

'They don't talk  
about it enough'

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Report on the 2014 consultations  
with Youth Advisors for 'Our Voices'

*Short report*

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# The 'Our Voices' Project

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'Our Voices' is a three-year, pan-European initiative funded by the Oak Foundation and the University of Bedfordshire.

The project aims to promote the involvement of young people in efforts to prevent sexual violence against children across Europe.

Project elements include:

## WORKING TOGETHER WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- Developing and supporting a pan-European network of Youth Advisors
- Supporting a number of youth-led activities that will explore the scale, nature, and impact of sexual violence
- Identifying opportunities and events for young people to share their work and views

## WORKING TOGETHER WITH ORGANISATIONS THAT WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- Collaborating with organisations to develop participatory work with children at risk of or affected by sexual violence
- Documenting learning on participatory engagement with young people affected by sexual violence

## DEVELOPING RESOURCES

- Developing a database of organisations
- Creating a knowledge bank of resources, models and tools on young people's participation to prevent sexual violence against children
- Promoting learning and debate through online exchanges and workshops



# The consultations with Youth Advisors

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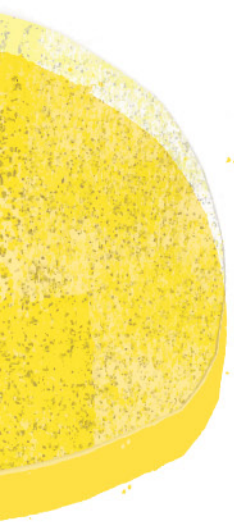




In the summer of 2014 as part of the 'Our Voices' project, the project team at the University of Bedfordshire, together with country partner projects, organised a number of consultations with Youth Advisors across Albania, Bulgaria and the UK.

#### THE CONSULTATIONS AIMED TO FIND OUT FROM YOUTH ADVISORS:

- What young people feel the issues are around sexual violence in their communities
- What the barriers and challenges to young people talking about sexual violence and accessing support are
- What young people think could be done to stop sexual violence
- How young people could be more involved in preventing sexual violence









## THE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

Forty-seven young people took part in the consultations. The majority were females (forty-two) however five males were also involved in one of the groups from Bulgaria.

The youngest Youth Advisor involved in the consultations was 11 years old and the oldest was 25. The Youth Advisors had different backgrounds and had a range of different experiences to draw from.



## INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP AND ACTIVITIES FOR YOUTH ADVISORS

A number of icebreakers, games, sessions and activities were designed into the workshop plans to ensure that the Youth Advisors had the opportunity to ask questions, better understand sexual violence and give feedback on the workshops.

The Youth Advisors identified a number of problems in their local areas. Across the different groups similar forms of sexual violence were discussed. These included:

- Unwanted touching
- Child sexual exploitation
- Child rape
- Trafficking
- Sexual harassment

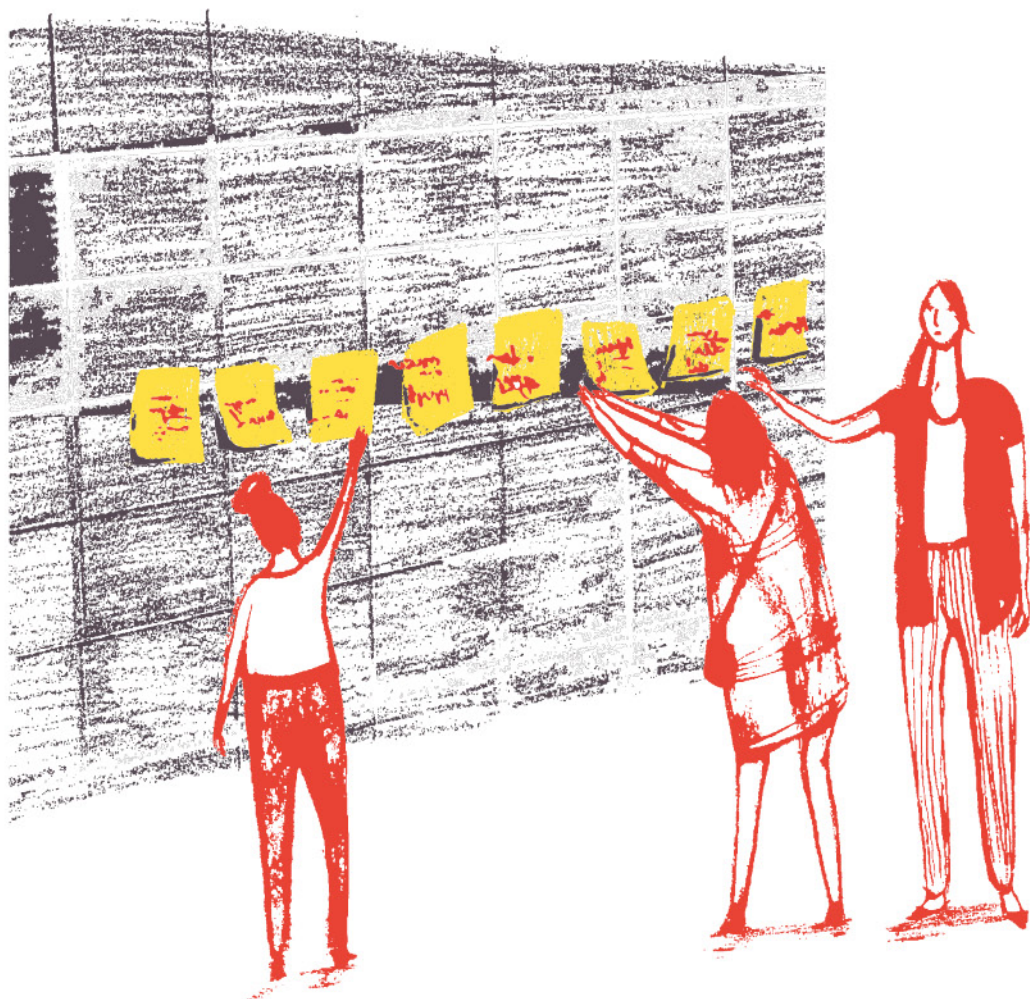
Youth Advisors talked about the different places and spaces where these forms of sexual violence took place. These included:

- In the family home
- In schools and classrooms
- On the street
- On public transport
- At parties
- In the workplace
- On the phone
- Online

The Youth Advisors also talked about who might perpetrate this abuse. This led to discussions about:

- Boyfriends
- Partners
- Friends
- Strangers
- Family members





*‘I’ve had a car go  
past me with a  
group of boys in  
it and they shouted  
“get your rat out”  
at me’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM







Word cloud illustrating the different problems that the Youth Advisors identified.



Kissing  
Touching  
Incest  
Gang rape  
Peeping toms  
Promise  
Hatred  
Forced marriage  
Blackmail  
Sex for money  
Family abuse  
Verbal violence  
Sexual violence  
Gestures  
Unwanted sex with partner  
Molestation  
Trafficking  
al abuse  
le photos  
Feeling alone  
Pornography  
one calls



### WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

Once the Youth Advisors had identified the issues surrounding sexual violence they felt were happening in their local areas, they were then asked to identify the reasons why they felt this was happening. These were some of the reasons they gave:

- People ignore sexual violence
- Lack of information
- Parents not protecting their children, or bad examples given by adults
- Being young and feeling pressured and scared
- The impact of pornography
- Wider social issues such as drug and alcohol abuse or poverty
- Perpetrators going unpunished
- No systems of safety
- The police not doing enough to stop sexual violence



*‘People ignoring it  
don’t want to believe  
someone they know  
is doing it’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

*‘Girls don’t consider  
it as abuse, what  
happened to them’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM ALBANIA

*‘Porn looks down  
on girls, then boys  
think that’s how it is’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM



## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE, ACCESSING SUPPORT AND REPORTING?

Youth Advisors identified a number of barriers and challenges that they felt prevented young people from knowing about and understanding sexual violence.

- Lack of information and education in schools and society
- Failure to talk about sex
- Shame and embarrassment
- Not being believed or supported
- Fear and being scared
- Not asking for help and not understanding the situation
- Not trusting enough to report and 'go public'
- Not knowing where to go for help
- Wanting to forget
- Not understanding the systems
- Lack of confidence in the police system and institutions





*‘The shame you  
cannot talk about  
this issue’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM ALBANIA

*‘You might be  
called a liar and  
attention seeker’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

*‘Young people don’t  
know who to talk  
to so that they can  
be informed’*



YOUNG PERSON FROM ALBANIA

HOW CAN WE OVERCOME THE BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES THAT PREVENT YOUNG PEOPLE FROM TALKING ABOUT AND KNOWING ABOUT AND GETTING HELP ON THIS ISSUE?

Youth Advisors came up with a number of suggestions to address some of the barriers and challenges:

- Better education in schools
- Education outside of the classroom
- Education and support for parents
- To talk about it more
- More and better services
- More awareness about sexual violence support services
- For professionals (police, judiciary) to develop skills and gain young people's confidence
- Tackle wider social problems
- Change attitudes and promote empathy



*‘People should talk  
about the issue’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM BULGARIA

*‘Educate parents –  
after school sessions’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

*‘To be informed  
about non-  
governmental  
organisations that  
offer help’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM ALBANIA





# *‘More services’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

*‘The police officers  
should gain people’s  
confidence, they  
should participate  
in trainings for  
learning how to  
deal with a victim of  
sexual abuse’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM ALBANIA



## HOW YOUTH ADVISORS THINK YOUNG PEOPLE COULD BE MORE INVOLVED IN PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Youth Advisors thought they or other young people could get involved in sexual violence prevention work by:

- Getting involved in campaigns, events and distributing resources
- Talking about sexual violence to other young people and being ‘ambassadors’
- Working as a volunteer with services and supporting others

## WHY SHOULD YOUNG PEOPLE BE INVOLVED?

Youth Advisors came up with a number of reasons as to why they felt young people should be involved in sexual violence prevention efforts. They said that:

- Young people talk the same language
- Young people accept things
- Young people know more about what’s happening

## HOW CAN WE HELP MORE YOUNG PEOPLE TO GET INVOLVED – WHAT’S IMPORTANT?

Youth Advisors felt that it was important for organisations wanting to engage young people in sexual violence prevention efforts to:

- Show them examples of how other young people had been involved in efforts
- Offer training opportunities
- Provide incentives
- Think about the language that is used
- Make it fun
- Make it feel safe and comfortable for young people to be involved



*'If young people  
talk about their  
experiences, it's easier  
for other people to'*

YOUNG PERSON FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

*'Children feel  
more comfortable  
when sharing things  
with peers'*

YOUNG PERSON FROM BULGARIA



*‘We must be trained  
in specific techniques  
and games in  
order to explain  
sexual violence’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM ALBANIA

*‘Change words,  
sexual violence  
is harsh, difficult  
to say’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM



## WHAT WOULD PREVENT YOUNG PEOPLE GETTING INVOLVED IN ACTIONS?

Youth Advisors also came up with lots of things that would stop them from getting involved which included if:

- Too much time was involved
- It meant re-living experiences and feeling re-traumatised
- There were not enough resources or incentives
- It caused stigma and embarrassment for young people
- They were scared about the perpetrators finding out
- The work was boring and solitary
- It wasn't organised and official
- Young people were not ready to be involved or not interested
- They did not have the right information or had had a bad experience

## ARE THERE ANY KEY VALUES OR PRINCIPLES THAT SHOULD GUIDE HOW WE INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE IN PREVENTION WORK?

Youth Advisors came up with a number of what they felt were key principles that were important when working with young people.

- To listen
- To take time and involve young people in decision-making
- To give encouragement and promote confidence
- To make sure involvement is meaningful
- To be non-judgemental
- To be careful
- To give clear information
- To work with others
- To respect
- To not be patronising or forceful
- To understand and be patient
- To be inclusive



*‘If experiences (of sexual violence) are recent, fresh, raw’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

*‘Wouldn’t want to be part of it if wasn’t official and you didn’t look official’*

YOUNG PERSON FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

*‘Fear of threats from the abuser’*



YOUNG PERSON FROM ALBANIA

# Some of the key messages from Youth Advisors

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After taking part in the workshops, the Youth Advisors had a number of key messages for different groups. Here are a few of them....

## **FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

Be wise, wise up

Get informed about sexual violence! It affects 1 in 10 children worldwide

Together against sexual violence – youths for youths!

It was not your fault!

Tell someone

It's never the victim's fault, don't feel guilty

Look, just because I was once a victim, doesn't mean I'm still a victim

## **FOR PARENTS AND CARERS**

Talk and inform your children about sexual abuse. It's not a taboo.

## **FOR SCHOOLS**

Invite services in to talk to the school

Have regular meetings with staff

## **FOR THE POLICE**

Just because I didn't say the word 'NO' does not mean that I gave consent

## **FOR FUNDERS**

Help us to use our experiences to help other people and share our knowledge with other countries



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## FIND OUT MORE

For more information and to access the full  
report visit:  
[www.beds.ac.uk/research-ref/iasr/centres/ourvoices](http://www.beds.ac.uk/research-ref/iasr/centres/ourvoices)

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## CONTRIBUTORS AND PARTNER PROJECTS



