



European Guidance on Sexual Assault Interventions

Key actions to improve the standards
of policy and practice across Europe



This project has received financial support from the European Union Directorate-General Justice DAPHNE III Programme 2007-2013: Combating violence towards children, adolescents and women (Just/2010/DAP3/AG/1395)



This publication has been produced with financial support from the European Union DAPHNE III Programme 2007-2013.

Daphne III is managed by the European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and aims to contribute to the protection of children, young people and women against all forms of violence and attain a high level of health protection, well-being and social cohesion. Its specific objective is to contribute to the prevention of, and the fight against all forms of violence occurring in the public or the private domain, including sexual exploitation and trafficking of human beings. It aims to take preventive measures and provide support and protection for victims and groups at risk.

For more information see:

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants/programmes/daphne/index_en.htm

The information contained herein does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission. Responsibility for this publication lies with the author. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.

Published by the Comparing Sexual Assault Interventions (COSAI) project, March 2013.

Reproduction is authorised, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged.

This document is also available online at www.cosai.eu

Comparing Sexual Assault Interventions (COSAI) project partners:

East European Institute for Reproductive Health (Romania)
Educational Institute for Child Protection (Czech Republic)
Latvian Association of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians (Latvia)
Liverpool John Moores University (UK)
Victim Support (Malta)

Associate project partners:

Department of Health (England)
European Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO-EURO)

This project is coordinated by

National Heart Forum/ Health Action Partnership International (HAPI)
www.hapi.org.uk



This project has received financial support from the European Union Directorate-General Justice DAPHNE III Programme 2007-2013: Combating violence towards children, adolescents and women (Just/2010/DAP3/AG/1395)

PARTNERS & ASSOCIATE PARTNERS





About this Guidance document

Purpose

The European Guidance on Sexual Assault Interventions has been produced as part of the Comparing Sexual Assault Interventions (COSAI) project, which aimed to improve the effectiveness, appropriateness and humanity of sexual assault interventions for women aged 16 and over across Europe.

The purpose of the document is to provide the European Commission with recommendations for key actions which can contribute to improving the standards of sexual assault services in Member States and therefore decrease the social, mental and health harm caused to the victims of sexual assault.

Context

Sexual assault is prevalent across European countries with estimates ranging between 6.8% and 33.2%¹. These estimates, however, likely underestimate the real numbers as sexual assault is one of the most underreported crimes and some forms of sexual violence are not perceived by victims or perpetrators as an offence. In particular, because perpetrators are generally known to the victim and are likely to be a partner or ex-partner, sexual assaults often occur in private and injuries are uncommon, which is contrary to myths around rape involving a stranger and resulting in injury.

The effects of sexual assault extend beyond the short and long term impacts on victims' physical and mental wellbeing. Sexual assault has implications for the families, friends and significant others, and also for society as a whole. Financial costs are estimated over 91000 Euro for a single rape and can reach 9.5 billion Euro in a year².

Definition of Sexual Violence

COSAI uses the WHO's definition of sexual violence as: any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object.

The expressions sexual assault, rape, sexual abuse and sexual violence are often used interchangeably. This document uses the term sexual assault to describe all forms of sexual violence including rape.

Source:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>

COSAI has found the way European countries deal with sexual assault varies significantly. Some countries have made considerable progress in reviewing the legal definitions of sexual violence and rape to ensure they are protective of victims, in providing comprehensive and victim-focused care, and in contending myths, prejudices and public perceptions which blame victims. In contrast, there are other countries with little development in terms of understanding all the dimensions of sexual violence, not only in terms of differentiating forms of violence, but also how to adequately address the legal, medical and practical needs of victims.

The work of COSAI looked at sexual violence research, policy and practice at international, national and local levels across Europe in order to identify existing models of interventions, make recommendations on evidence informed service provision and provide resources to build capacity of policy makers and practitioners to implement best and appropriate practice.

¹ COSAI (2012) Models of intervention for women who have been sexually assaulted in Europe: A review of the literature. www.cosai.eu

² These figures are based on 2003-2004 data from England and Wales. They can be found in Department of Health, Home Office & Association of Chief Police Officers, 2009. A Resource for Developing Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs).



The European Commission can play a central role in fostering change and promoting good practice among Member States in terms of more effective, appropriate and humane sexual assault services for women. This in turn will contribute to reducing the social, mental and health harm caused to the victims of sexual assault.

Key actions to improve the standards of sexual assault interventions across Europe

The following points summarise the key actions recommended at the European level to support Member States to design and implement sexual assault interventions. These actions result from the findings of the COSAI project.

1. Ensure sexual violence is given a high priority on Member States' agendas

- Sexual assault does not exist in isolation, but within a larger societal problem of violence against women. Some national action plans and protocols and legal, health and welfare service providers often include sexual assault service provision and crisis intervention within this larger framework of violence against women and children. Sexual violence requires specialised services to address the multiple dimensions of care from medical, psycho-social and legal sectors, which differ to those of other forms of violence. For instance, to collect forensic evidence or deal with risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Therefore, specific focus should be placed on this form of violence to guarantee women receive the care they need for their physical and mental health recovery, to pursue any legal proceeding and be able to lead a normal life.
- Building on the good practice of European institutions in addressing domestic violence within the overall context of gender based violence (e.g. through commitments to sign the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence), efforts should be invested specifically for sexual violence. Through a Convention or Directive, Member States recognise the distinctive nature and response to sexual violence.



- Sexual assault is a social, public health and economic problem which requires government action. Whilst most European countries have strategies to address sexual violence, either alone or as part of other violence strategies, there are some with none in place. Governments need to take the lead in addressing sexual assault by acting in a convening role to bring together key stakeholders from each sector, including Non-governmental Organisations, which have been key drivers of change in different countries. A multisectoral and collaborative approach to sexual assault will ensure a comprehensive package of care is provided to women to meet their short, medium and long term needs.

2. Establish of a European Working Group on Sexual Violence

- A European Working Group on Sexual Violence can make the links between the European Commission and the Member States.
- The Working Group could share good practice among the Member States and advise on the development of standards on sexual violence interventions, making further recommendations and monitoring progress.
- COSAI has identified models of good practice and interventions for sexual assault, but this is an area of research and practice which lacks more evidence and examples; in particular, around addressing the needs of specific populations groups (e.g. refugees or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) and resource implications of different service designs. The Working Group could promote joint collaboration between the Member States. In particular, around identifying more examples of good practice and models of service provision which are appropriate to the resources available in different countries and settings.
- The membership of the Working Group should involve geographical spread from Member States. Individual members should include high level government officials to make decisions and influence policy, as well as practitioners to bring expert knowledge from the ground. The Working group would be led by a senior position

from the European Commission who would also provide secretarial functions.

3. Promote the adoption of the same legal definition of sexual violence across Member States

- Member State's legal definitions vary between traditional rape laws based on violence and coercion as the basis of the offence, and modern laws which focus on consent and cover a wider range of forms of sexual violence.
- Sexual assault law which has violence and coercion as the defining factor often suggests a woman's testimony of being assaulted can only be trusted if there was resistance on her part and she could show injuries. Instead, sexual violence legislation should be based on the victim's lack of consent, which implies that the woman has been violated of her rights. Consent-based laws are included in the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

4. Disseminate standard guidelines and protocols to respond to sexual violence and share with Member States

- European Member States are at different stages of progress in terms of understanding and responding to sexual assault. This variation has significant impact on whether women report crime and creates inequalities in terms of women's short, medium and long term recovery. The Working Group should play a central role in sharing knowledge and transferring learning between Member States.
- Evidence from COSAI can inform minimum standards for the forensic, medical, criminal justice and psycho-social sectors involved in responding to sexual assault. In addition to these individual recommendations, one critical responsibility of all sectors involved is to acknowledge all dimensions of the care and support required, and try to coordinate their efforts to ensure women receive the care and support they need, instead of working in silos. Implementation and adherence to the standards



should be monitored and evaluated by a regulating body in each Member State.

- The guidelines and protocols should address the needs of vulnerable groups, including adolescents, young women, those with disabilities, homeless, sex workers, women on low incomes, women who were previously victims of sexual abuse or assaults, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people.

5. Produce education and awareness-raising campaigns to disseminate in Member States

- General public education and awareness-raising campaigns are needed against prevailing rape myths, prejudices and biased attitudes towards victims, as these often serve to protect offenders and castigate victims. In addition, others should address what constitutes sexual offenses, such as sexual violence, sexual assault, rape, intimate partner violence, sexual traffic, and what the effects are on victims.
- Specific campaigns need to target service providers to prevent secondary victimisation or victim-blaming attitudes, which are often reflected either in their behaviour or by neglecting to care for victims.
- Responsibility to commission and oversee the production of these campaigns should be with the Working Group.

6. Promote the use of the COSAI tools to assess service provision and train professionals on sexual assault

- One of the key recommendations identified from the COSAI research was the need for more mechanisms to evaluate sexual assault interventions. The **COSAI Benchmark & Evaluation Tool** was developed to assess current practice against recommended aspects of service provision. It is an instrument of self-reflection which seeks to assist services, or those commissioning them, to assess the way they work and make any changes according to the standards recommended, which ensure comprehensive care and support, and more positive experiences for women who access sexual assault services.
- International evidence shows sexual assault specialisation helps women to access respectful and sensitive services, guarantees confidentiality and safety, and the ability to understand and determine a course of action for addressing all their care and support needs. This is achieved through staff training in dealing with sexual violence. The **COSAI Training Programme on Multisectoral Sexual Assault Interventions for Women** contributes to this in two ways. On the one hand, the training manual is based on a *Training of Trainers* model so as to build the capacity of professionals conducting the training and allow for further trainings. On the other hand, the training programme's content promotes best and appropriate practice by increasing knowledge about sexual violence and improving service design and provision based on the multisectoral approach needed to ensure the best possible outcomes for victims.



The European Guidance on Sexual Assault Interventions summarises the key actions for the European Commission to foster change and promote good practice in the provision of sexual assault interventions for women. More information, including findings from the evidence and recommendations at both country and individual service provider levels are available in the COSAI website: www.cosai.eu.

COSAI Resources on Sexual Assault Interventions

Literature Review on models of intervention for sexual assault and existing evidence of service effectiveness.

Benchmark & Evaluation Tool with standards of good practice to assess the effectiveness, appropriateness and humanity of interventions for victims of sexual assault.

Policy briefing summarising the evidence and presenting a series of recommendations that build on identified good practice and address common challenges in European countries.

Training Programme aimed at promoting best and appropriate practice for a multisectoral audience of practitioners and service providers.

Country Case Studies and Recommendations for service providers to better meet the needs of victims in the COSAI partner countries: **Czech Republic, Latvia, Malta, Romania and United Kingdom**

Mapping survey with current policy and programming of services for sexual assault in European countries.

Report of interviews with service providers in 7 European countries on sexual assault service availability, effectiveness and appropriateness.

