



Understanding and responding to violence against women and children across Europe

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Definitions of Gender Based Violence

GBV is violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately.



GBV can take various forms:

Physical: it results in injuries, distress and health problems. Typical forms of physical violence are beating, strangling, pushing, and the use of weapons. In the EU, 31 % of women have experienced one or more acts of physical violence since the age of 15.

Sexual: it includes sexual acts, attempts to obtain a sexual act, acts to traffic, or acts otherwise directed against a person's sexuality without the person's consent. It's estimated that one in 20 women (5 %) has been raped in EU countries since the age of 15.

Psychological: includes psychologically abusive behaviours, such as controlling, coercion, economic violence and blackmail. 43% of women in the 28 EU countries have experienced some form of psychological violence by an intimate partner.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

VAWG was first developed in the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which recognized violence as rooted in historically unequal power relations between men and women.

It has been adopted in many policy initiatives, such as the Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy set out by the UK government in 2021 and the EU, UN, and WHO.

It has been the core terminology used in highlighting and addressing gender-based violence and driving feminist advocacy.

- (King-Hill, 2025)

- Globally, an estimated 736 million women—almost one in three—have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life (30 per cent of women aged 15 and older).
- Current or former husbands or intimate partners perpetrate most violence against women. More than 640 million women aged 15 and older have been subjected to intimate partner violence (26 per cent of women aged 15 and older).
- Of those who have been in a relationship, almost one in four adolescent girls aged 15–19 (24 per cent) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner or husband. Sixteen per cent of young women aged 15 to 24 experienced this violence in the past 12 months.

Global Evidence on the Prevalence and Impact of Online Gender-based Violence [OGBV]

- The most recent surveys show a prevalence of OGBV ranging from 16% to 58%.
- Several studies from different countries identify Facebook as the top location.
- According to victim-survivors, perpetrators are more likely to be unknown and acting alone, but large numbers are known to the victims.
- “Perpetrators” themselves report divergent, multifaceted and often over-lapping motivations for their actions;
- Analysis of underlying drivers of OGBV highlights an overarching theme of power and control, and heteronormative expectations around gender roles and sexual practice.
- OGBV should be understood as part of a continuum of abuse where normalised behaviours, such as sexual harassment in public spaces, shade into behaviours widely recognized as criminal, such as physical assault.
- The societal impact of OGBV includes Media freedom is compromised; Democracy being undermined; Economic losses resulting from lost productivity; A ‘climate of unsafety’ prevails.
- Evidence base: The number of surveys about self-reported experiences with online harassment has increased rapidly. The majority of the research found during the course of this rapid review came from international and domestic non-governmental organisations and think-tanks. Academic research studies were also found, including several literature reviews.

Should we change VAWG to VAWC?

“By adopting terminology that reflects the full spectrum of childhood experiences, practitioners and policymakers can ensure that all children, regardless of gender, are visible, protected and adequately supported. This shift is not about diluting the focus on gendered violence, but about expanding the lens to safeguard the rights and well-being of all children where appropriate.

Inclusive language ensures visibility, access and protection for all children. It aligns with legal definitions and expectations of safeguarding, supports trauma-informed practice and enables accurate data collection.”

(King-Hill, 2025)

- A more open social awareness and clearer discussions on violence - but it's still a postcode lottery
- Better understanding the prevalence and actual rates of violence.
- Changing definitions and recording practices.
- Shift in policy and governmental thinking around sexual abuse and interpersonal violence,
- Changing social values and norms, both positive and negative on violence
- Cultural and generation shifts
- Social media and online platforms/influencers

Why the rise in VAWG/C?



The changing landscape of crime and criminal justice

Desistence

Strengths-based
approaches

Service users'
journey & service
user engagement

Changing nature
and discussions
on risk
management

Harm reduction

Life course
criminology

Trauma and
Trauma-informed
practice

Prevention

Recovery capital,
particularly
Justice Capital

The need to
balance
punishment and
rehabilitation

The importance of
taking a rounded,
holistic approach

The importance of
multi-disciplinary
approaches



Primary prevention is broad social and cultural messaging and interventions about how to prevent harmful behaviour from happening (i.e., messaging and interventions focusing on the realities of sexual abuse, its impact upon victims, and the consequences for those involved in it).



Secondary prevention is messaging, and interventions aimed at people at risk of engaging in harmful or problematic behaviour, to dissuade them from engaging in said behaviours (i.e., messaging and interventions aimed at people at risk of committing sexual abuse so that they can seek help before they offend messaging about the realities of sexual abuse, its impact upon victims, and the consequences for those involved in it).



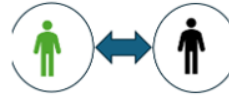
Tertiary prevention is messaging, and interventions aimed at people who have engaged in harmful or problematic behaviour to dissuade them from engaging in said behaviours again in the future (i.e., messaging and interventions aimed at people caught for and/or convicted of committing sexual offence that they get help to reduce their risk of re-offending).



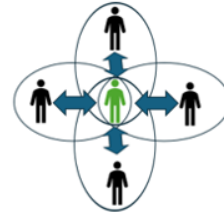
Quaternary prevention is messaging, and interventions aimed at supporting ongoing harm reduction, social inclusion and reducing the risk of engaging in harmful or problematic behaviour (i.e., messaging and interventions aimed at people post release/post criminal justice engagement for a sexual offence to reduce their risk of re-offending and improve their likelihood of pro-social integration).



Individual Factors in a person's biology & personal history that increases possibility of committing sexual abuse. **Examples:** Autism, neurodiversity, offence supportive beliefs; history of abuse; addictions.



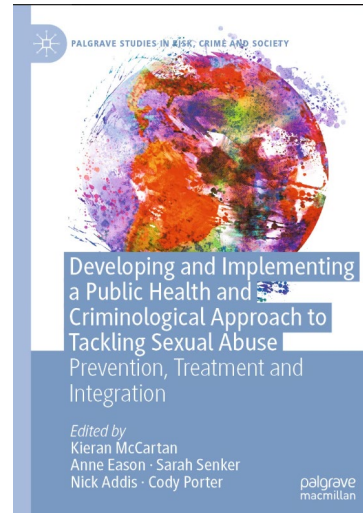
Interpersonal Factors within a person's closest relationships history that increases possibility of committing sexual abuse. **Examples:** Association with peers, family members or partners that condone sexual abuse, being in abusive environments.



Community Factors in the community such as relationships with schools, workplaces & neighbourhoods increase possibility of the person committing sexual abuse. **Examples:** General tolerance of sexual abuse, lack of support from police, weak community sanctions against "perpetrators".



Societal Societal or cultural norms that increase possibility of a person committing sexual abuse. **Examples:** Inequality due to an Individual's gender, neurodiversity, race, class or Inequality due to economic & social policies.



Taking an Epidemiological Criminology (EpiCrim) approach

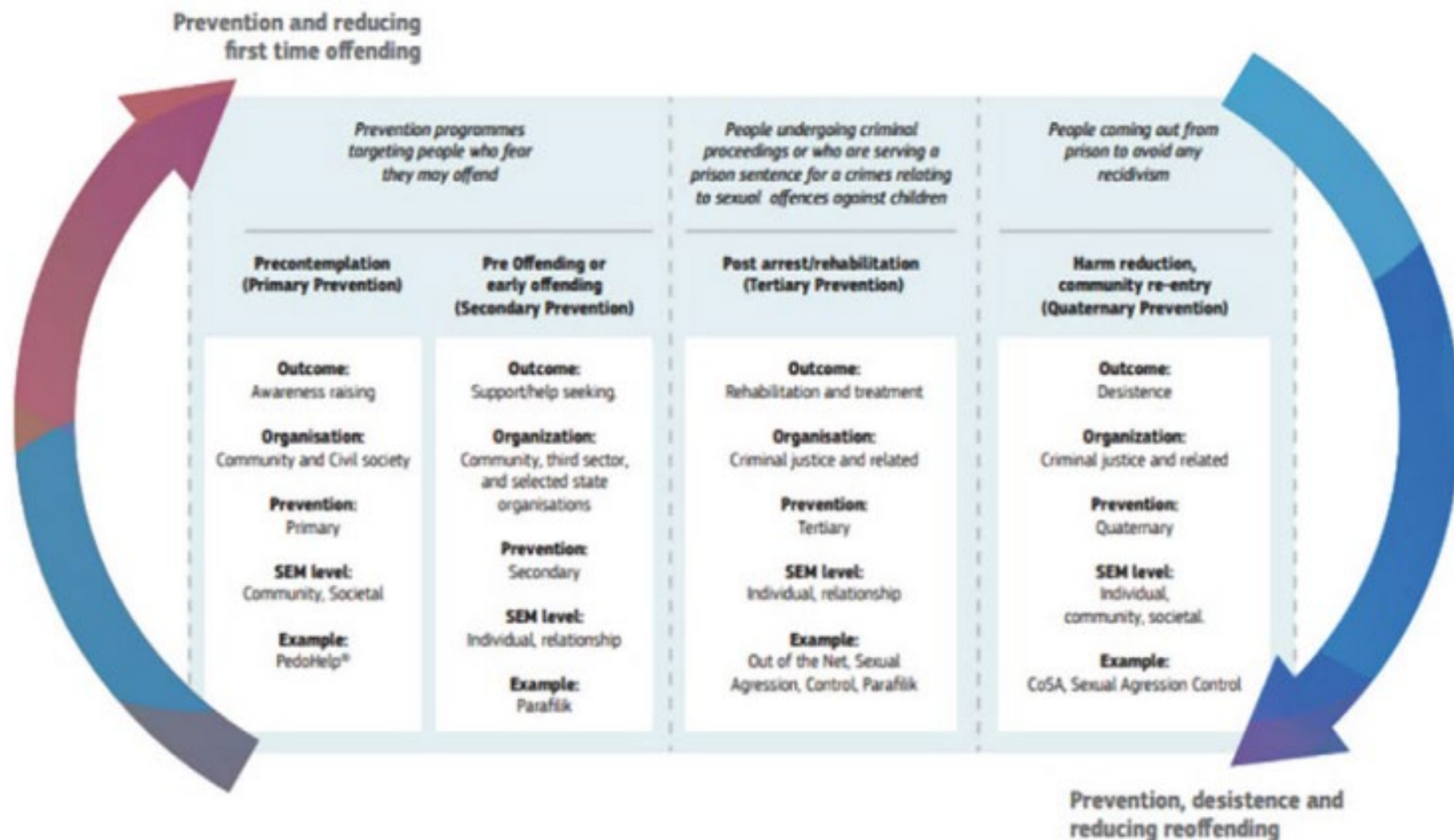


Fig. 1.1 Public health approach to the prevention of Child sexual abuse (Di Gioia et al., 2022)



- Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence need to be implemented in a framework that encompasses broad availability, multiple referral mechanisms and effective multiagency work while ensuring adequate resources.
- Programmes should be delivered by competent and specialised staff in settings that foster perpetrator accountability while maximising the likelihood of programme attendance.
- The safety of victims is paramount in all activities of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence. These programmes need to ensure collaboration with partner services. Such collaboration must entail timely information about the programme to women and girls and that their needs and concerns are addressed.
- Regular risk assessment and management should be undertaken throughout the course of the programme.
- Programmes should address the root causes of violence, be gender sensitive and support perpetrators in taking responsibility for their acts of violence.
- Programmes for perpetrators of sexual violence cover a wide range of perpetrators, including adult, youth and children who commit violence against different victims (adults or children, within or outside the context of domestic violence).
- These programmes must be specifically designed for the particular population they address and must undertake regular risk assessment.
- All programmes for perpetrators of sexual violence must prioritise victims' safety, human rights and well-being at all stages and encourage perpetrators to understand and take responsibility for the consequences of their actions.



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It's time to talk about it. Child sexual abuse can be preventable.

CONSORTIUM

- 14 Countries
- 19 Partners
- 6 Universities
- 5 Law and Enforcement Agencies
- 2 Hotlines
- 1 Legal expert
- 1 Technology provider

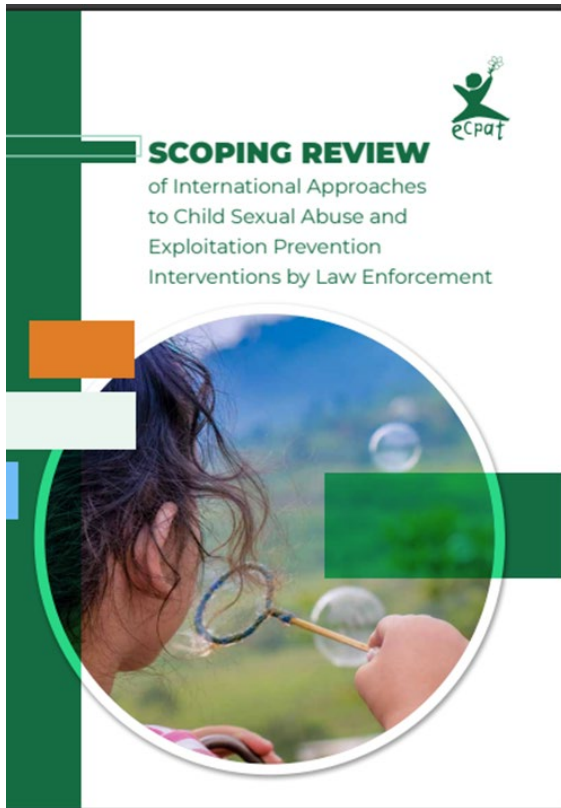
TIMELEX

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PREVENT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

ECPAT

International scoping review



Key findings

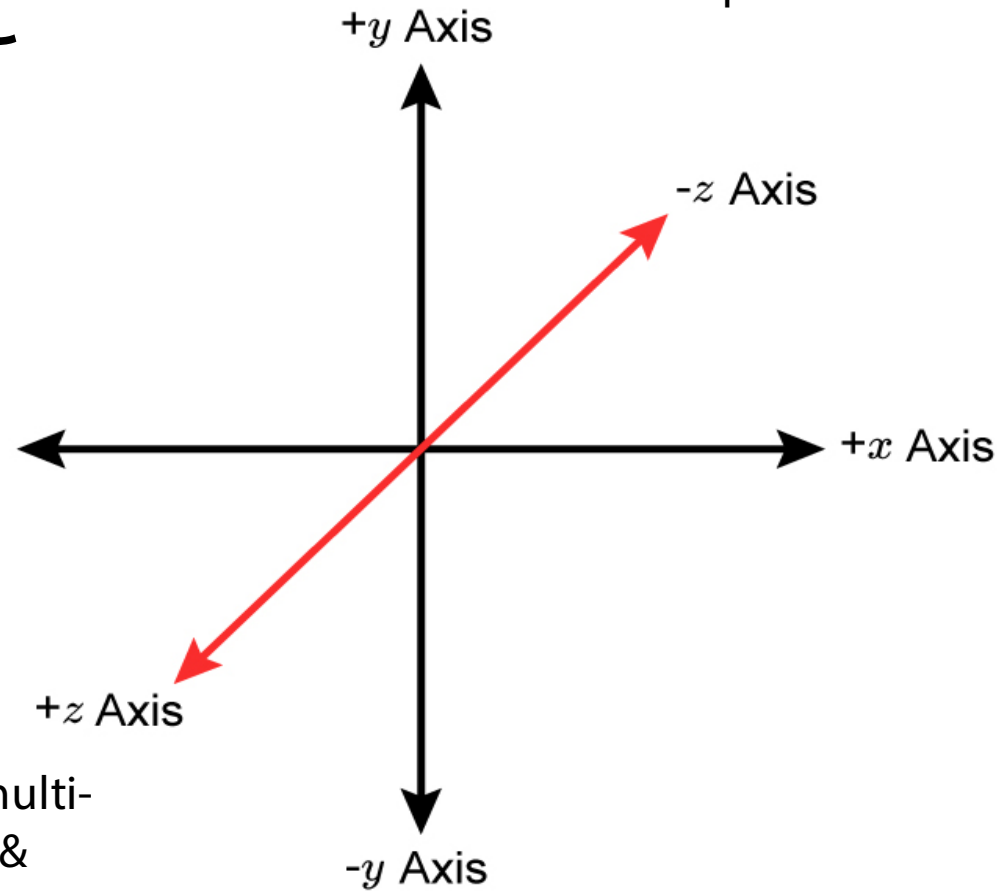
1. A need to better understand and define their role in CSA prevention, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels;
2. A need to align with and work in partnership with existing national and international CSA frameworks;
3. A need to help develop new national and international CSA frameworks;
4. Most CSA-prevention initiatives are based at the primary, tertiary, and quaternary levels;
5. Most CSA-prevention is focused on the community and societal levels of the socio-ecological model;
6. They tend to lead on tertiary interventions but are usually a partner/collaborator on the other levels;
7. Need to consider their involvement in secondary prevention with at-risk groups;
8. A better developed and more robust evaluation of law enforcement prevention initiatives is required.

Key recommendations

1. Need to work with their national governments, key stakeholders and local communities to develop appropriate national frameworks and implementation plans for CSA prevention that are fit for purpose in their specific contexts;
2. Need to work with communities, especially at-risk communities, to demonstrate their commitment to preventing CSA;
3. Law enforcement officers should be trained in the reality of CSA.
4. Need to develop evidence-informed policies rooted in narratives about the Epi Crim-centred framing;
5. Develop a theory of change around CSA prevention, especially secondary prevention with people at risk of committing CSA;
6. Need to review all CSA-prevention interventions that they are involved in and identify the gaps in their provisions;
7. They need to identify the key outcomes of their CSA-prevention interventions and then develop a series of research and evaluation tools that enable them to capture these.

Axis of VAWC response & prevention

The socio-ecological model (individual,
interpersonal, community & societal)
interpersonal



4 prevention stages (primary,
secondary, tertiary, & and
quaternary prevention)

A shared, multi-disciplinary, multi-
agency approach to policy &
practice [public health-EpiCrim]

Future directions & considerations for European probation

See offending behaviour, and VAWC. as a health and wellbeing issue

Balancing service user rights and victim rights – also that some service users are victims themselves as well.

Investing in staff training and staff support so that they have specialised skills and knowledge to work with these topics and populations

Continuing to invest in and becoming a trauma informed organisation - for the benefit of staff and service users

Contributing to quaternary prevention, community integration through partnership working

Using knowledge of service user behaviour and aetiology to inform primary and secondary prevention interventions upstream

Work across the socio-ecological model in a rounded fashion

Continue to educate communities about the reality of VAWC and herald the good work done by probation | this is to make individuals, communities and society safer.

Special expert group on Gender Based Violence (2024-26)

Membership

- Kieran McCartan, UK & Ireland
- Anna Esquerra Roqueta, CEP
- Ana Maria Lavado, Portugal
- Carmel B Donnell, Ireland
- Olja Ristova, North Macedonia
- Endika Biota, Basque Country - Spain
- Zammit Mary Anne, Malta
- Lea Holst Reenberg, Denmark
- Evija Burkovska, Latvia

Tasks

- Review of the literature and best practice on getting men who have committed VAWC engaged in treatment programmes.
- Developing professional messaging on VAWC to upskill public understanding.
- Develop a one-pager on tips/advice for probation staff in working in a trauma informed way with VAWG/C.