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Digital technologies and gender-sensitive perspectives in mental health in Romania

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Abstract:

This comments paper addresses several issues about the state of affairs in Romania with regards to digital and social media use by young people, in the context of mental health and gender equality. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and considerable drawbacks in gender equality, including the increased violence experienced by girls and women online and offline, immediate measure supporting mental and emotional wellbeing of young people are needed. The lockdown has likely exacerbated also negative online experiences, such as cyber-aggression, excessive internet use and negative user-generated content. Therefore, joint national strategy of government commissions from education, health, and social protection of young people should centre both mental wellbeing and a gender-sensitive approach. The Swedish and Czech examples of decentralising and involving civil society in the decision-making process is salutary. Some concrete measures could include: a systematic assessment of digital media use by young people which takes into account the gendered dimensions of those practices and gendered forms of interpersonal violence; a continuous monitoring of gender stereotypes in media and their critical assessment included in media education curricula; specific measures targeting groups of young people with an increased risk for experiencing interpersonal violence, either in-person or online (i.e. poly-victimisation).

1. Relevant country context

1.1 Brief assessment of the situation in Romania – digital and social media, gender dimension and mental wellbeing for young people. The research – monitoring and consequences

1.1.1 Gender equality in Romania and COVID-19

With regards to violence against women, during the quarantine imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic in most countries, women faced increased isolation and higher exposure to the risk of violence by intimate partners (WHO, 2020). In Romania, a study conducted by the FILIA Center has shown that 67% of the women interview declared their mental health has deteriorated during the quarantine. Furthermore,

52% women in rural areas have encountered difficulties in accessing medical services (Alexandru et al., 2021) and have experienced increased inter-partner violence.

Furthermore, there are strong indications that the lockdown has also increased digital harassment of girls and women, in particular the prevalence of sexting and sexual cyberbullying (SCB) among children and adolescents. As a consequence (and also judging by media reports[1]), the prevalence of non-consensual dissemination of nudes and SCB during the COVID-19 pandemic has increased. The lockdown arguably created a magnifying glass, exacerbating long-unresolved problems related to non-consensual sexting, SCB and gender inequality. Across Europe, cases of SCB, image-based sexual abuse (or the more popular term "revenge porn") have soared.[2] In Romania, Instagram groups have been created for the sole purpose of slut-shaming and bullying young girls through the non-consensual posting of their nude images.[3]

1.1.2 The (digital) lives of children and COVID-19

The JRC survey in 11 countries (2020) about the digital lives of children during the pandemic collected data from 518 Romanian families (parent and one child 10-17 years old) in July 2020. According to the report, 6 out of 10 children believe that they have spent too much time on the internet during the lockdown. The report also shows that the number of unpleasant situations online has increased especially for girls and for younger children. Furthermore, between 12 and 17% of children experienced more cyber-victimisation during the lockdown (compared with the previous period), while 20% have seen more negative user-generated content (NUGC) than before (Velicu, 2021). Another report from the JRC research on the same sample of Romanian families showed that the worries of children with regards to the negative consequences of the lockdown were not the same for all – girls and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds being far more worried (Velicu, 2020).

The DigiGen report (Eickelmann et al., 2021) regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the education of young people in 5 European countries included information about the schooling of young children. Several issues related to the education crisis, amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, were identified for Romania: educational inequality with many young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion, major difficulties in switching to the online teaching system, a generalised need to develop digital competencies among teachers, and inequalities in children's access to online educational activities, which was identified as highly dependent on the household infrastructure, for example, broadband connection, laptop/computer, smartphone, etc. (Forian & Țoc, 2020). One can assume that those most vulnerable and at risk of

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[1]   https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-52413994
[2]   https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-europe-porn-trfn/revenge-porn-soars-in-europes-coronavirus-lockdown-as-student-fights-back-idUSKBN22H2I6 and https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-52413994
[3]   https://www.scena9.ro/article/revenge-porn-adolescenti-pandemie

exclusion from the school system (due to poor access, lower or insufficient skills, other material deprivation) would also be at risk for developing mental health problems.

1.1.3 Researching young people's digital media use – beyond the "effects" paradigm

In Romania, there is no systematic data collection with regards to media and internet use practices of children and adolescents (with the exception of Save the Children Romania that gathers data annually from children and adolescents, but usually from non-probabilistic samples or urban samples). Besides Save the Children, Romania has participated again in the cross-country survey conducted by the EU Kids Online network between 2018 and 2019 in 19 countries, following a common methodology. The report (Smahel et al., 2020) covers a wide range of topics, including uses and opportunities, but also a series of 'risky behaviours' (i.e. that might lead to harm), including excessive internet use, seeing sexual content, engaging in sexual communication (sexting), cyber-victimisation and seeing negative user-generated content.

The EU Kids Online research shows that in most cases, those children who already have many resources, online and offline, tend to reap most benefits, while those most vulnerable offline, tend to experience more negative effects also online. This holds true in the case of excessive internet use, which is influenced by "health determinants", as per Dahlgren and Whitehead's model (2021), in the case of cyber-victimisation and aggression, negative user-generated content, accessing sexually explicit content or receiving unwanted sexual communication from peers (sexting). The Annex 1 details some of these results, presenting the situation of Romanian children and some data on the entire dataset of 19 countries.

These trends have been named "rich get richer" (or "poor get poorer") (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2007; Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). The Swedish paper (Asklöf & Randén, 2021) acknowledges there are risk factors – such as socioeconomic conditions and lack of exercise – which are covariates of poor mental health outcomes, but also beneficial factors, such as speaking to parents, exercise and meeting with friends. Similarly, our own research has indicated that young people who are at risk of experiencing harm from digital experiences are those with unsupportive family and school environments, lack of peer support, but also those who experience other forms of online victimisation (Barbovschi et al., 2021). Finally, as a note of caution, most research framed in terms of "effects" imply causation, whereas only correlations can be inferred from these studies (Attwood et al., 2013), limiting causal statements implied in statements about "media effects" or "influences".

As a general note on cross-sectional research, the EU Kids Online network warns against a techno-deterministic perspective on digital media use by children (i.e. What media "does" to children) and advocates a nuanced perspective, which takes into account both the child's agency and a wider variety of factors (individual, social, media, societal) which might shape different outcomes, including those related to mental health. Nonetheless, in spite of difficulties in assessing clear causation lines, it is important to have an awareness between potential relationships between digital

and social media use, mental health outcomes and mediating factors, as suggested by the Swedish paper as well (Lindbom, 2021).

1.2 Gender perspective in (mental) health policies in Romania, gender mainstreaming

1.2.1 National Strategy for Equality of Chances and Treatment of Women and Men and Prevention and Fighting Domestic Violence for 2018-2021

In terms of promoting gender equality, the Law 202/2002 stipulates the equality of chances and equal treatment of women and men, including access to health services. Furthermore, the National Strategy for Equality of Chances and Treatment of Women and Men and Prevention and Fighting Domestic Violence for 2018-2021[4] has a component of gender mainstreaming, namely introducing gender perspectives into national policies through:

- Constructing a unified methodology regarding gender mainstreaming in national policies and programmes;

- Consolidating and improving the legislative framework for the organization and functioning of COJES (County Commissions for quality of Chances for Women and Men);

- Active involvement of the National Commission for Equality of Chances for Women and Men (CONES) in implementing the Strategy and the General Plan of Action;

- Forming a national network of experts in the field of gender equality;

- Capacitating NGOs in their involvement in formulating and proposing alternatives to public policies initiated by the Government in budgeting gender mainstreaming.

The National Strategy for Equality of Chances tackles issues related to reproductive health and proposes creating integrated centres (together with the Ministry of Health) for supporting women in case of emergency due to sexual violence. The Strategy also addresses the issue of promoting gender equality education in schools, including topics related to prejudices and stereotypes, and discrimination of girls with disabilities.

1.2.2 National Health Strategy for Romania

To the best of our knowledge, just as in the case of Czech Republic, the current National Health Strategy for Romania has no gender mainstreaming elements included with regards to mental health. Nonetheless, the Ministry of Health recognises that older girls tend to experience more depressive symptoms, that Romanian children face specific challenges related to parents working abroad (and leaving them in the care of others) and the issue of the under-diagnosis of mental issues among children

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[4]   https://anes.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Strategia-Nationala-ES-si-VD.pdf

and adolescents is not negligible (INSP, 2021). The same report estimates that girls are at higher risk of developing depression and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. The health system still follows a centralised, paternalistic model which reproduces gender inequalities. Moreover, there is still enormous stigma associated with mental difficulties and illness.

At the time this paper was drafted (November 3rd, 2021), an Emergency Ordinance (UG nr. 105/2021) was adopted by the joint commissions from the Ministries of Education, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, in order to implement a National Programme for Support of Children in the Context of the COVID-19 pandemic, "Care for the Children". The commissions acknowledge the research carried between 2020-2021 with regards to the mental health of children and parents, who reported increased anxiety, aggressive situations, emotional difficulties, depression, sleep or eating problems, abuse or neglect, excessive internet use, increased phobias, bullying and cyberbullying, suicide attempts or drug use. The project has a budget of 6,000,000 euros for 2 years and aims to protect the psycho-emotional health of children through mechanisms of evaluation and intervention; to improve the mechanisms of intervention in cases of violence against children (either physical, sexual or emotional), whether that happens within families, in institutions, communities or online. The proposal is a valuable step in recognising the mental health crisis cause by the pandemic and the increase in violence against young people. However, this proposal, in the current format has no gender-sensitive perspectives included[5].

1.2.3 Comprehensive sexual education

One of the most disputed law projects in Romania is the one related to comprehensive sex and relationship education (CSRE) in schools. The legislative project, which follows EU recommendations, has been met with significant resistance from conservative and religious factions in Romania, both with considerable political power. As a consequence, "sex education" has been replaced with "sanitary education" and conditioned by parental approval. Basically, the most vulnerable young people, those who would have benefitted most from access to such information – including information on contraceptives and STIs (Romania is still no. 1 in Europe for adolescent pregnancies and STIs), or information about gender violence, consent and sexual abuse – were once again excluded from such education. Recognising the link between the topic of CSRE and mental health outcomes for girls and women at risk of becoming victims of partner violence and abuse is an important step which could push the human rights agenda forward in Romania.

Finally, there is still considerable discrimination and stigma against the LGBTQIA+ community in Romania, with queer youth being considerably more at risk for developing mental and emotional symptoms and negative outcomes (e.g. self-harm, suicide). In line with Lindbom (2021, the Swedish paper), an intersectional perspective

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[5]   https://www.facebook.com/hatosadrian/posts/349271606973217

which takes into account gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, neurodiversity – would allow for a better understanding of the impact of social structures on the mental health of individuals.

2. Comparison of Romania's situation with Sweden and the Czech Republic

Taking account of the practices/measures under review, as described in the discussion papers (see the CZ paper and for SE in particular chapter 4 on good practices):

2.1 Similarities/major differences with Romania

Similarly to Czech Republic, the health system in Romania is a public health care provision, covered by the compulsory health insurance, while the uninsured are entitled to only a minimum set of services. According to the European Commission report for 2019, health spending in Romania is the lowest in the EU, both on a per capita basis (EUR 1 029, EU average EUR 2 884) and as a proportion of GDP (5 %, EU 9.8 %). The share of publicly financed health spending (79.5 %) is in line with the EU average (79.3 %), and while out-of-pocket payments are generally low, except for outpatient medicines, informal payments are both substantial and widespread. The report also mentions that spending in all sectors is low and the health system is significantly underfunded. The report mentions other hindrances to health care provision, such as over-reliance on hospitals and under-use of primary or community care, poor integration of services, lack of systematic performance assessment and evaluation, frequent changes in leadership (EC, 2019). Unfortunately, current debates on the public agenda are stirring towards the privatisation of the health system, which will further increase socioeconomic inequalities.

Several reforms in mental health care provision have been initiated in early 2000, with the most recent changes undertaken in 2014. The National Strategy (2014-2020) for Health included also the improvement of mental health of the population (Ministry of Health[6]). Nonetheless, as the Romanian Association of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy notes in its memorandum towards the minister of health for a reform in the system of psychiatric care (2020), mental health has not been properly integrated in the national health strategy[7]. Moreover, the Association proposed the introduction of education on mental health in the undergraduate school system and in universities.

Furthermore, the health strategy at the moment has no intersectional perspective (an issue signalled by the Czech paper). Moreover, there is a significant lack of

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[6] http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/173679
[7] https://e-psihiatrie.ro/memoriu-privind-implementarea-reformarii-sistemului-de-asistenta-psihiatrica-din-romania/

involvement of representatives of patients in the consultations and decision-making processes. Finally, as the Czech paper notes, the current strategy has no gender mainstreaming elements included with regards to mental health.

With regards to the good practices exemplified by the Swedish papers, an agency which monitors digital media practices of young people and raises awareness about gendered norms and gendered power structures in various environments, such as school and digital media, and how these affect young girls and boys, their general level of experienced stress and mental well-being would be extremely beneficial also in Romania.

2.2 What of the described practices could work in Romania?

Since one of the most pressing issues is the centralisation of the Romanian health system, the Czech proposal of decentralising patient care by forming a network of Centres of Mental Health is one strategy that could work in Romania. Furthermore, as the EU Commission report states, relying solely on hospitals for providing health care and mental health care is not efficient. Therefore, following the Czech strategy of involving more community care, communities, families and recipients of the care in the planning and development of mental health policies should be beneficial also for Romania.

Furthermore, there is already a network of Romanian NGOs doing important work in the direction of gender equality and ending all forms of gender discrimination and violence. Just like in the case of the Czech civil society, there are significant initiatives from the civil society which target gender inequalities, including aspects related to mental health and/ or the use of digital technologies by young people (some of these good practices are listed in the Annex 2). There is also a recognised need at the level of the Ministry of Health to develop more community care. Therefore, the Czech example of instituting an advisory board on mental health, which, in addition to practitioners in the field, includes also NGOs as well as patient organisations, representatives from administration, and informal caregivers would constitute a good model to follow.

Finally, the Swedish example of constituting a Media Council with the mission of conducting systematic research on digital media use by young people, with a gender-sensitive perspective in mind would allow Romanian policy makers to follow trends over time. Similarly, the example of The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden's systematic mapping of pornography consumption and mental health among young people could also be implemented in Romania.

As a general conclusion, putting forward proposals and initiatives which stem from an intersectional approach to mental health (including the gender dimension) is an important next step for promoting a more inclusive society.

2.3 What would be difficult to implement and why?

The Czech example mentions the patients' and caregivers' involvement and participation in government institutions to counter-balance the limited power in

decision-making processes and lack of representation in government. In Romania, two issues are recurrent: the severe underfunding of the health system and lack of continuity and stability in governance. These two hindrances could jeopardize any initiative for a sustainable inclusion of gender perspectives in mental health reforms.

The Swedish example of Comprehensive Sex and Relationship Education is one of the urgent needs of the Romanian school system. However, CSRE would be hard to implement in Romania, due to the opposition of conservative and religious factions – that once again have succeeded in blocking another legislative initiative (2021) aiming to introduce sex education in schools.

Another example of good practice difficult to implement in Romania is the Swedish Youth Policy Communication and its Action Plan. Romania has still a long road ahead in terms of decentralising decision-making processes, of centering the voices of young people in matters important/ relevant to them and actually taking into account multiple stakeholders.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

This last section presents some of the measures that could be implemented in Romania in order to:

- address potential negative effects of extensive digital and social media consumption on girls' and boys' mental health in a gender-sensitive way

  - A systematic assessment of digital media use by young people, with an interest in gender-sensitive dimensions (including intersections of other identities and capabilities), which take into account gendered forms of interpersonal violence.

  - A continuous monitoring of gender stereotypes in media and digital media and implementation of media education in school curricula which is critical of gender stereotypes and discrimination on criteria of gender and sexuality.

- ensure the integration of a gender equality perspective in (mental) health policies

  - A thorough assessment of mental health state of the population, with particular attention to the most vulnerable groups – girls, women and those from precarious socioeconomic backgrounds – which have been most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

  - A special attention of increased signs of violence, both in-person and via electronic means of communication – with attention to already at-risk groups of young people (e.g. pre-existing psychological and social difficulties).

  - A decentralised approach to policy implementation and to decision-making processes, which center the voices of young people in matters important/ relevant to them and which take into account multiple stakeholders, especially patient and caregivers organisations.

- ° A better collaboration between Gender Equality government bodies and those of the Ministry of Health, in particular in topics related to mental health and a) vulnerable groups of young people and marginalised identities b) gender-based violence offline and online c) sexual health and education.

- ° Proposing and adopting policies which center an intersectional approach to mental health (including the gender dimension), important for promoting a more inclusive society.

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Annex 1: Young people's digital media use – problematic aspects

Excessive internet use

The EU Kids Online report states that between 2 and 8% of children (including Romania) experience three or four excessive internet use criteria (e.g. going without eating or sleeping because of the internet; feeling bothered they cannot be on the internet). Romania is the country with the most marked gender differences, with more boys experiencing addictive symptoms (Smahel et al., 2020: 79). It should be noted that, according to the report, the vast majority of children 12 to 16 years old do not experience any of the criteria of excessive internet use. Nonetheless, as the Swedish paper notes, it is important to monitor digital media use which becomes "excessive" and is associated with negative outcomes in terms of physical, mental and emotional health for young people, as well as negative consequences for their social and family lives, as well as academic performance. Furthermore, it is important to include more factors or "health determinants", as per Dahlgren and Whitehead's model (2021), which might account for why some young people experience more negative consequences, whereas other thrive, are unaffected or develop resilience in coping with different situations encountered online. Finally, in line with the Swedish policy paper (Lindbom, 2021), all research should take into account a gender-sensitive perspective (e.g. looking at different groups of young people, overcoming the gender binary and including non-binary youth in research, remaining curious about digital practices which are still gendered, looking at different outcomes for different genders, including neurodivergent and youth with special needs in research).

Pornography

As long as the issue of pornography consumption is framed in strong terms such as 'influence', the basic confusion between correlation and causality will persist in terms of a "simplistic cause-and-effect logic: it is porn that makes children do or think bad things." (Buckingham & Chronaki, 2013). However, The Sexualisation Report (Attwood et al., 2013) shows that studies linking pornography consumption to negative effects, such as rape acceptance and negative views about girls and women are spurious and inconsistent. Furthermore, numerous such studies have an inherent negative bias towards sexuality, or towards having an interest in sex or not being sure about one's preferences or sexuality (Attwood et al., 2013).

In the EU Kids Online survey in 19 countries (Smahel et al., 2020), 33% of children in all countries have seen sexual content in the past year (varying from 21% in France to 50% in Serbia). In all countries, boys report more seeing sexual content, Romania being one of the countries with a higher gender difference (Smahel el al., 2020: 89). Furthermore, the report shows that a substantial number of adolescents have positive feelings about these experiences. Similarly, other research suggests that young people seek out sexual material for a variety of reasons: such as curiosity, entertainment, facilitating masturbation, relieving boredom, increasing sexual

knowledge, skills and confidence, to be transgressive for the 'yuck' factor, and to develop opinions and capabilities (Attwood et al., 2013; Bale, 2011; 2012; Tsaliki, 2011). Nonetheless, some children, mostly younger and girls, do not seek out sexual content, are unwillingly exposed to it and experience negative feelings as a result (Smahel et al., 2020: 93).

Sexting

With regards to sexting, an average of 22% of all European young people 12 to 16 years old report receiving sexual messages in the past year. 6% report sending or posting sexts themselves while 4% asked others for sexual information. 13% were asked for sexual information about themselves when they did not want to answer such requests (Barbovschi et al., 2021). The same report shows that young people who engage in active sexting (where they initiate communication, i.e. sending, requesting, or posting sexts online where other people can see them) live in less positive home and school environments. They also tend to find online spaces to be safer venues for connecting with others and expressing themselves (including through sexual communication). Moreover, boys are more likely than girls to send, post, and request sexual messages in the countries included in our survey, including in Romania. At the same time, girls of all ages tend to be significantly more upset about receiving sexual messages than boys. However, other factors, such as relationship context (i.e. sexting within an established relationship versus sexting across multiple contexts online) are linked to undesirable outcomes such as sexual cyber-bullying and non-consensual dissemination of nudes (Nygård & Kvalem, 2021).

Finally, with regards to receiving unwanted requests for sexual messages, they tend to be received by girls who are older and display a preference for online communication. They are also more likely to experience cyber-victimisation, report more sensation-seeking, feel less safe in their homes and online, and have more emotional difficulties. The findings suggest that receiving unwanted sexual messages is not an isolated problem and may be associated with an increased risk of exposure to other forms of victimization (Barbovschi et al., 2021), a phenomenon known as poly-victimisation (Finkelhor et al., 2007). What is urgently needed is relevant comprehensive sexual education, to allow young people to develop skills including critical and informed responses to sexual digital communication and content. We recommend steering away from sexting education that is grounded in fear, but to adopt a positive vision and rhetoric about young people's sexual practices. A CSRE curricula should include issues of sexuality, privacy and consent, as well as critical evaluation of sexual content disseminated through digital media.

Cyber-aggression

According to the EU Kids Online research, the overall prevalence of "traditional" bullying (face to face) is in decline; however, the cyber-aggression seems to be on

the rise (compared to 2010 data). Other data gathered in Romania by NGOs (e.g. Save the Children) also suggests that cyber-violence is increasing[8].
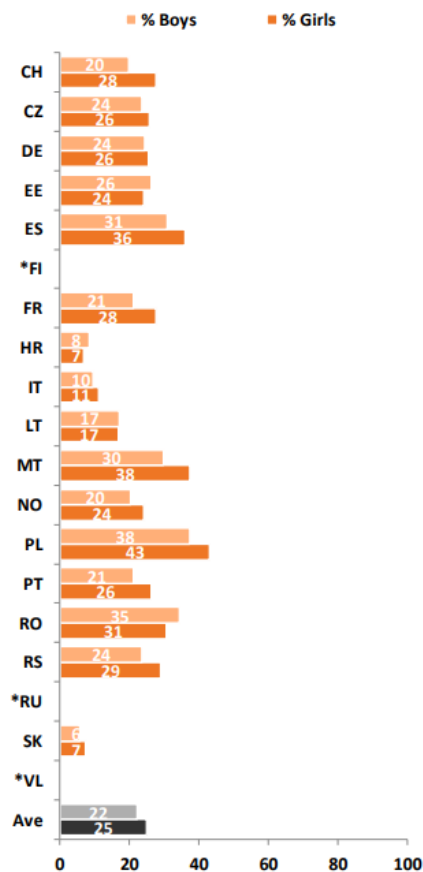
Figure 39: Aggression and victimisation in the past year (on- or offline), by country
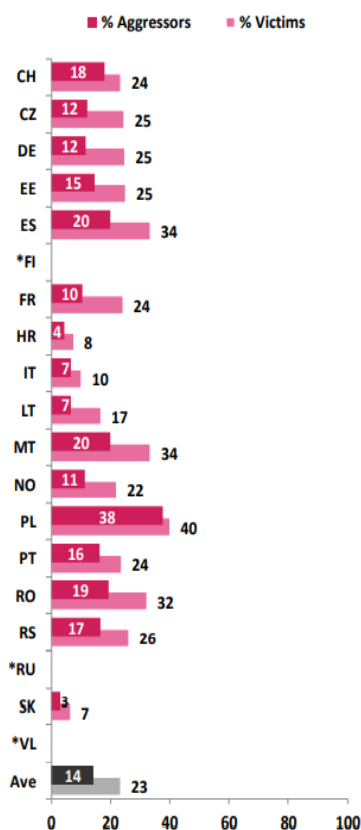
Figure 40: Victimisation in the past year (on- or offline), by gender

*FI/RU/VL: Full age range not available.

QF20 In the PAST YEAR, has anyone EVER treated you in such a hurtful or nasty way? And QF28 In the PAST YEAR, have you EVER TREATED someone else in a hurtful or nasty way? Percentage of children who answered *yes*.

*FI/RU/VL: Full age range not available.

QF20 In the PAST YEAR, has anyone EVER treated you in such a hurtful or nasty way? Percentage of children who answered *yes*.

Source: EU Kids Online 2020 report, Smahel et al. (2021)

Romanian children score above the European average for both victimization and aggression., while Czech Republic score slightly above average only for victimization.

Finally, Romanian boys score slightly higher for victimization than girls, although in most countries the reverse is true (girls reporting more victimisation). However, the gender differences are not particularly marked.

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8   https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/ce-facem/sanatate/educatie-pentru-sanatate

Negative user-generated content (NUGC)

The only content involving harm per se which the EU Kids Online research asked about was the negative user-generated content (NUGC), which included seeing websites or discussions where people discuss: ways of committing suicide, ways of physically harming themselves, ways to be very thin, hate messages, their experiences of taking drugs and gory or violent images. Romanian adolescents (12-16) report above average scores for all items, with the exception of self-harm content (below average) and ways of being very thin (average). Czech Republic also reports some of the highest scores for all 6 items. The report also notes that in general, exposure to different types of harmful content is interrelated – if children report they see some content, it is more likely that they also see other types of harmful content (Smahel et al., 2020: 62).

Table 7: Harmful content: children (aged 12-16) who answered at least monthly, by country

	Ways of physically harming or hurting themselves	Ways of committing suicide	Ways to be very thin	Hate messages that attack certain groups or individuals	Their experiences of taking drugs	Gory or violent images
CH	9	5	8	13	14	10
CZ	18	10	17	25	15	17
DE	2	2	3	4	3	6
EE	7	5	10	14	7	5
ES	8	7	6	17	13	14
*FI	18	8	10	17	10	11
FR	7	4	9	8	6	7
HR	9	6	9	11	7	11
IT	4	4	6	10	7	12
*LT	-	-	-	-	-	-
MT	10	12	12	18	12	15
NO	8	5	12	16	8	9
PL	19	19	32	48	21	28
PT	10	9	12	17	13	15
RO	8	12	12	18	13	18
RS	18	11	17	24	16	23
*RU	16	8	25	24	11	17
SK	2	2	5	8	4	6
*VL	11	8	9	20	16	16
Ave	10	8	12	17	11	13

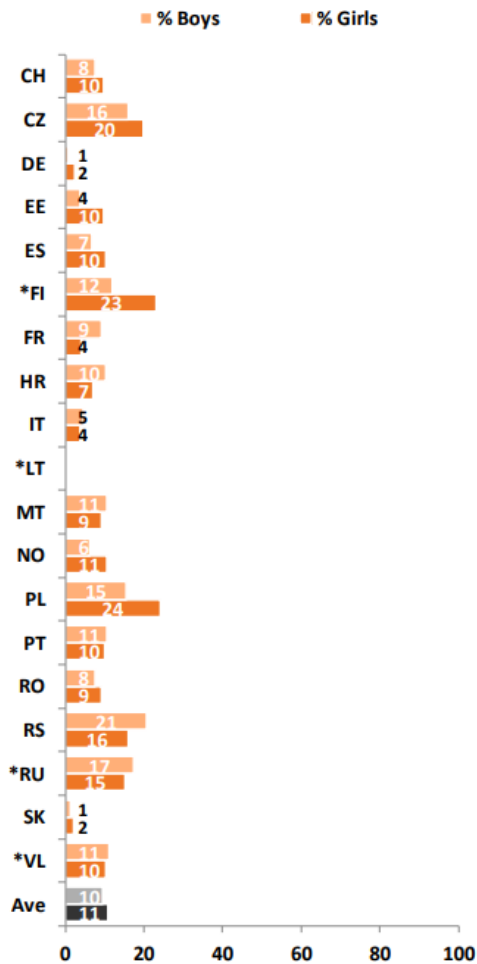*FI/RU/VL: Data not weighted. LT: Full age range not available.

QF50 In the PAST YEAR, have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things? Percentage of children who answered *at least every month, at least every week,* or *daily or almost daily.*

Base: All children aged 12-16 who use the internet.

Source: EU Kids Online 2020 report, Smahel et al. (2021)

In most countries, the gender differences are not strongly marked, only in Estonia, Poland and Finland, girls tend to see more content about self-harm than boys (with more than 5 percentage points difference). Only in Serbia boys tend to see this type of content more than girls.

Figure 52: Harmful content: Ways of physically harming themselves, by gender

■ % Boys   ■ % Girls

Country	Boys	Girls
CH	8	10
CZ	16	20
DE	1	2
EE	4	10
ES	7	10
*FI	12	23
FR	9	4
HR	10	7
IT	5	4
*LT		
MT	11	9
NO	6	11
PL	15	24
PT	11	10
RO	8	9
RS	21	16
*RU	17	15
SK	1	2
*VL	11	10
Ave	10	11

*FI/RU/VL: Data not weighted. LT: Full age range not available.

QF50a In the PAST YEAR, have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things? Ways of physically harming or hurting themselves. Percentage of children who answered *at least every month, at least every week,* or *daily or almost daily.*

Base: All children aged 12-16 who use the internet.

Source: EU Kids Online 2020 report, Smahel et al. (2021)

Annex 2: Good practices in relation to mental health and gender mainstreaming in Romania

Government

Ministry of Health - Project no. 7, "Mental health of children and adolescents".

The past two years have signalled that children and adolescents are at risk of developing mental health issues in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. In the beginning of 2021, the Ministry of Health has initiated a campaign "Mental Health – Solidarity in Mental Health. There is no health without mental health" (January, 20201), with target populations children and adolescents. Another project of the Ministry of Health, "Support for developing community services of mental health for children and adolescents" is a positive step in strengthening community capacity for detecting and addressing early signs of depressive symptoms, anxiety and ADHD in children – the project aims to raise awareness and capabilities of community members, parents, professionals in primary medical care, education and social protection, and to improve access to health care[9].

ANES - Agenția Națională pentru Egalitatea de Șanse între Femei și Bărbați (National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men)

ANES was founded in 2016 under the umbrella of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly, with the mission of promoting equal opportunities and treatment of women and men, and combatting domestic violence and violence against women, with the role of proposing normative acts, ensuring the enforcement of normative acts and legislation and implementing EU funded programmes. ANES collaborates with NGOs (e.g. FILIA Center) in EU-funded projects in its area of activity and expertise. The agency collaborates with regional General Directions of Social Assistance and Protection of the Child (DGASPC) in matters concerning the protection of minors.

NGOs

Coaliția pentru Egalitate de Gen (Coalition for Gender Equality)

The coalition, founded in 2014, gathers 11 Romanian NGOs, with the mission of developing and building NGOs capacity (active in the field of gender equality) to promote and integrate gender equality principles in all domains of private and public life. Among its lines of activity, the Coalition fights for introducing gender equality topics in schools curricula, as well as comprehensive sex education in schools (which addresses also topics like consent, sexual violence and abuse)[10].

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[9]   http://www.ro-sanatate.ms.ro/index.php/ro/proiect-nr-7-sanatate-mintala-copii-si-adolescenti
[10] https://ongen.ro/despre-noi/

One of the projects of the Coalitions is EGALIS: EGALITATE DE GEN PRIN SCHIMBARE SOCIALĂ ȘI EDUCAȚIE (EGALIS - GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH SOCIAL CHANGE AND EDUCATION), which aims to promote feminist education in schools, in order to deconstruct stereotypes related to feminism among young people and teachers alike. The project will elaborate numerous educational materials which could further be used in schools and public institutions working in educations. The project is funded through the Active Citizens Fund – Romania, financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the SEE Grants 2014-2021[11].

eMerge: Gen in pop culture - by MediaWise Society

eMerge is an Erasmus+ project, between 2020-2023 in Belgium, Italy, Greece and Romania. It offers to teachers media competences in order to deconstruct, together with pupils, gender stereotypical representations which are deeply embedded in media practices and in pop culture. The initiative proposes a methodological guide on education and media culture and a media education guide for improving gender equality in schools. These guides are flexible and adapted for teachers, in order to help them identify the practices of media consumptions of their pupils. Furthermore, the project improves media competences of teachers about gender representations in pop culture and familiarises them with media education strategies. Finally, the initiative raises awareness among adolescents 12 to 18 years old on gender representations in media and their effects on citizenship and life, together with the entire class and school community[12].

Salvati Copiii Romania (Save the Children Romania)

Since 2008, Save the Children – the coordinator of the InSafe node in Romania - is coordinating projects related to children's safety online. In addition to annual quantitative research investigating patterns of digital media use, the NGO coordinated awareness campaigns, provides educational materials and workshops, runs a counselling line for young people, has a direct report line for online abuse. More than 506,000 children, as well as 130,000 parents and teachers have benefited form educational activities, 7,400 children have received direct counselling and over 9,100 reports have been made through the dedicated line[13].

Another project run by Save the Children entitled "Education for Health" advocates for a healthy lifestyle for children and adolescents since 1998. Nowadays, the project includes modules related to sex education and violence prevention and developing healthy relationships (aspects related to emotional health)[14].

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[11] https://www.feminism-romania.ro/?fbclid=IwAR2VbqmiDmX6QI0w6nepo2sOeiRNLD1tGGPQAr BIWMywIQ5Voi9f-cukR6c
[12] https://mediawise.ro/actiune/emerge-gen-in-cultura-pop/
[13] https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/ce-facem/protectie/siguranta-pe-internet
[14] https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/ce-facem/sanatate/educatie-pentru-sanatate

Sexul vs Barza (Sex vs the Stork)

The first sex education video platform in Romania, aimed at adolescents, which touches subjects related to sexual education, sexual violence (including violence in schools), relationships and dynamics, pornography and media representations of gender and sexuality, revenge porn and image-based sexual abuse, LGBTQIA+ issues[15].

LGBTQIA+ organisations

Pride Romania[16], MozaiQ[17] and Accept are some of the most prominent NGOs active in the field of LGBTQIA+ rights in Romania which promote human rights, respect for diversity, protection of vulnerable groups, and fights against discrimination in Romanian civil society. Among the activities, the NGOs organize annual Pride parades in Bucharest and Cluj, film festivals and other events for the community. In addition, Accept also offers free psychological counselling to members of the community and their families.

About education – the grassroot

About education is an initiative of one individual, motivated to collaborate with schools, NGOs, parents, in order to foster climates of wellbeing in schools, of friendliness and creativity. Anca is interested in transforming traditional schools in innovative schools. All the projects involve aspects related to mental health for teachers and pupils[18].

The project "In a Relationship" of the Friends for Friends Foundation.

In a Relationship (2016-2018) is a project which tackles one of the most sensitive topics in the lives of adolescents - that of the first romantic relationship - what makes them work and what destroys them. The project involved adolescents directly - from methodology to graphic design and communication. The mission of the project was to raise awareness about the violence inside adolescent couples, which sets the seeds for domestic violence later in life. The project tackled a wide range of violence, including physical, emotional, psychological, sexual and cyber- abuse. The national research included 1,500 adolescents, 10 teenage researchers, an illustration workshop and an exhibition based on them, several public interventions and interactive workshops with psychologists and trainers supporting groups of adolescents in situations of relational abuse.

Mad Pride Romania

Started 2019, Mad Pride Romania is an initiative inspired by the mass movement Mad Pride, of the users of mental health services, former users, and the aligned, which advocates that individuals with mental illness should be proud of their 'mad' identity. The movement organises an annual festival and has an active mental health support

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15 http://www.sexulvsbarza.ro/#violenta-sexuala
16 https://prideromania.ro/
17 https://www.mozaiqlgbt.ro/
18 https://ancatirca.blogspot.com/p/starea-de-bine-in-scoala.html

group on Facebook. Their manifesto requests, among others: the change of language in media representations of life situations and portrayals of people dealing with mental suffering; free therapy for uninsured and state subsidised therapy for those with medical insurance; access to therapy services for those living in rural areas and small towns; the stop of all forceful, involuntary commitments to psychiatric facilities; the stop of inhumane treatment in psychiatric facilities, including restraining and forceful medication; proper training of medical personnel with regards to diagnostics and over-medication; full transparency with regards of side effects of medication; the respect of the Convention of the rights of persons with disabilities (sanctioned by Romania in 2008); full legislation reform with regards to discrimination on the basis of mental health; public debates on socioeconomic and traumatic causes of mental health.

Mental Health for Romania

MHR is an NGOs founded with the aim of raising awareness related to mental health among young people in Romania. Among the services offered – free or discounted psychological counselling and psychotherapy, a call centre and an extended list of mental health professionals throughout the country. The project offers workshops on mental and emotional health in schools[19].

Centrul FILIA (2021). The Experiences of Women during the pandemic. The Status-Quo and recommendations for gender-sensitive post-crisis measures.

The project "Coronavirus" of the FILIA Center in partnership with National Agency for Equality of Chances between Women and Men (ANES) gathered survey data from 443 women 18 to 65+ affected by the pandemic. The report documents backlashes in several crucial areas related to women's equality: access to information, impact on work and living resources, domestic labour and care, access to health services, and domestic violence (Alexandru et al., 2021). The project also gathered over 70 confessions from girls and women in Romania documenting in their own words how the pandemic affected their mental health.

"The pandemic drained all my opportunities and filled that emptiness with an ocean of anxiety. I no longer feel I am the driver of my own destiny. All I have left is the school… online (a new term in the Romanian system in 2020). I feel like we are seen just as robots whose sole preoccupation should be the homework given by a teacher (by the way, we have 14 subjects), which now is much more consistent because they all think we have more time. Their assumption is we have no life beyond school, that we have no time constraints or pressures from our parents. The future is a blur." (Alice, high school student, 17 years old) https://coronavirus.centrulfilia.ro/

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[19]   https://mentalhealthforromania.org/ro/home