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Articles

The Comparative Analysis of Sexual Violence and Harassment at the Piloting Universities of Cyprus and Lithuania

Seksualinio smurto ir priekabiavimo lyginamoji analizė bandomuosiuose Kipro ir Lietuvos universitetuose

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Abstract

The sociocultural contexts of higher education institutions form the background for gender-based violence in professional structures and environment of academia. The article presents a comparative analysis of sexual violence and the reasons for its (non-)disclosure at the piloting universities in Lithuania and Cyprus. The findings of focus group interviews conducted within the framework of the *Ending Sexual Harassment and Violence in Third Level Education (ESHTE)* project, co-funded by the European Union, have been summarized in the present research. The focus group participants from each partner university involved university teachers, administrative staff, counselors and university students. The research was conducted during a 3-month period between 2017 and 2018. The main aim was to investigate university staffs' and students' experiences in the disclosures of the cases of sexual violence and harassment (SVH) in university environment and campus, as well as their awareness of existing procedures and policies in handling the cases of SVH. The results of this study discovered both universities' academic and administrative staff and students' personal experiences, attitudes and beliefs of SVH, as well as any of their suggestions towards the improvement of disclosures of SVH are discussed in the article.

Keywords: sexual violence and harassment (SVH), academic and administrative staff, students, Cyprus, Lithuania.

Summary

Aukštųjų mokyklų sociokultūriniai kontekstai sukuria prielaidas smurtui dėl lyties ir akademinėje aplinkoje. Straipsnyje pateikiama lyginamoji seksualinio smurto paplitimo, saugumo jausmo ir jo (ne)sukūrimo priežasčių Lietuvos (Šiaulių universiteto atvejis) ir Kipro (Nikosijos universiteto atvejis) aukštojo mokslo sistemoje analizė. Situacijos analizė yra paremta fokus grupės interviu, kuris buvo atliktas įgyvendinant Europos Sąjungos finansuojamą projektą „Seksualinio priekabiavimo ir smurto trečiojo lygio švietimo institucijose mažinimas“ (ESHTE), rezultatais.
Tyrime dalyvavo abiejų aukščiau minėtų universitetų tikslinės grupės dalyviai: universiteto darbuotojai, įskaitant dėstytojus ir vyresniuosius administracijos darbuotojus, bei universiteto studentus. Tyrimas truko 3 mėnesius nuo 2017 m. iki 2018 m. Pagrindinis tyrimo tikslas – ištirti universiteto personalo ir studentų patirtį atskleidžiant seksualinio smurto ir priekabiavimo (SSP) atvejus universiteto studijų aplinkoje ir universiteto miestelyje, taip pat jų turimas žinias apie esamas procedūras ir politiką SSP atvejais. Straipsnyje aptariama asmeninė dalyvių patirtis, požiūris ir įsitikinimai apie SSP, taip pat siūlymai, kaip mažinti ir keisti SSP situaciją aukštojo mokslo institucijose.
Kalbant apie smurtą dėl lyties, vertėtų atkreipti dėmesį į tai, kad jis vyksta visoje Europos Sąjungoje (ES) ir yra žmogaus teisių pažeidimas. Tai yra moterų ir vyrų nelygybės priežastis ir kartu jos pasekmė. Europos universitetuose ir mokslinių tyrimų įstaigose gausu pranešimų tiek moterų, tiek ir vyrų, patyrusių seksualinį priekabiavimą, kas, savo ruožtu, daro neigiamą poveikį jų

asmeninei gerovei ir mokslinei karjerai. Kita vertus, smurtas dėl lyties, įskaitant seksualinį priekabiavimą, Europos universitetuose ir mokslinių tyrimų institutuose dažnai yra nepakankamai įvertinamas, be to labai trūksta ir žinių šiuo klausimu. Keletas kitų autorių atliktų tyrimų parodė, kad nepalankiomis darbo sąlygomis dirbančioms moterims (pvz., doktorantėms) ar mainų programų studentams ypač gresia smurtas dėl lyties ir seksualinis priekabiavimas. Todėl straipsnyje analizuojamu tyrimu buvo siekiama ištirti ir palyginti įvairias seksualinio priekabiavimo formas aukštosiose mokyklose, kiek su tuo susiduria ir kiek tai patiria tiek darbuotojai, tiek studentai Kipre ir Lietuvoje. Antrasis tyrimo tikslas buvo nustatyti universitetų, kurie sėkmingai įgyvendina įvairias šios srities programas, veiksmus ir kolektyvinius institucinius mechanizmus, kurie veiksmingai prisideda prie smurto dėl lyties mažinimo universitetuose. Taigi, tyrimu siekta geriau suprasti smurto dėl lyties universitetuose situaciją, padidinti personalo ir studentų gebėjimą atpažinti ir kreiptis dėl smurto dėl lyties bei sumažinti smurto dėl lyties raišką akademinėje aplinkoje.

Tyrimui atlikti buvo naudojamas mišrusis kokybinių tyrimų metodas. Kokybinis tyrimas buvo atliktas atliekant: 1) išsamią literatūros apžvalgą; 2) dviejų fokus grupių interviu Šiaulių universitete (ŠU) ir Nikosijos universitete (NU). Akcentuotina, kad šis interviu buvo paremtas tiesioginę personalo ir studentų grupių patirtimi; 3) taip pat seksualinio smurto ir priekabiavimo situacijos universitetuose analizė ir palyginimas.

Nustatyta, kad abi šalys – ir Kipras, ir Lietuva - neturi senų tradicijų ar įsipareigojimų lyčių lygybės klausimais. Abiejose šalyse lyčių politikai didelę įtaką daro ES direktyvos ir konvencijos, skatinančios lyčių lygybę, kaip pvz. CEDAW ir Pekino veiksmų platforma. Kipre, priešingai nei Lietuvoje, nėra jokių nacionalinių teisės aktų, susijusių su SSP, kurie būtų įgyvendinami universitete. Universitetai nenagrinėja SSP atvejų; nėra duomenų apie ataskaitų pateikimo procentą ar atvejų baigtį. Kita vertus, teigiama, kad SSP nėra dažnas reiškinys abiejuose tyrime dalyvavusiuose universitetuose. Įdomu tai, kad yra mažiau informacijos apie SSP ŠU fizinių ir technologijos mokslų studijose, t.y. skirtingai nei Šiaulių universitete, studentai nepraneša apie savo patirtį šioje srityje. Kita vertus, vyraujanti priekabiavimo samprata „neiššifruoja“ grėsmę keliančių situacijų. Kitaip sakant, aukštosios mokyklos darbuotojai yra abejingi ir nekreipia dėmesio į SSP, todėl jų atskleidimo konfidencialumo ir anonimiškumo problema yra sudėtinga. Akivaizdu, kad abu universitetai (ŠU ir NU) turi mažai praktinės patirties, kaip užtikrinti konfidencialumą ir neleisti jo atskleisti. Atsižvelgiant į abiejų universitetų studentų susirūpinimą, nėra supratimo, kaip didinti SSP prevencijos iniciatyvas, nėra aiškaus visų SSP formų supratimo ir aiškaus supratimo, kaip į šiuos procesus galėtų įsitraukti kiti asmenys. Vyrauja aiški aukų kaltinimo retorika ir vyraujanti diskriminacija dėl lyties. Abu universitetai linkę seksualinį išpuolį suvokti kaip asmeninį rūpestį. Kiekvienas užpuolimas yra individualus įvykis, o ne traktuojamas kaip platesnio masto, tarp kultūrų, dalis. Abu universitetai seksualinio išpuolio atvejus laiko retais, atsiribojusiais ir atsitiktiniais. Seksualinio išpuolio prevencijos metodai universitetuose beveik visada nukreipti į moteris, į tai, kai joms apsisaugoti nuo atsitiktinio smurto, kuris yra universiteto hierarchijos rezultatas, o ne stipri ir palaikanti lyderio paskata, taip pat smurto lyties pagrindu visuomenės normalizavimas. Seksualinio priekabiavimo prevencija universitetuose turėtų būti pagrįsta tolesniais veiksmais ir tyrimais paremtu vertinimu, remiantis žiniomis apie patirtį. Būtina sisteminė ir esminė (taip pat ir nuostatų) šios problemos sprendimo strategija ir taktika.

Keywords: seksualinis smurtas ir priekabiavimas, universitetas, Kipras, Lietuva.

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV)[1] is happening across the European Union (EU) and it is a human rights violation. It is both a cause and a consequence of inequalities between women and men. By gender related violence we mean sexist, sexualizing or norm driven bullying harassment and violence whoever is targeted (Alldred et al., 2014). In European universities and research institutions there exist numerous reports by women and men who have experienced sexual harassment and who report its detrimental effects on their personal wellbeing as well as their scientific careers. GBV, including sexual harassment in European universities and research organizations, tends to be underestimated and there is little knowledge related to this issue. Several studies have shown that women in precarious working conditions (e.g. PhD students) or exchange students seem to be particularly at risk to experience gender-based violence or sexual harassment. In 2015, there were 19.5 million higher (third) education level students in the EU 28, and 54.1 % of these students were women. This gender parity was reflected in the *Sexual Violence and Harassment of Women Students in Higher Education in the European Union* (ESHTE) project partner countries, i.e. Cyprus, Ireland, Germany, Lithuania as well as UK and Scotland, and there were approximately 2,947,400 women students in these countries (Tertiary education..., 2015). The data (both at EU and national level) reveals a high number of women students experiencing some form of sexual violence and harassment related to their lives in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This is sometimes so frequent and so pervasive that they themselves may not recognize this as such until the discussions in a research study group 'illuminate' the reality of their experiences[2]. Although there is limited research available on the experience of gender-based violence in EU HEIs, there is a growing acceptance that it is a significant problem, detailed in general population surveys and research, such as in the Eurobarometer on gender-based violence (2016) and EU Agency for Fundamental Rights Violence against women (EU-wide survey, 2014). There is no EU centrally-collected data about sexual harassment at universities. Despite significant attention paid to this issue in recent years, there is no evidence suggesting that current policies, procedures, and approaches have resulted in a significant reduction in sexual harassment. The previous study (Gender-based violence..., 2012) reported on sexual violence and harassment of women students from five EU countries (Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and UK within 34 HEIs with 21,516 participants) highlighted that women students during their HEI studies experienced sexual violence (behavior forced to engage in sexual acts, forced to engage in intimate acts (caressing), sexual harassment (sexually harassed verbally, threatening unwanted sexual advances in a threatening way), first year students felt stalking (were receiving unwanted telephone calls, letters, e-mails, and SMS over an extended period). In common, with the general of this study population, students threatened by harassment incidents did not disclose information about the incident to anyone, most frequently because they judged the incident (stalking) to be of little importance, because of a feeling of helplessness, or due to uncertainty related to understanding and describing the situation as well as to a strong sense of shame and guilt (sexual violence). Overall the research confirmed that victims of sexual violence are very reluctant to disclose their victimisation to universities or state authorities.

A five-country EU study found that the majority of incidents go unreported and undisclosed due to a range of factors, including fear of not being believed and students' reluctance to be thought of or to be acknowledged themselves as victims. The research also highlighted the 'cultural messages' that underpin the sexual harassment and violence that women students experience: male students who consumed alcohol, had a peer network that supported sexist and violent perceptions of women and used pornography were more than nine times more likely to report committing sexually victimizing acts against women, compared to men who had none of these characteristics (It stops now, 2015; USV react, 2016). Sexual harassment at universities takes place in a particular gendered context. Universities are not only learning environments but also places where students socialize, develop relationships and live, so sexual harassment can permeate a woman's entire environment. Unlike some other form of public sexual harassment, women who experience sexual harassment at university may well live and study in close proximity to the perpetrator (Spotted: Obligations to protect women students' safety and quality, 2015). In the NUS

survey, 33 per cent of the incidents of harassment were reported to have occurred in halls of residence[3]. In Ireland, the following facts were reported: women students had been subject to unwanted sexual contact, some were rape survivors or with a further survivors of attempted rape, most women reported feeling harassed, including just being physically groped (Say Something, 2013). Meanwhile, in the UK and Scotland it was reported that women students had been subject to a serious sexual assault or experienced harassment including groping, flashing and unwanted sexual comments, stalking, experienced unwanted kissing, touching or molesting. Just a few percent of Irish and UK women students ever reported their unwanted sexual experiences to an official agency, such as the national police services (NUS. Hidden Marks, 2010). In a systemic review study (Bondestam and Lundqvist, 2020) on sexual harassment in higher education in the regions other than north/west, different issues are in the foreground, such as unwanted pregnancies or various direct and indirect consequences of support access issues. It is time to consider approaches that address the systems, cultures, and circumstances that enable sexual harassment to perpetuate. Therefore, the overall aim of the article is twofold: to investigate and compare the various forms of sexual harassment suffered by both staff and students of the two piloting universities in Cyprus and Lithuania (as less advanced project partners in SVH prevention project "It stops now!") and to identify the roles of universities in successful implementation of programs, actions, and collective mechanisms which are effectively contributing to the reduction of GBV at universities. We strive to better understand the issue of GBV at universities, and to increase the capacity of staff and students to address GBV and to reduce GBV in academic environments. In this context the aim of the article is to present a comparative analysis of the prevalence of sexual violence, feeling of safety and the reasons for (non-)disclosure at piloting universities in Lithuania and in Cyprus[4] through experience-based knowledge. The objectives of the research:

1. To review and compare the legal context of sexual violence and harassment in Cyprus and Lithuania.
2. To review and compare what is awareness of sexual violence and harassment, as primary prevention, within the piloting universities in Cyprus and Lithuania.
3. To review and compare what are institutional responses and supports in both (University of Nicosia, UN and Šiauliai University, ŠU) universities, and how both universities set up institutional frameworks in awareness raising and developing preventive measures.

In order to achieve these objectives, the following methodological approach was adopted and global research preventing gender-based violence in higher education organizations review was carried out.

Global Research on Preventing Gender-based Violence (GBV) in Academia

We have conducted an exhaustive review in the main multidisciplinary and discipline-specific databases and we have selected the forefront research articles across the world. The analysis of top-ranked, peer-reviewed research articles on sexual harassment in academia focuses on an overview of results on prevention measures and their preventive impacts providing the best response to GVB. We have been interested in the research about GBV in universities and research organizations which have provided empirical evidence of impacts to actions and policies which have effectively prevented GBV in the local academia environment. The review discovered the different kinds of actions and policy impacts changing social attitudes and behavior in order to end tolerance of all forms of violence: 1) networks of survivors – an informal advocacy group "Calling Out" whose survivors across Canada support one another in numerous ways (Vemuri, 2018); 2) specific campaigning by The 1752 Group launched the principle that requires all physics departments applying for or renewing a JUNO award to directly address misconduct (Page, et al., 2019); 3) universities reporting rape and the campuses with a more visible female presence as measured by having gender-based antiviolence activism groups, a women's center, and a women or gender studies program have higher reporting rates than campuses without a visible female presence (Perkins and Warner, 2017); 4) the survivor-activist created an informal advocacy group "Calling Out" Campus Sexual

Violence and it is also a supportive network in which survivors across Canada support one another in numerous ways (Vemuri, 2018); next initiative – prosecuting the perpetrators (e.g. procedures to document GBV incidents; consequences for perpetrators at organization level; reporting to the police (Vemuri, 2018); 5) organized a walkout to protest against the institutional inaction of sexual violence, chanting "we will not be silenced" and "this will not blow over" (Vermuri, 2018); 6) HEI offices supporting survivors and protecting victims (e.g. psychological, medical and legal support; anti-retaliation policies; training staff, including bystanders, to respond to early signs of GBV; securing campuses and workplaces (Best et al., 2017); 7) the campus implementing Green Dot had lower rates of violence victimization and perpetration when compared with two college campuses without bystander intervention training (Coker et al., 2015; Richards, 2019); 8) the evaluation and research of HEI environment and the creation of a culture that eliminates sexual harassment (Changing the culture, 2019); 9) measures to prevent and handle harassment in HEI, focusing on organization, management and unequal power relationships. When the management understands power relationships within the organization and has the right competence, this enables support and clear, rather than complicit, leadership (Henning et al., 2017); 10) a central way of preventing sexual harassment consists of education and training. Students, employees and managers should all be educated about what constitutes sexual harassment, and how to handle it, for example, with the help of training days, films, workshops and case studies, and preventive programs against sexual harassment and assault, known as "sexual assault prevention programs" (Vladutiu et al., 2011). Sexual harassment in HEI emerges as an ambivalent field, where the gender is highlighted in the majority of research studies. However, at the same time, the measures of preventive work and other interventions are not diversified at all, and there is a lack of actual studies that go beyond a binary gender understanding and gender as the only variable for exposure.

The research is based on the following theoretical background of sexual harassment:

1. The "nurture" perspective, which conceptualizes SH as a consequence of socialized sex roles and stereotypes. This theory views cognitive biases as the main cause of SH (Gutek, 1985; Gutek and Morasch, 1982). Negative attitudes of sex role toward women / misogyny; SH as behavior guided by socialized roles of men as sexual agents and women as sexual objects (Franke, 1997; Schultz, 1998). Sex-role spillover theory predicts that women should experience equally high levels of SH in both male- and female-dominated occupations (Berdahl, 2007; Fitzgerald et al., 1997, Glomb et al., 1999).
2. The "power" perspective, which views sexual harassment as emerging from sex differences in power (Segrave, 1994; Berdahl, 2007). The 'nurture x power' perspective, which regards sexual harassment as a means of protecting valued social identities (Tangri and Hayes, 1997; Welsh, 1999). A theoretically grounded conceptualization of youth sexual violence is presented with gender micro aggressions, sexual harassment, and sexual assault (Miyake et al., 2018).
3. An institution-wide strategic response to the GBV approach: developing policies and procedures for responding to incidents of GBV against students and staff; involving the students' union in developing, maintaining and reviewing all elements of a cross-institution response; regular assessment of interventions and policies; a sectoral oral representative body to develop guidance on how to handle disciplinary issues that may also constitute a criminal offence (Source: Universities UK, 2017).
4. A university-wide strategic response to the GBV approach: university staffs' experiences with disclosures of SVH cases, as well as any knowledge they have of existing procedures and policies in handling cases of SVH. Their personal experiences, attitudes and beliefs about SVH; suggestions they have towards the improvement of university SVH practices; students' experiences of procedures for reporting SVH cases, as well as any awareness raising campaigns and workshops that took place; their personal experiences, opinions on the culture about SVH, as well as any suggestions they have towards better practices.

Drawing on these theoretical approaches, and in order to achieve research objectives, the following methodological approach was adopted.

Research Methodology

We base our methodology on a comparative case study of two institutions. Comparative case studies examine the similarities and discrepancies between two or more cases that have a common focus. Comparative case studies usually use both qualitative and quantitative data. It is important in comparative case studies to describe each case in depth from the beginning as this enables a successful comparison (Goodrick, 2014). The research process was made up of three key tools: the newest research review, focus groups and analysis with data among two universities comparison.The methodology of this research was based on the generic qualitative approach. The generic qualitative (also called basic qualitative or, simply, interpretive) approach is described as studies that seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved (Merriam, 2009). This approach is guided not by an explicit or established set of philosophic assumptions (e.g. phenomenology, grounded theory, or ethnography), but rather by several characteristics of qualitative research. The generic qualitative data collection seeks information from representative samples of people about real-world events and processes (Percy et al., 2015).

A mixed-methods qualitative research design was used to conduct the research. A qualitative examination was conducted through: 1) an extensive literature review; 2) the interviews of two Focus Groups (FG) at the piloting Universities of Lithuania (Šiauliai University, ŠU) and Cyprus (University of Nicosia, UN) were focused on the first-hand experience of staff and student groups; 3) the analysis and comparison of the SHV situation in both universities. Firstly, the instructions for the facilitators and focus group discussion questions were developed by project partners, then the framework of instructions was delivered to piloting partners: a set of Instructions to Focus Group discussion were developed and named, such as Facilitator note; Focus Group overview to Facilitator; Focus Group overview to participants; Focus Group discussion questions to staff, and, finally, Focus Group discussion questions to students. Using the community development and the experience-based knowledge approaches, Focus Groups were composed of stakeholders with their attitudes, experiences, challenges and opportunities related to tackle challenges about SHV issues in both participating universities. The questionnaires provided to FG were conducted through structured questions by generating group discussions. The interviewees were given the space to explore relevant issues specific to their HEI. The FGs at both universities investigated the issue, using the whole HEI framework, based on wide-institutional approach which was developed collectively by the international project team of the UK, Ireland, Cyprus, Germany and Lithuania and consisted of three main discussion parts:

I. Primary Prevention – Culture, Education and Campaigns:

1.1. Awareness of incidences of sexual violence and harassment within the HEI (inside and outside campus);
1.2. Awareness of any campaigns or initiatives tackling sexual violence and harassment by the HEI or others;
1.3. Understanding of the legal context of sexual violence and harassment.

II. Secondary Prevention – Institutional Response and Supports

2.1. Knowledge of the policies, processes, people and procedures;
2.2. Role of external stakeholder e.g. police;
2.3. Training available.

III. Tertiary Prevention – Institutional frameworks

3.1. Knowledge of any HEI staff or student groups working on the issue of sexual violence and harassment;
3.2. Cross institutional frameworks;
3.3. State supported frameworks.

1. To review the development of understanding and recognition of SVH as being rooted in gender inequality.
2. To review the duties of both universities in developing an effective response to GBV.
3. To review how both universities are articulating a clear message, commitment, ethos procedures and protocols to build a Zero Tolerance Zone.
4. To discover how experience-based knowledge is increasing among HEI staff and impacting on students' academic performance.
5. To review how two universities raise awareness and develop preventive measures

In the sample of the research of University of Nicosia, two FGs consisted of: 1) 12 students (3 female and 9 male students). Students' origin profile is as follows: from European countries (Russia, Greece), African countries (South Africa) and Middle East Countries (Saudi Arabia, Syria); their age is 18–35 years. 2) Nine members of academic and administrative staff: 3 men and 5 women (Head of Student Affairs, student affairs officers, professors, executive VP of administration, clinical counselors, Counseling service officer, counselors). Focus Groups interviews were conducted for 3 months, since the end of 2017 and beginning of 2018.

In the sample of the research of Šiauliai University two FGs consisted of: 1) 19 students (16 female and 3 male students). Students' origin profile is as follows: mostly Lithuanians, a few Russians. 2) 16 members of academic staff and administrative staff: 2 men and 14 women (Head of Student Affairs, student affairs officers, professors, researchers, and representatives of Trade Union and Ethics Committee and Gender Study Centre). Focus Groups interviews were conducted for 4 months, since the end of 2017 and beginning of 2018.

All FG discussions were recorded and all participants agreed that results of this research could be publicized. Researchers committed to save the privacy and the confidentiality of the FG discussion participants. Seeking to guarantee the confidentiality for interviewees (as much as it is possible in such a small population case), all interviewers' answers were codified.

All data was analysed using the method of qualitative content analysis (Bowen, 2009; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The content analysis (the inductive and deductive approach) was used to analyse data of interviews and to identify stimulus, barriers and opportunities of women's political representation. It was systemized, categorized (by using induction and deduction approaches), and interpreted.

Understanding of legal context of sexual violence and harassment in Cyprus and Lithuania

Cyprus and Lithuania do not have a long tradition or commitment to gender equality. Gender policy is largely influenced by EU directives and Conventions for the promotion of gender equality: CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, etc. Cyprus and Lithuania harmonize with the EU *aquis communautaire*, bringing legislation in line with relevant international instruments. The law on Equal Treatment of Men and Women was passed in Lithuania in 1998, in Cyprus – in 2002. The first National Action Plan for Equality in Cyprus was passed in 2010, in Lithuania – in 2005. Lithuania signed the Istanbul Convention in 2014, but lodged reservations to the Convention and is undertaking national consultation and reviews to ensure the Convention's alignment with the country's constitution[5]; Cyprus ratified the Convention in 2017.

Legal background of Lithuania (LT). The legal assessment of sexual harassment is one of the current social problems that is ignored and not treated effectively enough. Public opinion is driven by the stereotype that sexual harassment cannot exist because the relationship between a woman and a man is

always based on mutual recognition and respect. Unwanted intimacies and physical contacts are regarded either as innocent jokes or provoked by the victim. However, studies show that the problem is widespread, especially in the workplace. There are not many surveys on this issue, but one of the surveys6 presented by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson indicates that sexual harassment is experienced at least once in their lifetime by 21 % of women and 15 % of men in Lithuania; 30 % of all harassment was engaged in by employers and 70 % by colleagues at work. The survey indicates that half of the respondents could not even recognize the actions of the harasser as sexual harassment. Occasional and intentional physical actions were reported by 70.5 % of these respondents, offensive verbal remarks by 18 %, pornographic pictures by 8 %, and psychological pressure and sexual suggestions by 17 % of the respondents. Most of the harassers were men (80 %). The survey has shown that the majority of all respondents (55 %) believe that it may generally be the victim's fault in the event of sexual harassment and 5 % hold that the victim is always to blame for the action of harassment. There is not much debate on this issue in public. Society is generally eager to ignore the problem, leaving the victims to fight this battle on their own. Victims are reluctant to go public with their cases not only because the harassers in most cases are their employers, but also because society lacks any supportive attitude.

Lithuania is a relatively quickly developing post-Soviet country which soon after re-gaining its independence adopted the Law on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men[7] and also the Equal Opportunities Act,[8] and later introduced sexual harassment in its new Criminal code which came into force in 2003. Even though after joining the EU Lithuania was implementing EU laws in respect to sexual harassment, the provision in the Criminal code remained ineffective in practice for numerous reasons. One of the obstacles is the evidence as an element of the crime which is necessary in criminal cases of sexual harassment, as *"Lithuanian law requires proving the sexual nature of the purpose."*[9] Moreover, the aforementioned Acts, regulating equal opportunities, might cause the issue of double coverage.[10]

Lithuania established the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson in 1999, whose legal basis stems from the Law on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men passed in 1998 and which came into force in 1999. It directly prohibited sexual harassment for the first time. Subsequently, the Equal Opportunities Act was adopted in 2003. These two statutes on equal opportunities are the main laws which define sexual harassment (directly by the former Act and indirectly but as one of the grounds of discrimination in the former) and consider it as a form of discrimination. There are also other national laws in Lithuania regulating sexual harassment, either by establishing a direct provision on sexual harassment (Criminal Code,[11] Labor Code,[12] Military Discipline Statute (art. 88)[13]) or leaving it as a form of discrimination on the grounds of sex (Civil Code,[14] Code of Administrative Offenses[15]).

The Lithuanian Labor Code neither defines sexual harassment, elaborates the acts which constitute sexual harassment, nor does it explicitly provide how the employer is responsible if an employee was sexually harassed in the workplace. Under the Lithuanian Labor Code, sexual harassment is considered to be a grave breach of Rules of Procedure. The Law on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men and Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson recommendations provide some guidelines for how an employer should guarantee equal working conditions for men and women without sexual harassment. The Lithuanian Law on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men defines:

> Sexual harassment means any form of unwanted and insulting verbal, written or physical conduct of a sexual nature with a person, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment.
>
> Harassment means unwanted conduct related to the sex of a person that occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, and of creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment.[16]

Sexual harassment is discrimination on the grounds of sex with the aftermath of the violation of a person's dignity.[17] The laws on equal opportunities in Lithuania do not require the victim of sexual harassment be subordinate or dependent, i.e. the abuse of authority is not one of the constituent elements.

The duty of educational and research establishments is to implement equal rights for women and men. Educational and research establishments have to: 1) take measures to prevent sexual harassment of pupils, students and employees; 2) take measures to ensure that pupils, students and employees would be protected from hostile treatment, adverse consequences and any other type of persecution as a reaction to the complaint or another legal procedure concerning discrimination.

The Labor Code and laws require forming the gender equality plans, if at least 250 staff members are employed in the HEI; however, the current restructuring of universities smothers this initiative.

The gender equality plans should involve a complex of measures, dedicated to regulate the prevention of improper behavior, sexual harassment and sexual violence. It is necessary to supplement internal documents: specific concepts (which are currently hardly distinguishable), descriptions of regulations and norms in academic environment (when staff and students are interrelated by the academic process; the dependence-based relation exists between a teacher and a student because a teacher holds a position of power),what is allowed, what is prohibited, strict sequence of the performance of procedures; to supplement the code of ethics; to clearly set the process of registration and investigation of reports and complaints about the cases of sexual harassment. The process of submission and investigation of complaints should be as safe for the victims as possible. The university bears responsibility to deal with such cases; therefore, appropriate competences are required in order not to violate the rights of both a victim and an abuser or violator. Any form of sexual harassment is illegal and not tolerated; it should be foreseen that sexual harassment at work must be treated as a severe violation of work duties. It is necessary to promptly react, strictly condemn sexual violence and harassment, investigate the cases of harassment in the university, and when such information is proved to punish the guilty, and to ensure the privacy of victims.

Each university is engaged in approving the Code of Ethics of Higher Education Institutions. For example, in the Ethics Code[18] of Šiauliai University it is stated that Legal Academic ethics are violated in the following cases: 1) discrimination by language and actions as well as academic or informal assessment based on age, gender or sexual orientation, disability, appearance, race or ethnic background, religion or beliefs, etc.; 2) harassment is when a person's dignity is offended, based on age, gender or sexual orientation, disability, appearance, race or ethnic background, religion or beliefs or an intimidating, hostile, or humiliating environment is created; 3) humiliating a person by employing superiority.

Legal background of Cyprus (CY). The legal definition of *sexual harassment* and *harassment* can be found in the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Act of 2002,[19] which states that:

> sexual harassment is unwanted, by the recipient, sex-related behavior which is expressed verbally or through actions that aims or results in the violation of a person's dignity, especially when it creates a hostile, degrading, demeaning or offensive environment at the workplace or vocational education or during access to employment or vocational education or training.
>
> Harassment is the unwanted, by the recipient, behavior that is related to the sex of a person which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Over the last few years, although there are many obstacles that inhibit the progress of gender equality and the prevalence of violence against women remains, there have been a number of positive developments regarding awareness-raising and commitment towards prevention and fight violence against women, especially domestic violence. Such developments are seen with the improvement of the legislative framework dealing with family violence, through the adoption of the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Handling of Family Violence, but also gender-based violence through the signing of the Istanbul Convention (in 2015) which was ratified by Cabinet of Ministers in March 2017 and was transposed into domestic law on July 14, 2017. Recently, harassment and stalking have been criminalized as foreseen by the Istanbul Convention, stated in Article 3 (d).

The establishment of actors such as the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence (1996)[20], the Observatory on Violence in Schools (Ministry of Education and Culture) and the continuous work of NGOs (such as the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies[21], the Family Planning Association and the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family[22]) who deal with such issues have greatly contributed to positive developments.

When examining the main definitions in Cyprus and Lithuania, it is clear that Lithuanian definitions are more closely linked to Article 40 of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The Cypriot definitions are more culture-oriented and stress the offensive environment at the workplace or during access to employment or vocational education or training. From the Lithuanian perspective, there is a wish to establish a common understanding of sexual harassment in the EU context. This suggests the ambition to reach a consensus in a common definition of sexual harassment, irrespective of situation, form of exposure, national cultural context, etc.

In Cypriot culture, making a claim of sexual assault is still considered taboo. This has significantly affected the existing regulatory framework, particularly in its general understanding of the concept of gender violence. Unlike sexual assault as a type of gender abuse, which has been addressed by legislation and case law, sexual harassment as a form of gender violence has been largely addressed by legislation and case law. There is no legal basis for proceeding in this way and it conflicts with the institutional role of the higher education establishments, and no legally established code of conduct. Both countries do not have adopted national policies that address gender-based violence in academia, either as specific policies on the topic or by identifying academia or higher education as a specific sector in more general policies. Referring on the autonomy of Lithuanian academic institutions they have the obligation to prevent SVH themselves and employer (Rector or President of University) is responsible for the safe working and studies environment.

Mapping the situation of sexual violence and harassment in piloting universities

The situation of SVH in University of Nicosia (UN) in Cyprus and Šiauliai University (ŠU) in Lithuania could be shown by the results of the research conducted by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies and the Šiauliai University Gender Studies and Research Centre in two types of focus groups: university academic, administrative staff and students. The main aim of the first focus group was to explore the experiences of university staff memberts with disclosures of SVH cases on campus, as well as any knowledge they have on existing procedures and policies in handling such cases. Then underline their personal experiences, attitudes and awareness of SVH, as well as any suggestions they have towards the improvement of university SVH practices.

According to the UN staff focus groups' interview analysis report, the main concerns of the focus group participants is the lack of a comprehensive university policy on SVH and the lack of clear and transparent procedures on disclosure, investigation and support in dealing with cases of SVH. Also, there is no comprehensive policy of clear procedures that foresee staff trainings or workshops on how to deal with SVH disclosures or raising awareness on campus by defining SVH[23]. The main gaps, highlighted by this UN focus group of academic and administrative staff, are the following: 1) there are no comprehensive policies and procedures that include step-by-step actions when handling SVH cases, from disclosure to the investigation of the cases; 2) there have been no trainings of front line officers, or any staff members across departments to whom students might want to disclose a SVH case. According to the interview analysis report, this can lead to various problems from mishandling a SVH case, re-traumatizing the victim and promoting a victim-blaming rhetoric on campus, which can instigate the circle of violence; 3) there have been no on-campus awareness raising initiatives on SVH or on any national legislation concerning SVH that has been implemented within the university. In a majority of cases, therefore, staff members are unware of the exact definition of SVH and what it consists of as well as any legal consequences the perpetrator might face; 4) the university does not keep records of previous or ongoing SVH cases. It means

that it is not possible to evaluate the extent to which current procedures on the handling of SVH are adequate or effective.

Quite similar results have been obtained by the focus groups that worked with UN students. The main concern was the general lack of awareness of SVH and what it consists of as well the strong culture of victim-blaming towards female students[24]: 1) there are no awareness raising initiatives on SVH. Most students are unable to recognize all forms of SVH, both as a perpetrator and/or as a victim. Maybe that is why a culture of victim-blaming has been steadily growing. Moreover, none of the students were aware of any procedures in place for handling SVH instance or support services available to seek help; 2) no clear understanding of consent, i.e. they did not know that consent is not permanent and can change with every different sexual activity; 3) no clear understanding of all SVH forms. The main focus was on sexual abuse and mainly rape. Sexual harassment was not taken seriously among the students, especially the male students; 4) no clear understanding of how they could intervene as bystanders. The students are unaware of the different ways they could intervene indirectly without having to use force or confront the perpetrator. This was one of the main reasons many are hesitant to intervene, out of fear that they would be injured; 5) there is a clear victim-blaming rhetoric and a prevailing culture of gender-based discrimination. The majority of the male students strongly believed that some women provoke their perpetrators with their clothing, behavior, etc.

From the point of view of ŠU academic and administrative staff members, over the last three years, there were no formalized SVH cases: 10 years ago there was a case involving one male university teacher who later was expelled. Recently, SVH facts or discriminating attitudes towards sexual minorities, nationality, surname etc., have not been noticed. Study programs training pedagogues deal with such themes as sexism, sexual harassment; also, experiences are shared, subjects on ethics analyze these matters as well. It should be noted that students' awareness of SVH in study subjects "Ethics of Pedagogy", "Ethics Management" is quite superficial. Standard and clear regulations are applied for Erasmus students because cultural differences are obvious; these regulations are compulsory during international studies. Staff members working in the study programs related to exact sciences notice that more problems occur for representatives of exact sciences because students do not know whom they should address if an SVH case occurs.

Currently, ŠU students most often observe sexual violence and/ or harassment (SVH) in social networks; they face this phenomenon at the university more rarely; no severe cases were reported. However, earlier for students it was known that: *someone has said something of this sort just for fun but not so severe and rough*[25]. A female student, representative of Šiauliai University Students' Union (ŠUSA), in charge of academic and social affairs, emphasizes that some cases exist, e.g., a female student had complained about a case when a young male tried to grabble a young female in the dormitory as if making fun of it, but it was not for fun. Or another case: a female student comes and tells that another girl received a higher grade, a university male teacher approached her more often because *her boobs were bigger.* Then, ŠUSA checks grades for all study subjects delivered by other teachers and if a student receives high grades in other study subjects, he/ she cannot fail in this concrete study subject. Other cases: a female student who malignantly missed classes was called a *chicken* and another one was called a *cheap whore*. According to students' opinion, SVH happens because: 1) perhaps teaching staff members think that students are too weak to address someone and complain? 2) it may not be publicized because some focus group students heard about such cases for the first time. If SVH cases were more broadly / openly disseminated, students could be able to identify SVH. Perhaps students would start complaining, discussing more often, but now they are possibly afraid and hide the cases of SVH. In our launched empirical research to capture students' experiences of sexual harassment at university, we discovered that students are able to identify SVH: during lectures, senior year students were being bullied, depreciated in a form of a joke; some students noted that women students were scanned with a suggestive glance (ambiguously scanned head to foot) and that means the respective relation ensuring a girl's dignity was violated.

The majority of students acquaint with legal terms of SVH while attending school; however, the limits of awareness and understanding of SVH differ; the power and dependence relation between a university teacher and a student is much more complex: student's dependence on teacher or professor (one's power); if he/ she demonstrates interest in a female/male student, a difficult situation occurs because the unwanted behavior may occur, therefore, possible tensions should be prevented. Students are less likely report on sexual harassment when the perpetrator is a male professor. Evidence indicates that reporting rates in university are generally low, potentially due to fear of retaliation—especially when the perpetrator is a prominent scientist or a famous professor.

Currently, ŠU students' focus group interviewees did not come across a case that assessment grades for someone were higher; in such a case, some features of illegal support, "secret admiration" could be identified. Facts of such a subtle character are not publicly disseminated in favor of both parties. It should be admitted that the environment of the HEI is, nevertheless, sexualized; there are bullying cases transferred from general education schools. Possibly, there is a much higher amount of unrevealed cases of harassment at university. We ground this assumption on the data of the international social research[26] conducted in 36 countries worldwide in 2015. It was revealed that Lithuania was included in the group of countries where harassment initiated by senior staff members and peers was little spread. In Lithuania, harassment at work is encountered relatively more rarely (7.2%) than, for instance, in the neighboring countries of Latvia (10.4%), Poland (11.3%), and Estonia (13.8%). It can be stated that harassment cases are relatively more often underlined in the so-called old democracies, for instance, in Sweden (87.6%). An assumption can be drawn that in Lithuania, the country of new democracy, the prevailing concept of harassment does not "decode" the situations posing threat, i.e. staff members are indifferent and do not pay attention to SVH.

Although both universities according to many factors (location, history, experience and etc.) are quite different, there are more similarities than differences between them in the analyzed topic. Although both universities view sexual assault incidents as rare, disconnected, and random, on the other hand, this also can mean that in both universities, sexual assault tends to be conceptualized as a private concern. Each assault is an individual incident, rather than seen as part of a wider issue that exists across cultures. The common attitude expressed by ŠU students' and staff members' that sexual harassment, addressing someone as a sexualized object, the suggestion of erotic, intimate intercourse must not be tolerated in all forms, and abusers have no right to work in educational institutions where young men and women are subordinate to, dependent on the power of the staff. Despite that, some key findings could be revealed concerning the staff of the universities of UN and ŠU: there are no comprehensive policies and procedures that include step-by-step actions when handling SVH cases, from disclosure to the investigation of the cases.

Prevention policies and measures implementing at piloting universities

With all, we intended to provide unique, valuable and comparable knowledge that contributes to identify effective policies, programs and actions to prevent SVH, protect survivors and prosecute perpetrators. Thus, we contribute to a better understanding of SVH in European universities and research organisations, in terms of prevalence, causes, impacts and effective actions to overcome it. As universities work to prevent and respond to sexual violence on campus, limited data are available that speak to what these efforts look like on the institutional level of University of Nicosia and Šiauliai University.Our research shows that despite the fact that UN academic and staff members are not properly informed regarding issues of SVH, both within the university context as well as at the national level, they showed a great interest and eagerness in participating in training workshops since they do not feel confident enough to carry on their tasks with such limited knowledge of the issue. Finally, there was a general sentiment of discontent in relation to the lack of a comprehensive policy framework provided by the university on SVH, as well as the lack of an efficient internal communication from the department in charge of handling SVH cases[27].

On the other hand, the participants provided suggestions that could enable the development of more effective and transparent procedures for the handling of SVH:

- The creation of a sub-committee, formed under the existing Health and Safety committee, which will act as a mediation committee between the university and other services (e.g. support services, police and lawyers). This sub-committee can be composed of university staff members and NGO representatives with expertise in different areas relating to SVH and can discuss and evaluate each SVH case individually.
- The counselors could organize workshops and trainings to raise awareness of trauma inflicted by SVH.
- The creation of an ambassador program for the university students that would help raise awareness of gender-based violence, gender equality and SVH. This could create a larger movement in the campus and could motivate more students to be involved in such issues.

The significance of this problem confirms the fact that according to the research[28] "*The focus group has not shown that we are at a stage where we can offer any innovative ideas but a minimum standard of code of conduct in relation to handling SVH disclosures as well as raising awareness ideas. [...] students are unaware of any procedures in place where they could seek help and support as well. They are also not aware of the root cause of SVH and how one should address it.*" (p. 3). The same is said about the institutional level. According to staff's opinion, "*the university has very few procedures when handling SVH disclosures, and most of the time the staff are not aware of them."*[29] (p. 4).

Considering the functional definition of SVH, it is important to mention that, according to the report[30], one of the most interesting findings of the focus group (and interview) discussion was the very low number – only five reported SVH cases encountered by the participants. Even more, regardless the fact that the staff's duty is to protect students' privacy, the communication about one of five cases was organized between different departments. And, even more – none of the cases were properly handled since no further actions were taken by any of the responsible departments. This problem stems from the lack of comprehensive procedures enabling the students to report a case of SVH, as well as a unified database where records of SVH can be kept in order to evaluate the efficiency of the procedures in place as well as conduct any further research.

Although there is the law[31], where SVH is defined, the empirical relevant analysis shows the lack of knowledge and awareness of SVH and confirms the fact that the current legal system is operating but it is based on personal beliefs.

Victim's agreement to fully collaborate and being willing to testify can be overcome if the necessary supportive services are provided to immediately after such an incident takes place. Apart from re-dramatization there is always the fear of being stigmatized if the incident becomes public, this especially affects local students as SVH is still a taboo topic in UN. Even though there is the client confidentiality policy at University of Nicosia, the students are still afraid to discuss such incidents with them. The main reason according to one of the counselors is that if the perpetrator is a member of the university staff he can easily find out about it and retaliate.[32]

Therefore, an assessment of how previous cases of SVH were handled suggests that students did not report such events due to fear and distrust of the university. The fact that no disciplinary action has ever been taken against the criminals currently working there shows just how problematic and inadequate the current procedures are.[33] The analysis of students' focus groups' interview report shows that the majority of the participants had a general understanding of the physical aspect of SVH, but there was a tendency to overlook or even discredit the verbal and especially non-verbal aspect of it. [34]

Below we provide some observations that confirm the relevance of the problem under consideration. First of all, there is still a tendency to "forgive" such (SVH) behavior, given the particular enabling factors that criminals act upon, such as drunkenness, mental illness, or even cultural differences between a victim and a perpetrator. Although it is believed that gender equality and greater respect between the two genders

can resolve such a culture of violence, too much of this case is diverted to the discussion of cultural differences, different perceptions of the same things. Also, gender equality is not associated with SVH. While it is understandable that the gender pay gap is the end result of gender inequality, it is incomprehensible how this power relationship opens the way to sexual harassment and violence.[35] In conclusion, the general attitude of bystanders is that students do not usually intervene out of fear (e.g. fear of getting harmed, also to become a target, to be falsely accused, etc.). Even so, the majority of the participants argued that one should interfere in "extreme situations", when it becomes physical. Additionally, there was a clear misconception about how a bystander can intervene without necessarily needing to directly confront the perpetrator. For instance, seeking for help (police officer, or campus official) or indirectly interrupting the situation.[36]

According to the analysis of staff discourse[37], the university's actions to raise awareness of SVH, or gender equality in general, are very scarce. As a result, the majority of the staff members and students are unable to recognize SVH incidents, since they do not have a clear definition of all its forms, as well as the psychological, emotional, and physical effects it has on the victim. Also, the fact that no SVH reports have been made comes to prove the lack of awareness and information of SVH. The university's attitude towards SVH is closely linked to the general local opinion towards SVH, as it is still considered to be a taboo topic. Even so, it is the responsibility of the university to take the necessary precautions and measures to protect the students and staff members as well as to educate them on such important issues that can impact them. Prevention is as important as protection since it can stop such crimes from happening.

Students' opinion analysis[38] showed that "*the participants were unable to give any examples of programs / workshops or campaigns addressing SVH. Even so, they were all very keen on the idea of having more awareness raising campaigns and workshops on SVH. One of the students attributed the lack of campaigns/workshops addressing SVH on cultural differences that exist from one country to another."* (p. 13). Also, there is the need of having awareness raising workshops on gender stereotypes that would make them aware of such realities – how women are sexualized, how sexual harassment is normalized, etc.

The focus groups interviews' analysis report highlights the misconception and misinformation on the consent and SVH as well as the need to address such gaps. It also draws attention to different beliefs and stereotypes that students with different cultural backgrounds have on certain issues. Therefore, these differences need to be taken into account when trying to inform such a diverse public on such a sensitive issue.[39]

The student led organizations / societies have been very lax when it comes to organizing any sort of activities and / or events that could have any social impact on campus. This lack of ambition and leadership from the students is further enabled by the fact that they are never hold accountable for this.[40]

What is beyond our notice or simply (un)consciously neglected by us, in the cases of old democracies, the academic community is treated as an obvious violation because their level of tolerance towards various forms of harassment at work is much lower. Tolerance towards SVH facts should be reduced in universities of Lithuania. The common attitude expressed by ŠU students' and staff members' that sexual harassment, addressing someone as a sexualized object, suggestion of erotic, intimate intercourse (not necessarily physical penetration) must not be tolerated in all forms, and abusers have no right to work in education institutions where young men and women are subordinate to, dependent on the power of the staff.

Currently, SVH is not a commonly spread phenomenon at Šiauliai University; however, continuous discussion, prevention and institutional concern related to the mechanism of assurance of equal opportunities as well as implementation of academic ethics are needed. The SVH problem should be solved by the university administration; in general, the entire community should not be indifferent towards this issue. Earlier, there were cases when university staff members were expelled and prosecuted.

It is necessary to encourage students to seek for support and not to stay silent. This should be promoted, publicly advertised inviting not to be afraid because a student suffers, undergoes such situation, gets

himself/ herself adjusted to such psychological violence and even is unaware of how to name this fact until this is heard of from aside, or, after some time passes, this is forgotten. In general, a university should have a clear framework of support and preventive measures: whom a student should address, how to explain and inform about the case of harassment in a suggestive manner, to provide guidelines for ensuring confidentiality. These measures should be taken due to the fact that students are highly concerned and feel insecure because a teaching staff member may find out about the complaint.

Such cases are highly complicated. For example, a group of students come to Šiauliai University Students' Union (ŠUSA) and complain about inappropriate behavior and sexual harassment caused to a female student. In order to solve such problems ŠUSA was founded at university, where students are able to communicate with each other; if needed, they address administrative staff, meetings are held, etc.

The administrative staff – Faculty Dean, Vice Dean or an administrator may be addressed directly, i.e. students address those members whom they trust the most. Only some representatives of administrative staff understand harassment as sexually-based violence; however, both sides, i.e. administrative staff and students, must take the responsibility because the cases must also be evidence-based. The administrative staff is the closest support provider and is capable of solving SVH. However, it is difficult for a student to apply for help, as the cases are rather subtle and related to his / her academic achievements, thus, it is important that a group of students representing him/her would apply to the administrative staff of the faculty, and if the case is complicated, to University Rector or Vice-Rector for Studies. After the Committee of Ethics investigates such case and addresses the issue. The conducted research revealed that there exists a problem of disclosing such cases as they cause harm to the prestige and reputation of a particular university.

An available evidence, such as telephone recordings, testimonies of peer students who witnessed the case of SVH, helps administrative staff trace the abuser and the other cases of SVH. If there is no evidence available, during *face-to-face* communication the fact of SVH will not be proved.

Students hold the opinion that the position of a teacher is usually defended, if there is the *face-to-face* case, a student's words mean nothing, nothing will be proved and a teacher's position always remains superior; however, it depends on a particular situation and evidence, therefore, it is necessary to address police.

If there is a case of verbal harassment, offence, then it may be difficult to prove it. In such a case, patience is required because usually the teacher becomes exceedingly involved and expresses offence or does something inappropriate at presence of the entire group of students and this group of students witnesses the fact.

A university defends its position, administrative staff do not tend to give prominence to the facts of SVH: if a university teacher called someone *a chicken* as a joke, this is not a very significant argument proving improper behavior. Dissemination of SVH facts may both increase or decline reputation of a university because an unfavorable title of a media article may be given, for example, an imaginary title: ŠU Is Solving a Problem of Sexual Harassment. Then, students' parents will not advise to enter such university because of the case of harassment: "*If we witnessed or knew someone who suffered from SVH or experienced aggression, we, logically, would stop it, even myself, as student, as an individual, I would treat it in a different way if my acquaintance came to me, I would say that something should be declared, I would think of this situation, suggest whom to address and consider what to do, perhaps even to address police*"[41].

SVH disclosure and prevention should be done because this may make harm on health, since such students are inclined to depression, suicide. Moreover, the person who abused you may also abuse others. Students are not well familiar with legal terms of SVH characterizing assault, sexual violence, persecution, harassment and these concepts are hardly identified and distinguished.

Academic and administrative staff may address the Board of Ethics, ŠUSA, and Dean's Office, faculty department concerning SVH cases, even though students are afraid of that teachers will find out who behave improperly because staff and circles of personal acquaintances are intertwined with socializing networks (various professional, sport, entertainment clubs, etc.). Therefore, to maintain confidentiality in

a small university is rather difficult. University community is in a close knit, people maintain friendly relationships with each other, and it is very uncomfortable to start conflicts based on violation of the ethical norms. When traditional moral values are drastically violated, the majority tends to justify SVH cases or incidents and students are not encouraged by university teachers to talk about improper behavior. Universities have little experience in practice how to ensure the necessity to secure confidentiality and prevent from disclosure. From the point of view of staff, it is difficult for a university to manage such cases, and a social worker would help in starting solving the problems; therefore, for example, large universities hire psychologists. When students are about to graduate from the university, it is of high importance to remember the existing problem of SVH because the situation is even worse after students graduate and start working.

In general, some key findings could be revealed concerning the staff of the universities of University of Nicosia in Cyprus and Šiauliai University in Lithuania: there are no comprehensive policies and procedures that include step-by-step actions when handling SVH cases, from disclosure to the investigation of the cases; there are no trainings of front line officers, or any staff members across departments to whom students might want to disclose a SVH case; there have been no institutional awareness raising disclosure and prevention initiatives on SVH; UN, contrary to ŠU (since 2017), does not have any national legislation concerning SVH implemented within the University; the universities do not keep records of previous or ongoing SVH cases; there is no available data on reporting rates or case outcomes; SVH is not a commonly spread phenomenon at both universities; standard and clear regulations are applied for Erasmus students because cultural differences are obvious in case of ŠU; less knowledgeable about SVH are students of physical / technological studies at ŠU; the prevailing concept of harassment does not "decode" the situations posing threat, i.e. staff is indifferent and does not pay attention to SVH and to SVH disclosure problem at ŠU; to keep confidentiality and anonymity are essential in ŠU, but both universities have little experience in practice how to ensure the necessity to secure confidentiality and prevent from disclosure. The common concerns of the students of UN and ŠU: there is no awareness of raising initiatives on SVH; there is no clear understanding of consent; there is no clear understanding of all SVH forms; there is no clear understanding of how they could intervene as bystanders; there is a clear victim-blaming rhetoric and a prevailing culture of gender-based discrimination.

Therefore, it should be noted that both universities tend to conceptualize sexual assault as a private concern. Each assault is as an individual incident, rather than seen as part of a wider issue which exists across cultures. Both universities view sexual assault incidents as rare, disconnected, and random. The approaches of sexual assault prevention at universities almost always target women safeguarding themselves against random acts of violence.

The academic and administrative staff of both universities expressed similar following perceptions: gender-based violence in academia is an unrecognized issue and an underdeveloped field of knowledge and a cohesive infrastructure for tackling gender-based violence in both, UN and ŠU universities, are missing. However, there are general understanding of the physical aspect of SVH, but is a prominent lack of relevant policies, local legislation / regulations, responsible authorities, and up-to-date data. Problems of gender-based violence in higher education in piloting UN and ŠU have received very little attention both in research and on a policy level therefore very low number reported SVH cases encountered by the participants of both Universities. Also, gender equality is not associated with SVH at both universities. The students of both universities' are still afraid to discuss such incidents with administrative and academic staff. The main reason is that if the perpetrator is a member of the university staff she or he can easily find out about it and retaliate. At the same time, the academic relationship between faculty and students becomes strained. The fear of publicity if the incident becomes public, this especially affects local students as SVH is still a taboo topic in UN and ŠU. The general attitudes of usage of bystanders position is that UN and ŠU students do not usually intervene out of fear to intervene personal relationships, but when it becomes physical, they directly interrupting the conflict situation and try to seeking for help. UN and ŠU students have little information about the consent in a dating relationship when partners mutually agree to sexual activity (especially new approach it was for ŠU students). ŠU students collaborate with the

Students' Union, where they can to complain about inappropriate behavior and sexual harassment caused to student. At ŠU the administrative staff is the closest support provider and is capable of solving SVH; therefore, students address those faculty members whom they trust the most (Dean or Vice-dean). But if the case is complicated, students address to University Rector or Vice-Rector for Studies, then the ŠU Committee of Ethics investigates such cases and addresses the issues.

The views of UN and ŠU students differ in the following areas: UN has very few procedures and ŠU does not have any internal procedures for handling SVH disclosures; UN students were very keen on the idea of having more awareness raising campaigns and workshops on SVH when ŠU students prefer to have 1–2 workshops on SVH prevention annually, and ŠU students prefer to have non-traditional lectures on SVH prevention. ŠU students are very concerned about the public image of the university, so there is a thin line between the disclosure of sexual harassment and ensuring confidentiality at university. At Šiauliai University, gender and ethnicity-based harassment cases were identified.

Conclusions

Gender-based violence is a serious problem for academic and research institutions around the globe. Although Cyprus and Lithuania, as small EU countries, are far apart in geographical terms, they shares many common challenges on the prevention of sexual harassment in the research and higher education sector. Both countries – Cyprus and Lithuania – do not have a long tradition or commitment to gender equality. In both countries gender policy is largely influenced by EU directives and Conventions for the promotion of gender equality: CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action. The harmonization of Cyprus and Lithuania with the EU *acquis communautaire* brings legislation in line with relevant international instruments. The laws on Equal Treatment of Men and Women were passed in Lithuania – 1998; in Cyprus – in 2002, Cyprus National Action Plan for Equality – in 2010, in Lithuania – in 2005. Problems of gender-based violence in higher education have received very little attention both in terms of research and on the policy level in both Member States. Lithuania just from 2017 has a policy statement acknowledging gender-based violence in higher education as unacceptable and/or legislate gender-based violence in higher education, but Cyprus does not. There are not enough studies on SVH on institutional level in both countries. First representative SVH survey in Lithuania took place in 2018, according to it, 80% of population expresses the view that the abuser must not escape responsibility, a third of the Lithuanian population agreed with the statement that "women themselves are guilty themselves". Harassment at work is encountered relatively more rarely in Lithuania than in neighboring countries of Latvia, Poland or Estonia. In Cyprus at least 28 % of women have experienced some form of domestic violence including economic violence, sexual violence. According to our concerns in both countries, there are no comprehensive policies and procedures that include step-by-step actions when handling SVH cases, from disclosure to the investigation of the cases, no trainings of front line officers, or any staff members across departments to whom students might want to disclose a SVH case. Also, there has been no institutional awareness of raising disclosure and prevention initiatives against SVH. In Cyprus, contrary to Lithuania (amendments to the law passed in 2017), there is no any national legislation concerning SVH, implemented within the university. The universities do not keep records of previous or ongoing SVH cases; there is no available data on reporting rates or case outcomes. SVH is not a commonly spread phenomenon at both universities. Standard and clear regulations are applied for Erasmus students because cultural differences are obvious in both counties. Less knowledgeable about SVH are students of physical and technological sciences and they do not report their experiences when compared to faculty of Šiauliai University in Lithuania. Prevailing concept of harassment does not "decode" the situations posing threat, i.e. staff is indifferent and does not pay attention to SVH at ŠU. Therefore, the SVH disclosure problem concerning confidentiality and anonymity is the challenging issue in Lithuania. Both, Nicosia and Šiauliai, universities have little experience in practice how to ensure the necessity to secure confidentiality and prevent from disclosure. According to the concerns of the students of both universities (UN and ŠU), there are no awareness raising disclosure and prevention initiatives against SVH, no clear understanding of

consent, no clear understanding of all SVH forms, and no clear understanding of how they could intervene as bystanders. There prevail a clear victim-blaming rhetoric and a prevailing culture of gender-based discrimination. Both universities (UN and ŠU) tend to conceptualize sexual assault as a private concern. Each assault is an individual incident, rather than seen as part of a wider issue which exists across cultures. Both universities view sexual assault incidents as rare, disconnected, and random. A cohesive infrastructure to combat gender-based violence in higher education is lacking in the piloted universities of Lithuania and Cyprus. The approaches of sexual assault prevention at universities almost always target women, safeguarding themselves against random acts of violence as an outcome of universities' hierarchy, not strong and supportive leadership incentive, and societal normalization of gender-based violence. Therefore sexual harassment prevention in universities should be more based on follow-up and research-based evaluation through experience-based knowledge. Secondly, more research is needed to further establish the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of specific policies to address sexual violence within higher education institutions, such as policies mandating the training of college employees and administrators.

This study contributes to the previous literature at least in a few ways. Firstly, it enhances our sensitive and intimate knowledge of sexual violence and harassment of two piloting universities in Lithuania and Cyprus. Secondly, it underlines primary prevention and institutional response frameworks and support at the institutional level from a comparative perspective. Future studies should focus on universities' experiences in taking gender-based violence prevention experiences in order to understand what prevention measures and strategies are more powerful behind the embraced practices.

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Notes

1 For the purpose of this research, GBV is defined as violence directed against a person. Sexual harassment is defined as "any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment" (Article 40 of Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence).

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