to women” (F, Mostar)

“No emotional expressions, just a tough face” (F, Sarajevo)

While modeling the ideal man, boys focused primarily on physical appearance, followed by displaying social status and wealth. Every 3D figure of a man shows that the ideal man is muscular, takes care of his appearance, attracts women, and shows dominance. The only other physical characteristic that boys depicted was the penis.

“We also included the penis because we believe it is the main characteristic of a man” (M, Banja Luka)

“We included the penis because he is not ashamed to show it” (M, Sarajevo)

In addition to physical characteristics, branded clothing is also a significant topic of conversation. Expensive clothing and Nike-branded clothing are considered prestigious among boys (“Only Nike, that’s the best brand”). Besides branded clothing, boys from Sarajevo emphasize that the ideal man wears a chain (“A golden chain means – don’t mess with me” and “A golden chain is power”). Boys from Mostar mention that men drive their dad’s car, representing power and prestige.



Male model photos

Describing the ideal man, girls mentioned that he is cold and unemotional. When boys were asked about characteristics that cannot be represented with clay, they mentioned emotionality. They believe that men are emotional but must not show it. Here, we see a strong influence of gender and social norms. Men are living beings and, therefore, have emotions that they should express. However, society teaches them that expressing emotions is not “manly,” and they should keep them to themselves or express them in some other way.

“We didn’t express, for example, that he is emotional. Many boys might be emotional inside, but they don’t show those emotions” (M, Banja Luka)

“A man must not show emotions because that would mean he is weak” (M, Banja Luka)

“Maybe we didn’t emphasize the romantic side in boys. Maybe it’s not okay to talk about it in society because it’s not ‘manly’ enough, and we often end up being ‘whipped’” (M, Mostar)

“I didn’t highlight sensitivity or the emotional side. I know that men have feelings, but it seems that it is less emphasized in society” (M, Sarajevo)

In addition to the expectation for men not to show emotions, there are many expectations they must fulfill. Society expects men to be leaders and dominant in relationships with women, both in dating and marriage. They should also take care of the family’s financial situation. We can see the presence of an older gender norm from a time when women did not have the right to work, and men were the sole family members who could work and earn. Today, when women have an equal right to work, each employed person should be responsible for their financial situation. In addition, boys from Banja Luka were the only ones mentioning a protective role (“That they are dangerous in the club and protect their girls”) and patriotism (“That they love their country and are patriots”).

The model of the ideal woman from the perspective of boys does not differ much from the model created by girls. Both were focused on two similar aspects. The first is the physical appearance of a woman. Boys emphasize that they would model large lips, an emphasized buttocks, neat hair, and heels. Also, the ideal girl would be wearing makeup and branded clothing.

“Surely, she would be a figure with heels, fully made up, a purse, neat hair” (M, Mostar)

“If we were making a model of a woman, I believe it would look different. Maybe she would be slimmer with emphasized curves” (M, Sarajevo)

“There would be more attention to the choice of clothing and shoes because women’s style and fashion expression are often commented on” (M, Sarajevo)

The second aspect both genders focused on is the emotionality of women. As mentioned earlier, norms in most societies, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, dictate that women are much more emotional. Both boys and girls are aware of this norm. Boys from Banja Luka only focused on the physical characteristics of women, while boys from Mostar and Sarajevo confirmed the norm.

“We would emphasize more empathy and compassion, the vulnerability of women compared to men” (M, Mostar)

“I would definitely work on expressing emotions and sensitivity in the model. Women are often expected to be ‘softer’ and ‘more compassionate,’ so I would try to represent that” (M, Sarajevo)

Looking at the results of these workshops, we can conclude that there is a difference between the ideal man and the ideal woman, and both groups of participants are aware of it. Girls believe that the ideal woman takes care of her physical appearance, family, and children, while boys believe that the ideal man is strong, wealthy, and dominant. We can conclude that gender norms that have been present for centuries still influence the youth.

Topics 3 and 4: Socialization of masculinity and femininity; Power and influence

Socialization of masculinity

What is it like to be a young man in today’s society? Are there any institutions or individuals that influence the formation of masculinity? When boys were asked this question, the answers were roughly similar. The most common responses were family, peers, school teachers, and individuals popular on social media. Boys mention that family has the greatest influence on shaping their attitudes and behaviors, often citing fathers who teach them what it means to be a man and how a real man should behave.

“My father has the most influence; he tells me how a real man should behave. To be strong and to be the head of the family” (M, Banja Luka)

“Family, they are the ones who teach us, especially dads, that we must be the ‘head of the family,’ that we need to be strong, as if they strengthen us in that way” (M, Mostar)

Interestingly, peers influence the formation of masculinity, but not always in the most positive way. Gender norms, mentioned in the previous topic, begin to take shape for some boys when peers are most influential in shaping their opinions.

“Friends often ‘warn us’ not to chase after a girl, not to indulge her, that we would be pushovers and look ridiculous” (M, Mostar)

“Peers often say that you must be strong and never cry” (M, Sarajevo)

Boys state that sometimes they have to resist societal norms and expectations. From their responses, we can see that boys can be judged for various things, such as playing the violin and drawing, not having a desire to drive a car, not wanting to consume alcohol on a night out, and more.

A response from boys in Mostar indicates an awareness that men don’t have to behave stereotypically and according to gender norms prevalent in society. With the popularity of social media, activists advocating for different expressions of masculinity have become more visible, and discussions on men showing emotions have increased.

“TV, social media perhaps now show more men who are different from what we are taught (you have the right to express emotions, you have the right to be vulnerable, etc.)” (M, Mostar)

Boys mention that such societal expectations are very harmful because men are aware of their emotions and feel bad if they experience them, as they believe they shouldn't.

“It's stupid to expect us to be without emotions, not to cry, and not to feel pain. I think it's not good for mental health” (M, Mostar)

“The expectation that a man does not show emotions is harmful because not expressing emotions also affects a person.” (M, Banja Luka)

“It's useful to be brave, but the expectation not to cry is bad because we all have emotions” (M, Sarajevo)

What is normalized in society is having multiple girlfriends, which can be linked to the aforementioned suppression of emotions. Boys mention that if a guy has multiple girls, he is more accepted in society (“Being a ladies' man is rewarded, and it's cool, while if you're faithful to one girl, you're usually considered a 'boring guy'”).

Regarding places and institutions that influence the formation of masculinity, boys mention school, church, and social media. Currently, social media seems to be the most influential, as every group described the way it impacts them.

“Social media often portray men who are successful, perfect, who have a family, and care for their family” (M, Mostar)

Socialization of femininity

Girls believe that the greatest influence on the formation of their femininity comes from their mothers. They instruct them on how to behave and advise them on what a real woman should look like. Some girls also mention fathers as influential figures in shaping femininity, but fathers teach them in a different way. Fathers advise their daughters to be independent and stress the importance of a girl having her own money, emphasizing that she should not rely on a man. Besides family, girls believe that their best friends also play a role in teaching them about femininity. They share all their secrets and problems with their friends and spend most of their time with them.

“My mom always tells me that I have to behave like a lady. That means sitting like a lady, eating like a lady, talking like a lady” (F, Banja Luka)

“My mom always tells me how I should pay attention to my behavior, to be cultured, humble, to dress nicely, not to be provocative” (F, Mostar)

Participants think that there are certain attitudes and behaviors of women that are rewarded, such as behaving like a lady, being cultured, and obedient. Similarly, a woman who adheres to more traditional values is more esteemed than a woman who strives for independence and career goals.

“Awards go to women who maintain traditional family values, while those who choose a career and independence often face criticism and stereotypes” (F, Sarajevo)

“A woman who is oriented towards traditional values (family, home, husband...) is much more appreciated compared to women focused on a career, personal development” (F, Mostar)

“Girls have to be such that they behave like LADIES, usually we hear this from our mother or grandmother” (F, Banja Luka)

From their responses, we can see that society expects too much from women, putting excessive pressure on them to succeed in all aspects of life. Women often feel pressured in every sphere of life; they must excel as mothers, have a career, take care of themselves, and much more. For example, expectations about dressing are present, where revealing and short clothing is condemned, creating prejudices and a wrong image of that woman. Social media also influences women to focus too much on grooming and taking care of themselves, adding more pressure on women.

“Expectations for a woman to always be well-groomed can be harmful because it means that she feels pressured to always look perfect” (F, Banja Luka)

When girls were asked about deviations from expected attitudes and behaviors imposed by society, they state that they can resist it with self-confidence. A woman with confidence does not care about societal expectations, putting herself and her needs at the forefront. She lives less by the rules imposed by the environment and does more of what suits her.

“After gaining more confidence, I started to choose what suits me and how I will behave” (F, Sarajevo)

“After working on myself, developing my self-confidence and assertiveness, I was ready to make decisions about my life the way I wanted” (F, Mostar)

Themes 5 and 6: Attitudes towards violence and Forms of violence

From the analysis of the responses, it can be observed that the majority of participants consider violence unjustified in any form, and all forms of violence have negative effects on victims, especially when it comes to violence against women within the family context.

Looking at the exercise (“Vote with Your Feet”) where participants expressed their views on general statements related to violence, certain intergroup differences can be noticed. In the context of the first statement, “If someone insults me, I will defend my reputation, even if it means using force,” most young men responded affirmatively. They justify this by emphasizing that they won’t be taken seriously or seen as manly enough if they don’t act in such a way. Other people in their surroundings would perceive them as weak individuals lacking the courage to stand up for themselves.

“If you don’t defend yourself and stand up for yourself, everyone will consider you a weakling and a coward, what kind of man am I then?” (M, Mostar)

Although not all young men share this general opinion, where it is noticeable that some participants prefer turning to healthy communication and non-violent conflict resolution, these young men represent a minority within their peer group. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that they do not express stereotypical views that conflict resolution is desirable for a man and a sign of male courage and strength; instead, they try to use other approaches to such situations.

“You can’t turn to violence just because someone insulted you. We should all work on better understanding and communication.” (M, Sarajevo)

As for the girls’ responses to the first statement, a different situation is noticeable, where most girls agree that they would not use force to resolve conflicts, so they turn to attempts at conversation and reaching compromises peacefully. In the responses of some participants, it is noticeable that they would prefer to call a male person, like a male friend or brother, to defend them.

“It’s not up to us to solve it with fists and insults. I am a lady.” (F, Banja Luka)

Very few girls in all interviewed cities have the opposite opinion. They agree that the use of physical force is sometimes justified as a last resort.

In the context of the second and third statements from the exercise, “There are moments when a woman deserves to be beaten,” and “A woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together,” almost all respondents, regardless of gender, had fairly stable negative opinions about the justification of violence against women. Regarding the second statement, all respondents considered it completely unjustified and unacceptable to commit any kind of violence against women, and that such violence has negative consequences for the victim.

“The approach that a woman deserves to be beaten is absolutely wrong. No reason justifies violence against another human being.” (M, Sarajevo)

“No, no matter how angry we are and whatever happens, I believe violence is not an option.” (M, Mostar)

Regarding the third statement, there are noticeable differences because most participants agree that it is not acceptable for a woman to endure violence within the family. However, some participants admit that women are sometimes forced to stay in relationships where physical violence is present, primarily due to poor financial situations, invested resources, and emotional efforts.

“My neighbor endures violence because she is older, unemployed, and cares for her children. I believe she has nowhere else to go.” (F, Banja Luka)

Connecting the next statement with the previous ones, “It’s okay for a man to hit his wife if she refuses to have sex with him,” it is noticeable that most participants share similar views on such situations. They believe that sexual violence and violence in the context of sexual relations are never acceptable, characterizing such behavior as rape and sexual abuse. Participants of both genders believe that a woman should never accept such behavior or justify such abuse by her partner.

“Sexual relations should be based on mutual consent and respect. No pressure or violence is an option.” (M, Sarajevo)

“No, not at all. We have the right to refuse something at a given moment. This should be reported immediately as violence.” (F, Mostar)

It can be concluded that the majority of participants, regardless of their gender or city of origin, share somewhat similar opinions on the presented general statements about violence. They agree that violence against women is not justified in any context mentioned, and that refusing sexual relations should not be punished with any form of violence.

Their views on women being forced to stay in violent relationships in certain situations are interesting, indicating an awareness of the complexity of such relationships and social situations that prevent women from leaving them.

Moving on to the next component of this task, the statements related to friendly relationships with members of the homosexual orientation were as follows: “I would never have a gay friend.” and “I’m disgusted when I see men behaving like women.” In the context of these statements, there were noticeable gender differences in the participants’ responses. Most young men replied that they would not feel comfortable having a homosexual friend, while in girls, a more balanced division is noticeable, so many girls agreed that such friendship would not cause them discomfort or aversion. Most boys who stated that they would not have a homosexual friend express that they have nothing against members of the LGBT+ population, but at the same time, they could not have such a person in their close environment. They also mention that friendship with a person of a different sexual orientation would distance them from the rest of society and make them feel rejected by others.

“If I had a gay friend, I think I wouldn’t have any other friends because everyone in my class would laugh at me, and no one would want to hang out with us.” (M, Banja Luka).

Other boys, who are in the minority within their group of participants, like many girls, state that it would not be a problem for them to be friends with another boy who is a member of the LGBT+ community. Many of them state that they already have such friendships. They point out that the key characteristic of a good friend is their personality, i.e., what kind of person they are, not their sexual orientation.

Furthermore, opinions become somewhat more extreme when looking at the responses to the last statement. Here, most participants respond that they would have no relationship with a man who behaves like a woman, and it would make them uncomfortable to have such a person in their environment. They believe that such behavior is not natural and is the result of incorrect socialization or even hormonal disorders.

“I have nothing against the gay population, but that’s just too much for me. I prefer someone who is gay but doesn’t behave like a woman.” (M, Banja Luka).

In conclusion to this section, it is noticeable that many young men, and a significant percentage of girls, do not feel comfortable enough with individuals of different sexual orientations, especially if such a person behaves contrary to gender norms. Their attitudes indicate that young men pay considerable attention to certain gender norms, especially those related to expressing masculinity, stereotypical male values, and attitudes. Therefore, individuals who do not adhere to such views and do not behave in accordance with gender norms create discomfort for them, putting them at risk of rejection and ridicule.

Participants were then required to think about the types of violence that pose a problem in their community. Types of violence that appeared in all groups and were characterized as problematic include physical violence, sexual violence, psychological and emotional violence, cyber violence or violence on the internet, and peer violence or school violence. During the ensuing discussions, the facilitator focused on various aspects of violence and the social circumstances surrounding it. Initially, the focus was on the reasons why certain individuals commit violence against men or women. Girls state that violence against women occurs to establish power, a certain form of dominance, and to make women feel insecure and unequal. Young men point out that women mostly experience violence from their partners. It is also important to analyze which types of violence participants characterize as typical for men or women. Participants of both genders state that men are more involved in verbal and physical violence, while women engage in verbal or emotional, i.e., psychological violence.

“Physical violence, such as fights and conflicts, is present among young men, especially those striving for dominance or seeking recognition.” (M, Sarajevo).

“To show their superiority or defend themselves against provocations, young men sometimes use verbal violence against their peers.” (M, Banja Luka).

Many participants emphasize that women rarely engage in physical violence, primarily using various forms of verbal violence, such as verbal insults and gossip, or some forms of psychological violence, such as emotional manipulation.

“When in a relationship, young men sometimes face emotional and verbal violence from their partners.” (M, Sarajevo).

Some participants also highlight the growing danger of cyber violence, or violence on the internet, which can be expected given that young people are spending more and more of their free time online and on social media. This becomes a significant component of their identity and daily life, as well as a potential source of insecurity, weakened self-confidence, and even violence, as participants mention.

“Girls mostly use verbal and cyber violence against other girls and boys.” (F, Banja Luka). “I think some girls may face violence on the internet.” (M, Sarajevo).

Another type of violence that can be noticed in the statements of the participants is psychological violence that women experience in romantic relationships, where there is often emotional manipulation, the use of controlling behavior, emotional blackmail, and restrictions on certain freedoms. Surprisingly, most of these statements come from male participants, providing detailed explanations of this type of violence. Emotional violence in the context of romantic relationships manifests itself through prohibitions on socializing, controlling with whom the

partner will spend time, and in what way and to what extent. It often appears as an attempt to manipulate the partner due to internal insecurity, with a risk that this form of violence and control will escalate into more serious forms of violence.

“Young women probably face a form of violence where their partner prohibits socializing with friends and family, controlling their contacts... Some young men use emotional violence against young women in relationships, manipulating their feelings to get what they want.” (M, Sarajevo).

The discussion then focused on the social circumstances surrounding violence, primarily on whether it is acceptable to talk about certain types of violence and how to navigate the boundary between healthy discussion and raising awareness of various forms of violence, and glorifying violence, or placing too much focus on violence. Most participants have the opinion that talking and discussing violence, especially violence against women, is very necessary in today's society because many people still find themselves in situations where they face at least one form of violence daily, presenting an immense obstacle to cope with their aggressor. This negative feeling and the complexity of the situation increase if it involves violence in a romantic, marital, or family relationship. Most participants emphasize the importance of raising awareness about the existence of violence and creating a safe space for open discussions about different aspects of violence, primarily how to report violence, establish accountability for the aggressor, and cope with the negative effects of endured violence.

“I believe it is important to talk about violence when we want to educate others about the consequences and prevention... We have to speak about it to raise awareness and work together for change.” (M, Sarajevo).

Moving forward, the discussion delved into the aforementioned social circumstances that primarily lead men to commit violence. Participants largely mention various societal pressures that contribute to male violence, such as the pressure for men to express masculinity, strength, courage, and related characteristics. It is crucial to note that some participants point out that many young men who display aggression and engage in violence have themselves been victims of violence in the family or witnessed such violence, primarily from other men, notably fathers, brothers, and grandfathers. Therefore, the importance of socialization and modeling aggressive behavior through family violence is emphasized. Through observing violence in their families and using aggressive methods to resolve conflicts, many young men normalize such behavior and consider its use acceptable.

“Some young men might use violence because they have experienced violence themselves or witnessed violence at home, so they think it's normal behavior.” (M, Sarajevo).

As mentioned earlier, many young men resort to violent conflict resolution methods in an attempt to establish dominance over those weaker than them, i.e., to prove stereotypes about how a man should behave. Additionally, many participants note that many men do not know how to express their emotions and frustrations in a healthy way. Hence, they turn to violence as the only option for effectively solving problems, which is also a result of socialization into gender norms and stereotypes. Through socialization, men learn that it is socially desirable and expected for men to remain calm and composed in situations of high frustration or, on the other hand, to use physical force to solve problems. This creates an environment where young men never learn how to deal with their emotions, leading to their suppression and the development of poor defense mechanisms, ultimately resulting in the use of physical and emotional violence. Young men growing up in such a social climate do not have the opportunity to develop healthy ways of processing emotions, so they resort to violence as an alternative.

“Some young men use violence because they are not well-educated and don't know any other way to express themselves.” (M, Banja Luka).

On the other hand, participants also touched upon the reasons why many women never report violence and do not leave relationships where violence is present. The reasons mentioned most often fall into three categories: lack of resources, learned behavior, i.e., the socialization of behavior considered acceptable, and too much invested resources, making it difficult to leave the relationship. In the context of the first category, participants state that women who find themselves in situations where they are victims of violence often do not have access to information and resources that would enable them to report violence and find acceptable help. Some participants also mention that they very often do not know how to report violence.

“It's possible that some young women don't have enough information about their rights and options, so they feel helpless and don't know where to seek help.” (M, Sarajevo).

Regarding the second category of responses, the act of accepting, or even justifying, family violence is considered learned behavior because many victims of violence grew up in similar contexts where violence was accepted and tolerated. This observation by participants can also be related to the analysis of male aggressive behavior resulting from socialization, as mentioned earlier. Similarly, women who grew up in family contexts where violence was accepted and where help could not be sought, through the learning and socialization process, normalize such behavior and consider tolerating violence acceptable.

“They endure it because they saw their mother doing the same.” (M, Banja Luka).

“Some girls have learned it as the only way of communication.” (F, Banja Luka).

Furthermore, the last reason participants mentioned for women finding it difficult to leave an abusive relationship is the fact that they have invested too many resources, as well as emotional effort, in the relationship, making it a barrier to leaving. As an additional reason, the stigmatization of women who decide to report violence is mentioned, where many women who take this step face negative reactions and condemnation from their environment. Therefore, making such a decision is immensely difficult. Participants emphasize that a woman who makes such a decision is sometimes rejected by society because many individuals still hold the view that domestic violence should be endured and even considered acceptable. In conditions of stigmatization, non-acceptance, and rejection, women face condemnation and are often forced to accept their situation, justifying violence and remaining in abusive relationships.

“I think some young women endure violence because they fear the reactions and condemnation of society. They might feel like they lack support to leave that situation.” (M, Sarajevo).

In conclusion, a stability and relative constancy in the attitudes of participants can be observed, regardless of gender or city of origin, in the context of discussing different forms of violence, in which situations they occur, which types become typical for a specific gender, and within the complexity of the social circumstances surrounding violence, especially in situations of domestic violence between partners.

It is noticeable that violence is strongly linked to gender inequalities, and that in many situations it is increased by social pressures, whether they are stereotypes that encourage the display of aggression and the use of physical violence, or on the other hand, the use of verbal violence that is typical for women. Finally, the aforementioned social circumstances prevent women from reporting violence, which is further aggravated by early socialization that normalizes various forms of violence and the fear of stigmatization, creating a sense of helplessness in many women.

Topic 7: Main causes and consequences of violence

Within this topic, participants analyzed possible causes and future consequences of different types of violence. In the task related to the analysis of the causes of violence, participants were divided into three groups, and each group was assigned a specific type of violence for analysis: emotional, physical, and sexual violence.

In general, participants identified the most common causes of emotional or psychological violence as a lack of love, open communication, the presence of stressful and frustrating situations, and the need to establish dominance over the victim. In some groups, low self-esteem of the perpetrator and the need for power and dominance over the weaker, i.e., the victim, were also mentioned. Going deeper into the analysis, the importance of psychological factors in emotional violence is emphasized. One group identifies the lack of open communication within a romantic relationship as a primary cause of emotional violence. Others highlight emotional immaturity and insecurity as key causes.

“The lack of open communication creates sadness and anxiety that spills into emotional violence. Also, unconscious emotional immaturity creates fertile ground for manipulation and control.” (M, Sarajevo).

Furthermore, concerning the consequences of emotional violence, participants most commonly mentioned low self-esteem, the deterioration of the victim's mental health leading to depression and anxiety, increased isolation from the surroundings, impaired communication, and health consequences. Some participants also mention an interesting consequence: the victim herself becomes an aggressor after experiencing violence, continuing the cycle of violence. This is an intriguing observation that reflects the real picture of many abusive relationships. Moving on, the next groups focused on the causes and consequences of physical violence. Both young men and women identified witnessing physically violent behavior within the family, violent family dynamics, a lack of emotional control and empathy, and the need to establish dominance as the main causes of this type of violence. Approximately half of the groups also mentioned the influence of psychoactive substances as facilitators of physical violence, representing a potential risk zone considering the prevalence of alcohol and drug consumption among young people, as mentioned in the first part of the report. Physical violence was less complicated for many groups to analyze because many participants had witnessed such violence in their daily lives and in the media. Overall, participants identified the presence of physical violence in the family as the dominant cause, where violence becomes the primary way of resolving conflicts and dealing with intense emotions, stressful, and frustrating situations.

Such behavior becomes normalized and transmitted through future relationships with people in their environment.

“Children who witness violence in the family often become perpetrators themselves.” (M, Sarajevo).

Regarding the consequences of physical violence, participants predominantly mentioned the compromised physical health of the victim, such as physical injuries and bodily trauma, emotional stress and tension, mental health deterioration, and the occurrence of psychological traumas and mental disorders, such as PTSD. Girls also, as consequences of physical violence posing the greatest risk to the victim, more often mentioned the risk of damage to social relationships, as well as an increase in feelings of shame and social isolation, which is not as prevalent among boys.

The last category of violence analyzed by the third set of groups relates to sexual violence. Both boys and girls identified the lack of education in the context of sexual relationships as a cause of violence, primarily referring to a lack of understanding healthy boundaries in sexual relationships, a lack of understanding of consent, the influence of media and pornography, as well as cultural norms. Sexual psychological disorders and the presence of previous sexual trauma were also widely mentioned. Within this type of violence, there is a prevalent need for dominance and control over the partner, intensified by cultural and socialized gender norms. This attitude is not surprising, given the prevalent gender norms dominating in the socialization process, emphasizing masculinity, male dominance, and aggression. Therefore, these needs are transferred into sexual relationships. An interesting point for analysis here becomes the increasing influence of the media, especially pornographic content. The majority of groups of boys among the participants mentioned the negative influences of the portrayal of sexual relationships through pornographic content as significant causes of sexual violence. This becomes a potential risk for increasing the number of acts of sexual violence and potentially distorting the perception of healthy sexual relationships between romantic partners. This could be a starting point for future research on similar topics as in this report, but the positive aspect is that all discussion participants were determined against any form of sexual violence and emphasized the importance of sexual education, especially in the sphere of information and education about sexual consent and respect for the boundaries of one's sexual partner.

As for the consequences of sexual violence, participants most commonly mentioned lasting physical consequences, the appearance of physical and mental traumas, the occurrence of mental disorders, primarily PTSD, depression, and anxiety, the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, social isolation, feelings of shame, and sexual dysfunction and a lack of trust for future sexual partners. As was the case in the context of physical violence, girls more often cited social consequences compared to boys, such as social isolation and stigmatization, which is worth analyzing. From these statements, it is noticeable that women are more aware of the social consequences faced by victims of violence and the risk of social stigmatization if they are

characterized and labeled in society as victims of violence. Boys do not mention this as the first of the most risky consequences, while girls predominantly do. Here, the effect of gender norms and entrenched social attitudes preventing women from reporting violence and seeking help for experienced trauma is present again.

In the workshops, the analysis of different factors that can lead to the occurrence of violence was considered, as well as the analysis of negative consequences and how they differ between men and women. Participants summarized the causes of violence that are dominant in their environment. One of the key factors they highlighted is a lack of emotional maturity, control, and empathy, as well as emotional disorders and underdeveloped emotional skills.

“Definitely emotional problems, lack of emotional skills (previous traumatic experiences, low self-esteem, mental disorders) can be causes of violence, which is really concerning.” (F, Mostar).

As the second dominant reason contributing to the increased risk of all three analyzed forms of violence is learned violence, witnessing violence within the family and close surroundings that has become normalized in the family environment. This risk increases if individuals themselves have been victims of violence, thus transmitting the normalization of violence into future relationships.

“The main causes of violence are that a person has sometimes been a victim of violence. This could have happened in the family or at school. Often, such individuals become perpetrators themselves.” (F, Banja Luka).

Furthermore, a large percentage of participants identify the influence of media and cultural phenomena as a crucial cause of any type of violence, which is becoming increasingly prevalent in the youth society. Many participants were surprised by the actual influence that media has on them, especially in shaping violent behavior. This is a concerning finding because even young people are not fully aware of the impact of social media on their daily lives, especially on the occurrence of violence. This fact potentially makes them more susceptible to negative media influences and the normalization and underestimation of the real impact.

“...Some things are surprising, like the influence of media on violence, but I understand that violent content can shape our perception.” (M, Sarajevo).

As another significant factor contributing to the occurrence of violence, participants mention the aforementioned need for social and physical power and the assertion of dominance, which is crucial for reinforcing male gender norms, prevalent in a patriarchal society like ours. This need influences the occurrence of violence, which could be characterized as the main cause of any type of violence because other causes are strongly connected to the aforementioned causes, such as learned violent behavior, the emphasis on masculinity depicted in many media

contents, predominantly pornographic content, and the most important factor, which is the lack of learned emotion processing strategies and healthy coping mechanisms. This can be identified as a key factor in the occurrence of violence because young men, through family relationships, relationships with peers, broader social phenomena, and media, receive messages that empowering gender norms through dominance, power, control, and aggression are desirable for a “real man.”

The last part of the analysis within this topic relates to discussing the differences in the effects of experienced violence between men and women. Most participants agreed that violence of any kind negatively affects victims, regardless of their gender.

“Well, for me, all causes of violence are equally important because, in the end, they lead to the same goal, harming the victim.” (F, Mostar).

Nevertheless, participants agree that there are differences in the consequences of violence between men and women, further increasing the complexity of the analysis. Many participants highlight how violence is perceived differently if it comes from men compared to women. Given that gender norms support the expression of social dominance and aggression in men, violence is viewed from a different perspective. Displaying violent behavior is often justified, even normalized, and glorified in certain social contexts. On the other hand, violent behavior by women is viewed with contempt, making it a source of stigmatization and shame for women because it does not align with the gender norms typical for women. Moreover, women often justify violence and are frequently encouraged to stay in violent relationships due to a myriad of factors mentioned earlier.

“Similarities are that both young men and young women can experience trauma from violence. The difference may be that young men are encouraged to be aggressive while young women endure violence in silence.” (M, Sarajevo).

Thus, the existence of double standards in attitudes toward violence can be established, further reinforcing gender stereotypes. This complicates opening discussions surrounding violence, as in every context of violence discussion, factors related to gender norms and stereotypical behaviors associated with each gender must be included. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that participants predominantly hold positive attitudes within the violence theme. They have a developed ability to identify factors causing violence and the ability to engage in open and rational discussions about the consequences of violence and how these consequences differ between genders, strengthened by gender norms.

Topic 8: Movement towards change

In the final task related to the discussion of various aspects of gender norms, participants were tasked with using cartoons or comics to try to present a vision of a future society and describe how attitudes toward gender norms might potentially change.

As part of this task, scenarios in the cartoons varied. Girls focused more on social situations with peers, such as relationships with friends and partners, as well as relationships with the broader community. In their scenarios, girls often concentrated on attitudes toward the role of women based on gender norms and how they hope these attitudes will change.

2023

The first cartoon depicts a girl criticized by society and her family because she prefers spending her free time outside the house rather than cleaning it.

2043

The second cartoon portrays a family and the supportive influence of society, believing that a woman should not be a servant but has the right to rest and relax.” (F, Mostar)

Another type of scenario in the task involved depicting family and partner violence, in which girls criticized the current societal position where a large number of women are forced to endure violence and remain in abusive relationships.

2023

A boy physically abuses a girl and forces her to endure and not report the violence.

2043

It shows neighbors reporting the violence, but the girl tells them that her partner is physically abusing her.” (F, Banja Luka)

On the other hand, boys focused more on family situations, primarily scenarios involving fathers, a pattern present in all groups. This data may indicate that the socialization of stereotypical qualities valued in men is primarily caused by family socialization.

2023

In this cartoon, Dad tells his son that when someone insults or hits him, he has the right to respond in kind and should not be a coward but a brave guy.

2043

In the second cartoon, we see Dad talking to his son that masculinity does not mean responding in kind, that not being violent does not mean being less of a man and less brave.” (M, Mostar)

Boys also significantly focused on peer relationships and how gender norms influence the construction, quality, and interaction in these relationships. From the depicted situations, it is noticeable that boys often face conflicts with their peers, especially if they do not behave according to gender norms.

2023

This cartoon presents a boy who is verbally and physically bullied at school by peers because he is 'effeminate,' and no one does anything about it (the school) regarding this issue.

2043

In this cartoon, we definitely see the school, as an educational institution, working on such problems, teachers, professors educating themselves in the direction of better understanding this topic, violence, recognizing violence, and so on." (M, Sarajevo)

From the depicted situations, it is evident that both boys and girls are largely aware of the complexities of gender relations and believe that broader societal circumstances have a significant impact on the formation and empowerment of gender norms. This fact indicates that a large percentage of young people are indeed working to question gender norms and how they affect their daily lives. Differences between male and female participants can be observed in the depicted situations. While girls place a strong emphasis on the influence of the broader social context and the presence of violence in romantic relationships, boys focus on the influence of family figures and peer influence in the school context. Based on this, differences in the dominant influences on boys and girls can be noticed as they build awareness of gender norms.

Conclusions on research questions

Research Question 1: What are the current social constructs, attitudes, and experiences present for young people, especially regarding gender norms?

In the workshop participants, we observe the presence of stereotypical beliefs about how a woman/man should behave and how they should look. It is noticed that both genders primarily focus on physical appearance, but from two different perspectives. Girls want to be as beautiful, "feminine," and well-groomed as possible to attract male attention, and femininity is interpreted as gentle, caring, and submissive. On the other hand, boys want to be as strong as possible and have as much muscle as possible, as a symbol of strength and masculinity. It is important to note that expressing emotions is not included in masculinity because it is considered weak. Rooted and traditional stereotypes, which have a long history in the Balkans, are still present. Participants, both male and female, are aware of many stereotypes and mention some ways to fight against stereotypes and gender norms. They believe that the best way to resist is to be oneself and have enough self-confidence.

Research Question 2: How do social institutions such as media, school, religion, family, and peers influence social constructs of masculinity/femininity?

Participants mentioned that all five mentioned factors (media, school, religion, family, and peers) significantly influence the formation of their own masculinity or femininity. They particularly emphasized the influence of family and peers, as they spend the most time with them, but they do not neglect the impact of others. Many mentioned "TikTokers" as influential figures, stating how they look up to them and how such personalities influence the improvement of young people's self-confidence. It is expected that within the family, the parent of the same gender has the most influence on an individual (mother on daughters, father on sons), teaching them how to behave as a member of one of the two genders. According to the participants' responses, religion plays the smallest role in the construction of masculinity/femininity.

Research Question 3: What are the attitudes of young people towards behavior towards individuals of the opposite sex?

Essentially, it can be noticed that workshop participants have somewhat egalitarian views, regardless of gender and city of origin. No participant expressed supportive attitudes towards any form of violence, nor did they possess negative opinions in the context of violence. Nevertheless, attitudes supporting stereotypical gender norms still persist in certain individuals. From the first part of the analysis, it is noticeable that boys emphasize the importance of material wealth, physical strength, readiness, and the significance of social dominance, control, and power. As for girls, the physical appearance is a significant component of their identity, along with the emphasis on stereotypical femininity.

In the context of personality traits, girls find it challenging to resist social expectations that dictate a woman's role to be obedient and submissive to men.

Research Question 4: How are social constructs of masculinity linked to the abuse of power through violence?

Reviewing the previous part of the analysis related to identifying different factors of violence, it is noticeable that the primary cause leading to the occurrence of any form of violence is the socialization of violence within the family context. Individuals who have witnessed family violence or have themselves been victims of violence within the family begin to characterize this type of violence as acceptable and expected, normalizing the use of violence as a valid way to resolve conflicts. Such thinking and justification of different forms of violence are further transmitted into other relationships that such individuals form, primarily in peer relationships, as well as in future romantic and marital relationships, where it becomes most risky and leaves the worst consequences.

Going deeper into the analysis, attempts are made to find the causes of such behavior within the family itself, originating from broader social circumstances. The social climate in which an individual grows up significantly influences the creation and empowerment of gender norms and how much importance we actually attribute to them. Established gender norms, as beliefs about desirable characteristics for men, lead to the construction of the personalities and learned behaviors of young men. On one hand, men are pressured to suppress their emotions in most situations, with the explanation that “real men” do not express emotions. Young men are thus actively discouraged and shamed if they show emotional vulnerability and express negative emotions and psychological difficulties. Not only does such an approach to one's own emotions have negative consequences for men's mental health, but it actively disrupts the interpersonal relationships that young men build with others, as unprocessed emotions and frustrations often manifest through violent behavior.

Furthermore, in some contexts, men are encouraged to express aggression and manifest violence, especially in situations where their honor is threatened, and they must defend it to remain brave and masculine, avoiding the risk of being seen as “weak” by their surroundings. As mentioned above, such behavior becomes dangerous and risky if transferred into romantic relationships and if it becomes an established way of dealing with stressful and frustrating situations, especially when negative feelings are heightened by repressed emotions from the past. Therefore, it can be concluded that efforts to combat violence should focus on promoting healthy masculinity and reducing the significance of established gender norms that force the suppression of emotions and avoidance of discussing them, regardless of the negative consequences that arise from such behavior. The goal is to create a safe space and an acceptable social climate that encourages young men and men to openly talk about their emotions, leading them to develop healthy strategies for dealing with stress and negative emotions.

Certain reeducation is necessary in the context of reducing the occurrence of violence, the roots of which are found precisely in the emphasis on masculinity, male dominance, and power.

Research Question 5: For young men who do not use violence, what are the influencing factors and consequences?

As the dominant reason why some men do not engage in violent behavior, and why they have pronounced negative attitudes towards any form of violence, the socialization of non-violent behavior in the family is emphasized. Growing up in a family where violence was not present as a conflict resolution method has a noticeable impact on the socialization of an individual's personality. Individuals who grew up in an environment that did not resort to violence and encouraged the use of alternative methods to deal with intense emotions and stressful situations learned to employ non-violent methods.

The development of emotional intelligence is also linked to the lack of violent behavior expression, as individuals possess strategies for healthy coping with emotions and frustrations. Participants emphasize the importance of these methods, as well as the freedom to express their feelings.

Finally, some participants point out that they express negative attitudes towards the use of violence because they themselves have been victims of violence or know someone who has been a victim of violence, either in a family context or from peers in their social environment. Despite this, they highlight that violent behavior often continues in future relationships through the aforementioned process of socialization and normalization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the context of recommendations for future interventions aimed at promoting gender equality, two categories of actions are highlighted. The first category pertains to the development of individual intervention strategies, i.e., what individuals can do on a personal level to reduce the impact of negative gender stereotypes. The second category relates to societal intervention plans, i.e., what society as a whole can do. Some of the recommendations arising from the research include:

1. Work on educating young people, focusing on educating girls about their rights and issues related to gender equality and violence. For boys, education should address ways to combat gender inequality, developing strategies, and addressing the challenges young people face. The development of emotional intelligence and self-confidence aims to provide skills for healthy expression and management of emotions, with the goal of resisting toxic gender norms.
2. Enhance open communication with parents, peers, and people in the immediate environment, focusing on normalizing and encouraging youth to openly discuss their emotions, negative experiences, and the impact on their mental health. This action plan aims to break down stereotypical beliefs and expectations that young people, especially males, should suppress their feelings, as it is perceived as weakness.
3. Improve the educational context through curricula and materials promoting diversity and inclusivity, with a particular emphasis on gender equality and eliminating gender-conditioned stereotypes. Also, provide education and training to teaching staff on gender issues to create supportive environments for all students.
4. Organize greater support and education for parents. Conduct workshops for parents to stimulate understanding of their role in shaping gender norms and to support them in providing assistance to children regardless of gender.
5. Develop violence prevention programs targeting youth, especially those who have witnessed or have been victims of violence. Provide support to families of violent individuals to break the cycle of violence and encourage behavioral change.
6. Ensure access to psychological support and support networks for youth facing pressure from gender norms or who have been victims of violence, enabling them to express emotions and cope with stress.

7. Introduce a monitoring and evaluation system in educational institutions to track changes in youth attitudes toward gender norms and violence, adjusting strategies according to community needs.

8. Encourage community activism related to participation in academic and extracurricular activities and projects. This includes involvement in youth organizations that can provide education on violence, equality, and gender roles.

9. Public awareness through collaboration with the media and campaigns on the harmful effects of gender stereotypes and the importance of supporting gender equality.

Based on the data analyzed in the report, there is a need for additional work on future education about gender norms and the significant impact they have on the daily lives of young people. The main objectives of future interventions should primarily focus on educating young girls about their rights and strategies to resist gender norms, while interventions for young boys should focus on building healthy strategies for expressing negative emotions and developing awareness of healthy masculinity. This work is impossible solely at the individual level, so it is necessary to expand the intervention to the work of state institutions, primarily schools, and the work of youth organizations, to broaden the scope of activities.

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