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This report relates the experience with peer education trainings conducted with adolescents in Italy as part of the “Youth4Youth: Empowering Young People in Preventing Gender-based Violence through Peer Education” Project by Casa delle Donne per non subire violenza.

## **1. Introduction to Youth 4 Youth Programme**

### **1.1. Programme Objectives**

The primary aim of the peer education trainings was the sensitization of young people to the issue of gender-based violence (GBV) and develop attitudes of self-respect and self-value. The participants explored their attitudes on gender roles and gender-based violence and were empowered to create an environment free from violence for themselves as well as for their peers.

## **2. Training Programme Structure**

### **2.1. Set up and School Selection**

The training workshops took place in two different high schools and 1 two-year professional school in Bologna city and province. The first school named ‘Leonardo da Vinci’ offers three different courses (scientific, linguistic and social science) and the second school, named ‘Luigi Galvani’ offers education in classical studies. The two-year professional school named ‘Oficina’ offers professional courses of 2 years in different specializations such as electrical civil and industrial plants installation, administration and secretarial studies, informatics and hydrothermal plants installation. Some of the schools were contacted through professors who collaborated in the past with Casa delle Donne per non subire violenza while the others had already participated in the research study of the project Youth4Youth. One other criterion in choosing these schools was having different academic courses in order to see the impact of the workshop in different contexts.

The trainings were carried out with the entire classes. Students attended the training sessions in the school environment during the lesson hours.

There was no teacher present in the class during the trainings and also during the peer education training.

There were 4 classes participating in the project. There were one class of social science and one class of linguistic courses from Leonardo da Vinci school, one class of linguistic studies from Luigi Galvani school, and one class of informatics from Oficina school participating in the workshop. Four training sessions lasting 2 hours each were conducted in every class involved. The frequency of the training sessions was once a week. There was then a 2 hours training session with the peer educators followed by 2 peer education training sessions. Seven classes participated in the peer education training session.

## **2.2. Target Group and Participation**

The target group comprised students of the last two years in secondary schools, aged 15-19 years. This target group was preferred because it is considered to be old enough to have had various experiences in romantic relationships, thus they could treat issues scheduled in the training sessions. Peer educators have one more academic year until they graduate, thus they can continue acting as agents of change among their peers on issues related to gender-based violence.

On average, there were 83 adolescents participated in the trainings (there were some very little fluctuations in the numbers of students attending each training session). There were approximately 43 students coming from the Leonardo da Vinci school, 22 from the Galvani schools and 18 from the professional school.

There were 14 peer educators trained: 6 from the Leonardo da Vinci school, 4 from the Galvani schools and 4 from the professional school.

The peer education training involved about 145 students: approximately 65 students came from the Leonardo da Vinci school, 45 from the Galvani schools and 35 from the professional school.

## **2.3. Training Methodology**

The training programme employed a variety of interactive methodologies that aimed to encourage participants to share their opinions freely without criticizing the others' point of view.

In specific the following methods and training techniques were used:

Brainstorming:

Brainstorming was used as a way to open a topic for discussion especially when a new topic was introduced (stereotypes, forms of violence, myths etc.).

Group Discussion:

Group discussion usually followed an exercise (i.e. the gender in a box exercise, the scenarios and the role-play).

Buzz groups or small groups

The participants were divided into 'buzz groups' (or small groups) consisting of 4-5 persons. A topic of discussion or a scenario was given to each small group to discuss about. Buzz groups methodology was used for the discussion of gender roles and stories. The ideas generated in the small groups were then discussed in plenary.

Scenarios

Handouts of hypothetical 'real life stories', depicting incidences of GBV and abuse were delivered in order to stimulate discussion. The scenarios depicted situations that were close to the realities of youngsters so that they could identify with the characters.

Role-Play

Role plays were used to recreate a real life situation and to provide the opportunity for participants to observe how they react and how they feel in such situations.

Taking a stance

'Voting with your feet': participants were asked to 'take a stance' on an issue by physically going to a pre-designated place in the room that represents a potential action that can be taken to handle an abusive incidence.

### Drawing

The participants were invited to work in groups and to create an artistic piece that conveyed messages against stereotypes and gender-based violence.

### Writing

The participants were invited to work in groups and to write stories of girls victim of GBV with a “happy end”.

### Audio

The participants were invited to make a radio phonic spot against GBV. They were also asked to act and then record the stories they wrote.

## **2.4. Outline of Training Sessions**

During the first 3 training sessions students were trained on issues regarding social construction of gender, gender roles, gender stereotypes, and gender-based violence. The training programme started with a distinction between gender and sex, helping the students to understand what is meant with the social construction of gender. Afterward, the participants were invited to explore the society’s expectations for each gender and the inequalities that may be present between the genders. The participants explored how people who do not fit the stereotypical role models for men and women are often subjected to violence and abuse. They worked on understanding what constitutes GBV and on recognizing the various forms of GBV by the means of various exercises. Every session aimed at empowering young people to stand up to GBV.

The 4th session was dedicated to the peer education introduction and peer educator was identified thorough volunteer participation. The participants were then invited to produce creative materials such as posters or audio clips which highlight messages on gender-based violence. There was an exhibition of these materials at the end of the training.

The 5th training session was dedicated to ‘training the peer educators’, aiming to provide young people with the necessary skills in training and group facilitation, so that they could effectively carry out their role as peer educators.

Peer trainings were conducted using techniques learned at the initial training sessions and targeted younger age groups (15-16 years). The peer education trainings concentrated on raising awareness on gender roles and society’s expectations for each gender and explore how GBV appears in adolescent romantic relationships.

It follows the outline of each of the training sessions.

### **2.5. Facilitators’ required knowledge and skills**

All workshops were conducted by two psychologists with prior experience in participatory teaching methods and in working with young people and victims of GBV in an anti-violence centre. Considering the complexity and sensitivity of this type of training it was decided to implement co-training in order to provide emotional support to participants who may feel upset after recalling or sharing an unpleasant or hurtful episode (ex. going out of class).

The trainers organized a meeting with teachers before the training began in order to have more information regarding eventual episodes of GBV or domestic violence among the participants. In case there were participants victims or perpetrators of GBV a particular attention was shown toward them. This helped also to predict what kind of questions or discussion on GBV could have been raised by any of these participants.

The meeting with teachers helped also to know better the personal relationships within the class.

All personal and intimate information that was shared during the training sessions was handled by the facilitators with sensibility and understanding, in a non-judgmental but supportive way.

### **2.5.1. Dealing with disclosures of violence or abuse**

Since the GBV is highly frequent and often very hidden it is quite likely that there will be people with personal experience as victims, as witnesses, as friends' or neighbours' of victims, or as perpetrators. The participants frequently disclosed personal experiences of violence, and help or information was often requested usually during breaks or at the end of the course. In order to deal better with eventual disclosure the following point was made:

- Asked for agreement with a simple Contract in order to create a safe learning environment:
  - a request for confidentiality in relation to any personal disclosures from participants
  - encouraging participants to be self-reflective, to accept the possible wide range of views on GBV and to consider the importance of dialogue as part of learning
  - a request to be pay attention not to monopolize the discussion, in order to give to all the participants the chance to express ideas and ask questions
  - a reminder that there is no 'typical' victim, perpetrator or GBV situation, and that we need to check our own stereotypes
- it was emphasized that all participants need to treat any personal disclosures with care, sensitivity and confidentiality. Moreover, participants need to feel comfortable to pack in at any time and leave the room if they need to in case the training becomes too emotionally stressful to them.

### **2.5.2. Supporting Young People with Experience of Gender Based Violence**

The information of an eventual counselling point present in schools was collected in order to provide help for participants who may disclose experience of violence.

In case of a personal disclosure of GBV it was:

- asked whether a quiet/private space was necessary to talk about

- used the key messages with those having experienced GBV or were distressed about past experiences: “you are not alone”, “abuse is never acceptable and you are not to blame”, “there is confidential help available that can also be anonymous if you wish”
- checked the safety of the participants experiencing GBV at that moment. In case their safety was at risk they were encouraged to seek help.
- furnished GBV helpline number and information on local support services.
- was involved the school in case the students experiencing GBV were younger than 18 years old in order to take a necessary action to protect them.

## 2.6. Things to think about (For the future)

- 1) The training was conducted by two female facilitators.

Women that work with men should be aware that men may view their leadership as reinforcing the assumption that violence prevention is a "women's issue" not relevant to them. Different authors have argued persuasively that men need to take responsibility for preventing men's violence against women (Flood, 2003; INSTRAW, 2002; Kaufman, 2001). Male educators tend to be perceived as more credible and more persuasive by male participants so they can act as role models for the other men. Having men work with men embodies the recognition that men must feel responsible for helping to end gender inequality. The opportunity for men to listen to the attitudes and views of other men is powerful, especially because it empowers men who want to fight GBV phenomenon and provides them with visible allies. It is also beneficial for men to see women and men cooperating in a respectful partnership. At the same time, having mixed-sex educators is a valuable demonstration to participants of egalitarian working relationships across genders.

The peer education training (6th session) was almost always conducted by mixed-sex peer educators except for one class where this co-conduction was not possible because there were no male students.

- 2) Discussions on the historical and theoretical background of gender-based violence were scarce as the time at disposal was employed in interactive and experiential learning. Hence, all the theory, including definitions and the socio-cultural, legal and political factors that perpetrate GBV were broadly outlined in handouts, which were given as 'take-home reading' at the end of the training sessions. The facilitators furnished also different addresses of websites where students may find useful information on GBV.

The teachers' collaboration would be useful in the future: they could be formed to introduce these arguments during the lessons. This could help future training, especially in terms of time for interactive learning, because students would be informed and aware of the presence of the phenomenon of GBV.

- 3) It would have been useful recording the presence of the participants in every session for a better evaluation of the training experience. Not all the students were present in all the sessions of the training programme and this may have influenced the results of the evaluation.

### **3 Reflections on the Training Sessions**

#### **3.1. Session 1**

##### **Activity: Gender Roles**

###### Introduction

- Short briefing from trainers about the training
- Discuss student's expectations about the training

Completion of perceptions 'pre' questionnaire

###### Gender and sex

Read out statements and ask students to differentiate between gender and sex

###### Gender Roles

- 'Gender in a box' exercise

- Use magazine clippings to discuss how media depict 'real men' and 'real women'
- Discuss what messages are conveyed by the media regarding body image and the stereotypical roles for women and men
- Identify how women or men who do not fit the stereotypical roles become victims of abusive behaviour

### **Activity: It's my right**

Ask students to mention what rights they have in relation to

- living their lives happily as the men and women they want to be (without being confined by society's expectations)
- protecting themselves from the harmful behaviours that are used to enforce normalised' or 'accepted' beliefs about masculinity or femininity

Write all responses on a flipchart, starting with the phrase:

It's my right to.....

### **3.1.1. Session Objectives and Key Messages**

The first session focused on the presentation of the activities designed in the project, on the analysis of the gender stereotypes and the influence these may have in our life.

#### Objectives:

- Identify students' expectations and ensure that they are fulfilled throughout the course of the training.
- Distinguish between biological sex and the social construction of gender
- Explore how the media and society shape the roles for men and women
- Discuss 'models' of attraction
- Critically assess the media-portrayed image of women and men and understand how young people are negatively influenced by these images.
- Explore the contradictions that sometimes exist in relation to society's expectations for men and women

- Challenge gender stereotypes and also the ‘accepted’ or ‘normalized’ beliefs about masculinity and femininity
- Introduce concepts of gender inequality and hierarchies of power
- Discuss which roles can be changed and how
- Introduce concepts of inequality, bullying, abuse and violence
- Introduce what constitutes GBV and how this relates to gender roles
- Discuss which expectations cannot be fulfilled and why.
- Violence in school environment

Key messages:

- The society influences and develops gender stereotypes but everyone may do something to change them.
- Living one’s own life happily as men and women that they choose to be is one’s own right.
- It is necessary to get protected from the dangerous behaviors used to strengthen the normalization and the acceptance of beliefs on masculinity and femininity.

### **3.1.2. Students’ Participation and Key learnings**

The students of the four classes of the different high schools involved in the project were quite collaborative, participated enthusiastically both alternating positions of attentive listening, criticism and self-determination and bringing their own ideas respectfully of the others.

Working with mixed groups of boys and girls brought to a good level of confrontation on the gender matters and the stimuli proposed. It emerged a difficulty distinguishing between “Sex” and “Gender” but once the difference was explained the participants reflected positively on the argument.

The activity “gender box” highlighted the importance that the physical appearance has for both genders. A female nice body was associated with ‘a thin figure’, while a male nice body meant an ‘athletic and muscular built’. It emerged also how the

expectations of the society produce contradictions for both men and women. The images produced are unreal and unachievable.

The woman should be a “superwoman”: be beautiful, have a beautiful body, be successful in both professional and familiar areas preserving the first position to the family and children. They should be ‘calm, maternal, responsible, lovely, housewives, good looking’ and at the same time ‘provocative, sexy, career women and faithful’. The men should be ‘handsome, with a beautiful body, rich, successful at work and with women, self-confident and able to look after the family economically’.

It emerged that the gender stereotype is quite present. Men are permitted to have many women as this makes them more masculine while women are not permitted to have different partners as this makes them seem loose.

Key learning:

- Gender and Sex
- Gender stereotype
- Differences of gender
- Bullying
- It’s my right...

**3.1.3. Things to think about**

The activities proposed in this session permitted through ‘play’ to treat arguments distant to the participants (gender differences and stereotypes) making them more available, clearer, and more criticisable. It was considered quite significant associating the gender stereotypes with the influence of the society on life, on the way being yourselves, and on the right to be as you desire to be. This first empowerment activity brought to reflection on what the participants may do as teenagers and in their everyday life in order to fight gender stereotypes and gender based violence.

A “fragile” point of this activity was having highlighted which were the awards and penalties for the ones approaching or turning away the gender stereotypes emerged. This activity showed that what was considered an award for someone (notoriety) was a penalty for someone else. Hot discussion followed explicating specific dynamics between the classmates.

## 3.2. Session 2

### Violence in romantic relationships

Overview of last session and key messages

- Definition of Gender-based violence and short examples
- Scenarios depicting incidences of gender-based violence

#### 3.2.1. Session Objectives and Key Messages

##### Objectives:

- Pupils to have increased understanding of GBV, what types exist, when it happens and what causes it
- Pupils to understand the definition of power, hierarchies of power and that abuse of power is a choice (i.e. abuse is the perpetrator’s choice, not the responsibility of the victim)
- Pupils to understand the links between GBV and people choosing to abuse the power they have.
- Pupils identify specific techniques for challenging peers’ attitudes and behaviours that support GBV in the school environment
- Pupils identify myth that support GBV and stereotypy
- Enhance students’ understanding of GBV (understand what constitutes GBV, when it happens, how it happens and the reasons behind it)
- Identify types of violence and of GBV
- Enable students to identify incidences of GBV as such

- Link how the stereotypical roles for women and men, social taboos and prejudices can lead to GBV
- Explore hierarchies of power between gender and across genders
- Explore the boundaries of healthy relationships
- Draw attention to psychological violence and its serious repercussions
- Explore what constitutes verbal /physical abuse, control, threatening, intimidation

Key messages:

- Abuse of power is a choice not a responsibility of a victim
- Violence is present in the relationships between adolescents
- Psychological violence has serious repercussion on mental health
- Everyone can do something against GBV

### **3.2.2. Students' Participation and Key learnings**

The students answered positively also to this session. In all the groups the participants had difficulty to define the gender based violence while were able to name and distinguish the different forms of violence. The least known forms of violence were economic and assisted violence.

The presentation of the stories brought either to a good involvement of the participants and to a discussion on the responsibility of the violence exerted.

The majority of the participants, either boys and girls, stressed the responsibility that the victim in the stories read, had in some way in provoking the violence experienced through some of her behaviors (deluding the boy, dressing provocatively, accepting the advances in internet ...).

The trainers tried particularly to change this myth and stressed how violence is always a choice of the person exerting it and not of the person suffering it.

## Key learnings

- GBV
- Hierarchies of power in relationship
- The responsibility of the violence is of the person that chooses to exert it and not of the person that suffers it.

### 3.2.3. Things to think about

Helping the participants to understand that the responsibility of the violence is of the person that chooses to exert it and not of the person that suffers it, was one of the most difficult and ticklish passage of this session. It requests certainly the necessary time to permit a good discussion between the participants and highlight all the aspects of the case. Initially there were forms of prejudices toward the victims of violence (she caused it, she didn't get enough protection ...), and only after an ample discussion the participants succeeded in paying attention to the severity and responsibility of the actions of the persons exerting violence and not to the "responsibility" of the person suffering it.

This activity seemed being a useful instrument to explore the youngsters' perceptions and to try to change it. It was certainly the first time that the participants treated such arguments, expressed their perceptions, ideas and opinion, and realized that some behaviors considered "normal" before were actually forms of violence.

## 3.3. Session 3

### **Activity: Role Play**

- Explain to the participants that they are going to listen to a short story talking about a couple and their relationship and that after there will be a discussion on the impressions generated.
- Role Play

- Discussion about:
  - Identify incidences of GBV in romantic relationships
  - Identify and explore verbal /physical abuse, control, power, intimidation
  - Discuss notions of how violence in relationships is romanticized.
  - Violence can be provoked?
  - Reaction of friends

### 3.3.1 Session Objectives and Key Messages

#### Objectives:

- Identify the warning signs of GBV in romantic relationships
- Understand the fact that GBV is ‘systematic’ abuse, not just a violent act
- Discuss how experiences of GBV in romantic relationships are different for boys and girls
- Explore how violence in relationships is romanticized
- Identify the barriers people often experience in challenging GBV (lack of awareness, fear, belief that it is a ‘private matter’)
- Identify the barriers people often experience in challenging GBV (lack of awareness, fear, belief that it is a ‘private matter’)
- Pupils to explore how they can respond to instances of GBV in intimate relationships in a safe way
- Pupils to understand how they can protect themselves and others from GBV in intimate relationships

#### Key messages:

- You are not alone
- It is possible to identify the risk’s signals.
- It is possible to end up a violent relationship.

### 3.3.2. Students' Participation and Key learnings

Even this session was successful and obtained participation in all the classes. The story used for the exercise was considered very near to the real experience of the participants and helped them to identify themselves with the characters and recognize that some seemingly "harmless" behaviors that even the participants experience or had experienced in their relationships, may be forms of violence if acted in a systematic or harmful manner for one's own rights.

The story helped the participants to outline the strategies of action in case boys or girls may encounter violence: ask friends for help, talk to the victim, look for adult's support, and go to a centre specialized in family consulting. The figures of parents and teachers as adult references to ask for help caused discussion between the participants: while some of them would never talk about violence with these adults, others may do it.

#### Key learnings

- Romanticizing the relationships brings to possible violence and systematic power abuse.
- The GBV is very frequent among teenagers.

### 3.3.3. Things to think about

It emerged the difficulty of the participants to identify the forms of help to ask for in case facing violence. What stroke a lot was the youngsters' perception considering teachers not able to furnish help in case requested.

## 3.4. Session 4

### **Peer education**

PowerPoint Presentation on what peer education is and how young people can become peer educators.

### **Qualities of a peer educator**

Discuss key qualities of peer educators:

- Balance
- Flexibility
- Impartiality
- Intuition
- Focus on the process
- Inclusion
- Empathy and good listening skills
- Creativity
- Humor

### **Art activity**

Facilitators to explain the purpose of the art activity, discuss possible ways students can go about it.

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation questionnaire

### **3.4.1 Session Objectives and Key Messages**

#### Objectives:

- Discuss general ways young people can use to stand up to GBV
- Students to become aware of what peer education is, understand the role of the peer educator and recognize why peer education is effective.
- Students to be encouraged to become peer educators
- Discuss the skills and qualities peer educators will need to draw upon during their trainings
- Be promoter about action against GBV

### Key Messages:

- Everyone can be promoter about action against GBV
- Everyone can be a potential peer educator
- Enhance your skill is possible

### **3.4.2 Students' Participation and Key learnings**

Students' participation was successful. Many students wanted to have the opportunity to be peer educator and participate to the training. They were excited to help younger students to empower their knowledge about GBV between adolescent. In all cases it was their first time they were involved in acting as peer educators, so it was important that they understood the key principles of peer education.

### Art activity

The creation of the artistic product was enthusiastically embraced by the students because it gave them an opportunity to 'express themselves' and also convey messages to others.

The students create:

- poster about what is violence and how to get it out
- spot audio about action against GBV in different languages
- stories about GBV in adolescence and how to get it out

Clearly, the art activities provide a 'creative note' to the trainings, making the entire experience more enjoyable and more complete.

The products were inspired from a variety of aspects discussed during the trainings, as for instance:

- Messages about violence in relationship
- Messages about the risk of 'romanticizing violence'
- Messages about the fact that 'no one can provoke violence'

- Messages about the fact ‘no one is alone in front of violence’
- Messages about the fact ‘you can stop the violence’ and how you can stop the violence

Key learnings:

- Students can communicate messages about GBV to other young people
- Young people’s understanding of how they can protect themselves and others from GBV

### **3.4.3 Things to think about**

Young people felt very responsibility realizing that “be a peer educator” means ‘acting as a teacher’ and all of them were very enthusiastic and motivated in carrying out trainings to their peers. This responsibility can generate a mistress and need to be carried up from the trainers and need to be considered in the session.

### **3.5. Training the Peer Educators**

Particular emphasis was placed on the skills and qualities that could promote participatory and interactive learning among peers. Improving their own skills to stay in relation with other young students and to ‘teach’ them.

The training also allowed young people to discuss their concerns and fears of becoming peer educators. Some key principles of group facilitation were discussed (as for instance good communication skills, impartiality, inclusion, flexibility, creativity etc.).

In the training we prepared peer trainings activity and we agreed on our roles and our presence during their activities with peers

### **3.6. Peer Trainings**

Activity of the peer education training:

- Introduction of the Daphne Project
- Short briefing from peer trainers about the training

- Activity “Gender in a box”:
  - To understand what gives status to boys and girls and women and men in our society
  - To understand the social mechanisms by which society confers status on girls and boys as also women and men
  - Explore concepts of masculinity- femininity, gender roles and gender stereotypes
- Use the role play of scenario “George and Eveline” for:
  - Explain what gender-based violence is
  - Identify incidences of GBV in romantic relationships
  - Identify and explore verbal /physical abuse , control, power, intimidation
  - Discuss notions of how violence in relationships is romanticized.

The peer education training focused on exploring the ways that gender-based violence is manifested in adolescent romantic relationships, considering how relevant this issue is to young people.

In view of its great appeal and its powerful impact, the role play exercise of ‘George and Eveline’ constituted the center focus of the peer education training. In addition, since it was also important to identify the relationship between GBV and gender roles, an exercise on society’s expectations of women and men was also included.

### **3.7. Teachers’ Training**

This training involved teachers who asked to provide their students for participation in the training workshops and teachers just involved in the research. We proposed them the opportunity to participate in a one-day workshop that introduced them to the basic concepts relating to GBV and peer education. In this way they could be actively engaged in the process and support their students.

Unfortunately not all teachers interested to the workshop made to come due to school commitments. Anyway, even if they have not participated, they appreciated

the opportunity and they showed their interest asking for material about the workshop.

#### Activity Teacher' training:

- Introduction to the training
- Power Point Presentation about the Youth 4Youth Programme and first search results
- Theoretical Background on: Gender/ Social construction/normalization, Gender inequalities, Gender based violence, Gender roles
- Short debriefing about their evaluation of the intervention in the classroom and peer education experience
- Discussion of how the school system can support teachers in standing up to GBV

#### Teachers' feedback:

Feedback from the teachers at the workshop was positive. Stressed the importance of this type of activity in the school environment, and the difficulties they met to address both these issues with other colleagues and with the boys. They appreciated the activities proposed and the tools used.

## **4. Programme Outcomes**

### **4.1. Shifts in knowledge, attitudes and Perceptions**

#### **4.1.1. PRE and POST questionnaires**

The students participating at the training were 83 on average. The questionnaire was administered to 69 students before the training sessions began and to 70 students after the training programme terminated. The first sample was composed of 37% boys and 62% girls while the second sample was composed of 41% boys and 59% girls. The mean age was nearly the same in both samples, 17.51 (s.d.= 0.70 range 16-19), and 17.43 (s.d.= 0.70 range 16-19). Regarding the other demographic data collected in the pre and post training period the majority lived in

urban areas and had already had an intimate relationship in the past. This disparity between the two samples and a number of students that participated at the training is due to the fact that the students participating in the training sessions were not always present during the all session and questionnaire administration.

The following tables outline the differences in perceptions, attitudes and knowledge of all the students as they stood prior and post the training. Regarding the perceptions of the characteristics the percentages indicate if they apply mostly to men, women or both. In the rest of the tables the percentages indicate the degree of agreement (strongly agree and agree) or disagreement (strongly disagree and disagree) according to what was considered 'appropriate' for each statement. As there were only 44 students out of the total sample having completed the questionnaire either before and after the training programme finished, the data collected was analyzed statistically to search for significant shift in knowledge, perceptions and attitudes due to training only for this part of the sample. The frequencies of the responses given are calculated for the whole sample and are shown in the following tables. There were also some participants giving no answer. The frequencies of the "no answers" are not shown in the tables as they were quite low or even sometimes missing.

The comparison of the percentages brings to the conclusion that the training had at some extent a significant impact on the student's perceptions, attitudes and knowledge in relation to gender stereotypes and forms of violence, and to actions to undertake in case of witnessing violent behaviors.

Young people's perceptions on the characteristics belonging to boys or girls seem somehow changed after the training as in 19 adjectives out of 26 there was an increase in the percentage of the students attributing them to both genders (see Table 1). Only in three cases (ambitious, arrogant and polite) there was a decrease in the frequencies of the response "applies equally to both". These differences in frequencies in the pre and post questionnaire remained similar even when there were only 44 students considered. It seems that the exercise "Gender in a box" worked producing positive changes in the gender's characteristics perceptions.

**Table 1 Characteristics**

	Applies mostly to MEN		Applies mostly to WOMEN		Applies equally to BOTH	
	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %
Administration						
adaptable	9	10	33	23	58	67
adventurous	45	46	1	3	50	50
aggressive	67	63	6	1	26	36
ambitious	10	19	19	11	70	69
analytical	22	17	38	33	33	44
athletic	54	53	1	3	44	44
compassionate		3	68	61	29	36
arrogant	42	49	5	7	52	43
dynamic	26	20	19	9	52	70
polite	6	3	29	39	62	58
promiscuous	16	10	13	20	67	67
sensitive	1	1	67	52	32	44
flirtatious	14	4	38	36	45	59
tough	78	79	3		19	20
timid	9	3	50	56	38	40
smart	9	6	36	19	54	76
slender	7	7	34	33	55	59
confident	35	34	16	4	46	62
modest	10	10	26	29	60	60

serious	12	13	29	16	58	71
decent	10	2	25	20	62	77
nurturing	3	3	35	23	61	73
shy	12	6	45	39	43	54
independent	20	26	17	10	60	64
caring	9	4	48	46	42	50
vulnerable	10	6	51	50	35	43

The comparison of the means produced by the 44 students in the pre and post questionnaire showed statistically significant changes regarding the perceptions on gender's behavior, perceptions on intimate relationship and general attitudes to violence. The shift produced after the training programme goes toward more disagreement with statements stating conservative vision of the gender roles, justifying violence in intimate relationship or affirming wrong myths on violence. The frequencies of all the alternative responses are shown in the tables 2, 4, and 6. These percentages refer to the entire sample.

**Table 2: BEHAVIORS**

		Agree		Disagree		I am not sure	
Administration		Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %
1.	Real men don't cry	10	14	87	84		
2.	It's mostly the woman's duty to take care of the house and the children	20	27	77	71	1.5	2
3.	Boys are usually better than girls in science	20	14	75	84	5	2
	It's the woman's nature to be shy and timid	33	36	62	64	5	
4.	It's more difficult for boys to control their temper	48	39	42	61	9	
5.	Men are more driven than women to be professionally successful	19	26	77	73	4	1

6.	It's not proper for girls to swear	14	11.5	67	83	19	4
7.	Men should be primarily responsible for financially supporting their family	45	41.5	49	57	6	1.5
8.	Men are tough and aggressive by nature	22	23	77	74	1	3
9.	Boys cannot control their sexual urges	26	10	71	89	1.5	
10.	Boys who have many sexual partners are macho	12	13	83	84	4	1.5
11.	Men are more focused than women in making money and being financially well-off	32	34	59	60	7.5	4.5

**Table 4 RELATIONSHIPS**

		Agree		Disagree		I am not sure	
Administration		Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %
23.	If a partner constantly points out your shortcomings it's because s/he cares	19	2	77	94.5	4	3.5
24.	There's nothing wrong with checking the mobile phone of your partner	26	17	74	80		3
25.	It is ok to restrict the way your partner dresses if you think it is provocative	54	36	45	63	1	1
26.	Is it completely natural to restrict the amount of time your partner spends alone with his/her friends	25	9	74	91	1	
27.	If your partner constantly checks on you (i.e. asking where you are and what you're doing) it means that s/he truly cares about you	32	11.5	61	87	7	1.5
28.	When you show you are jealous in a relationship, it means you really love your partner	42	34	46	56	12	10
29.	It is acceptable to shout, insult and threaten your partner if s/he has been unfaithful to you	40	33	57	64	3	3
30.	What happens in a relationship is a private matter and others should not interfere even if	7	6	88	93	5	1

	violence is present						
31.	If you try to help a friend who is in an abusive relationship you'll make things worse for him/her	4	4	90	89	6	7

**Table 5 BOYS AND GIRLS**

In a relationship it is a **type of violence when HE ....**

		Agree		Disagree		I am not sure	
		Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %
Administration							
32.	Continually shouts at her	77	86	19	13	4	
33.	Checks what she does, where she is and who she is with	42	73	49	26	9	
34.	Makes offensives jokes about her in front of others	87	92	12	7	1	
35.	Slaps her	94	92	4	7	2	
36.	Threatens to physically hurt her	93	92	4	7	3	
37.	Pressures her to have sex	78	86	16	13	6	

In a relationship it is a **type of violence when SHE....**

		Agree		Disagree		I am not sure	
		Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %
Administration							
38.	Continually shouts at him	62	74.5	35	24	3	
39.	Checks what he does, where he is and who he is with	40	70	54	27	6	
40.	Makes offensives jokes about him in front of others	78	84	20	14	2	

41.	Slaps him	87	80	12	19	1	1
42.	Threatens to physically hurt him	86	77	13	23	1	
43.	Pressures him to have sex	65	72	29	27	6	1

Despite significant shifts were expected also in the general perceptions on violence, and in the perceptions on violent behaviors between boys and girls in intimate relationships, the comparison of the means produced in the pre and post questionnaire showed only non-significant differences. Even though no significant shift was obtained from the analysis of the data collected there was an increase in the percentage of disagreements in the post questionnaire for most of the statements. For more details see tables 3 and 5 showing the frequencies of the responses furnished by the entire sample.

**Table 3 GENERAL PERCEPTIONS**

		Agree		Disagree		I am not sure	
Administration		Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %
13.	When students call each other names it is most often just harmless fun	68	62	25	34	6	4
14.	I believe that bullying is a natural part of being a boy	4	7	93	93	3	
15.	People who are being called names most probably deserve it	4	11	93	86	1.5	1.5
16.	Threatening to hit someone but not hitting them is still a form of violence	80	84	17	14	3	2
17.	It's ok to gossip and create negative rumours about someone if their behaviour calls for it	20	21.5	71	77	9	1.5
18.	Physical abuse is more serious than verbal abuse	47	46	49	48	3	6
19.	There's nothing wrong with showing sexually explicit pictures from magazines to someone	11.5	7	77	84	11.5	9

	who doesn't like it						
20.	Making fun and mocking someone about their appearance via facebook is not as serious as doing it in person	12	19	87	77	1	3
21.	It is ok to make sexual advances to a girl who you know has had many boyfriends in the past	19	11.5	74	88.5	7	
22.	When a girl refuses to have sex with a boy she has been flirting with she is just "playing hard to get"	18	10	78	87	4	3

**Table 6 GENERAL ATTITUDES TO VIOLENCE**

		Agree		Disagree		I am not sure	
Administration		Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %
44.	If a person is being abused, they could simply exit the relationship	42	37	55	56	3	7
45.	Women are most likely to be sexually abused by a stranger than someone they know	25	13	72	80	3	7
46.	Sometimes girls provoke sexual aggression by boys because of the way they are dressed	52	38	42	59	6	3
47.	People who resort to violence most likely have a drinking problem	28	22	64	74	9	4
48.	Victims of violence are usually people who are weak characters	32	26	65	73	3	1
49.	People who abuse others are usually not very educated	35	23	56	72	9	4
50.	Violence appears mostly in grown-up relationships and rarely in adolescent relationships	22	10	74	86	3	4
51.	People exercise violence in a relationship because they want to control their partner	62	61	23	30	15	9

52.	People exercise violence because they feel superior to the victim	68	70	16	21.5	15	7
53.	People who don't report on-going abuse by others must want the situation to continue	7	3	93	91		6

#### 4.1.2. Findings from the Focus Group Discussions

The focus group experience was positive and very enriching on knowledge and right attitudes to assume toward gender based violence and stereotypes on gender roles. The following statements refer to what the participants thought about this experience.

- *It was very useful: the argument is known a little and one thinks that there is violence when there are slaps but violence is even more. Now I know how to recognize psychological violence.*
- *I know that there is a solution, that there are places where a woman may go and get help.*
- *There are different forms of violence.*
- *It is a taboo, teachers and students, parents and children talk about it quite a little. Doing such kind of project helps us to understand that it is not unreal but really occurs, it is not so far from us as it seems.*
- *Both me and my friends reconsidered our intimate relationships: at the end most of us broke up.*

#### 4.1.3. Participant Evaluations

The experience of training resulted positive for the participants that referred more positive feelings experienced than negative ones (see table 7). The training seems having produced changes in the previous perceptions and attitudes on the arguments discussed as 23% of the participants reevaluated their previous opinions and stances, 61% felt engaged / involved and 70% intrigued.

**Table 7 FEELINGS EXPERIENCED DURING THE TRAINING**

Happy 16%	Challenged 7%	Dissatisfied 6%	Content 17%
Surprised 10%	Disappointed 4%	Enjoyed yourself 16%	Intrigued 70%
Empowered 4%	Revaluated your previous opinions and stances 23%	Bored 4%	Engaged/Involved 61%
Interested 67%	Stressed 0%	Inspired 26%	Disinterested 1%
Rushed/ Pressed for time 12%	Enthusiastic 16%	Tired and low energy 3%	Relaxed 33%

The satisfaction with the training resulted also in the high frequency of agreement received in statements referring to the training experience given in the Training Evaluation Questionnaire. 54% of the participants agreed and completely agreed that training stimulated new learning which means that it may have produced changes in the previous perceptions and attitudes regarding violence and gender roles through furnishing new knowledge. The acquisition of new knowledge due to training may be derived also from the high percentages of participants that found the topics interesting (62%), that appreciated the active participation in the activities and discussion, and expression of ideas (64%), that considered time allocated for discussion as adequate (71%) and that found the theoretical aspect of the course satisfactory (67%). As it can be viewed on table 9 the majority of the participants indicated high percentages on the usefulness of the training in the acquaintance of new knowledge and understanding on gender stereotypes and gender based violence.

The conclusion on the usefulness of the course is obvious if we read the answers to the open questions too. It brought significant knowledge on the violence phenomenon and changes in the vision of the youngsters. The following statements refer to the important things some participants learnt during the course.

*- The violence is of different types, the most difficult thing to do is to learn how to recognize it and to have no fear asking for help as there is always someone ready to help you.*

*- Recognize the inappropriate behaviors.*

*- Definition of gender based violence and the different types of violence.*

The acquisition of the new knowledge on the phenomenon was not passive as the participants felt being actively involved.

*- Involvement, deepening, personal knowledge of the trainer: all the students participated actively listening to the discussion and understanding the argument treated.*

*- Involvement: I felt involved; impartiality: no one was discriminated; plainness: the doubts were elucidated.*

*- The commitment shown by the trainers brought us being more attentive so we followed the lessons with more interest.*

The course stimulated also discussion and reflection also on the stereotypes on genders.

*- Difference between sex and gender, existence of different forms of violence beside the physical violence.*

*- Balance and equality between genders.*

Different participants indicated this part of the training as the most appreciated.

*- Gender based stereotypes: interesting and near my everyday life.*

- ... *the society's expectations on the gender roles as the course showed that certain stereotypes are false.*

- ... *the society has developed feminine and masculine stereotypes.*

The new knowledge obtained modified also most of the myths on the nature and the presence of violence in the society.

- ... *the violence is everywhere in our society.*

- ...*the violence hides everywhere that is frequent both at work and at home.*

- *The violence may be present also in little gestures that are not considered violence by most of the people.*

The way the arguments were treated by the trainers were appreciated a lot by the participants as it stimulated not only the acquisition of theoretical knowledge on the violence phenomenon but also the reflection on how a violence victim may feel, what to do in case of violence and how to recognize the beginning and the escalation of violent behaviors. The appreciation was also due to the role playing method used to introduce the participants to the arguments.

- ... *when we read the stories of real life occurring frequently: it helped me understand how people that experience violence feel.*

- ... *situations between youngsters to read and comment: these are real and close to our everyday life, and now we know how to face them in case we or our friends encounter similar experiences.*

- ... *when we staged one of the stories in order to understand better the beginning and the escalation of an episode of violence because its experience, even though on stage, helps its comprehension.*

## 4.2. Empowerment

### 4.2.1. PRE and POST questionnaires

Despite significant shifts were expected in actions to undertake in case of violence the comparison of the means produced in the pre and post questionnaire showed only non-significant differences. Even though the majority of the participants retained it is important to intervene in case of violence witnessed what stroked is the decrease in the “disagree” answers in the post questionnaire. It is important underlying also the decrease in the “agree” answers with statements referring the right action to undertake in case of violent behavior witnessed or experienced. It seems that the participants felt more confident talking with friends about violence experienced rather than with their parents. For more details see table 8 showing the frequencies of the responses given by the entire sample.

**Table 8 ACTIONS**

		Agree		Disagree		I am not sure	
Administration		Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %	Pre %	Post %
54.	If I witness a classmate of mine being bullied, I would remain impartial and not interfere	4	4	96	94		2
55.	I feel confident to take action if I witness violent incidents among my classmates	54	47	36	52	10	1
56.	If teachers step in when a student is being abused by other students they would make things worse	15	37	77	57	7	6
57.	If I experience any sort of abusive behavior in my relationship I would immediately talk to my parents about it	48	54	40	40	12	6
58.	If I experience any sort of abusive behavior in my relationship I would immediately talk to my friends about it	70	63	20	33	10	4
59.	Even though I suspect that a friend of mine may be in an abusive relationship, I prefer not to interfere	3	9	93	89	4	3

#### 4.2.2. Findings from Focus Group Discussions

Even though the comparison of the data collected on the pre and post questionnaires seemed showing no significant shift toward more awareness on the actions to undertake in case of violence, during the focus group as well as in the Training Evaluation Questionnaire the participants referred feeling empowered on how to recognize and act when facing or witnessing violence. The following are some of the phrases recorded during the focus group experience.

*- We are more informed than before, I know what to do in case violence occurs to me or to a friend of mine.*

*- I feel being a spokesperson on how to fight violence.*

*- I feel having more responsibility on the gender based violence.*

*- I understood that we, the youngsters must and can do something to change things; beginning from us.*

*- I participated as peer educator to try myself on. I wanted to know how would have reacted other guys to the argument. I can imagine what my classmates think and would be interesting to see how other students face this argument.*

*-I participated as peer educator to see how much I know on the arguments. The result was fantastic.*

#### 4.2.3. Participant Evaluations

As it can be seen on the table 9 the participants consider the training programme very useful in empowering them either to recognize gender based violence, unhealthy relationships and one's behavior and to decide for the right thing to do in case witnessing violence. It is interesting to note that the mostly chosen percentages were 80% and 90% in case of empowerment to recognize violence and unhealthy relationships and behaviors. In case of feeling empowered to choose the right action in case of violence witnessed the mostly chosen percentage was 100%.

**Table 9**

	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
To what extent did the workshop contribute to enhancing your knowledge and understanding of gender stereotypes and gender based violence?	9%	23%	32%	9%	3%
To what degree the Workshop helped you recognize incidences of gender based violence?	9%	22%	26%	16%	7%
To what degree the Workshop helped you recognize if your relationships are healthy or not?	17%	17%	19%	16%	10%
To what degree the Workshop helped you understand when your own behavior may become unhealthy?	10%	19%	19%	12%	16%
To what degree the Workshop helped you to know what you should do if you or someone you care about is being abused?	4%	13%	19%	20%	28%

Regarding the open question *“Why do you feel more capable to take action against gender violence? What has changed?”* the responses were many and different. As stated in the *“Findings from the focus group discussion”* paragraph, the students felt empowered and competent on how to face gender based violence. Here there are some of their phrases witnessing their empowerment

- *I understand better when a situation is violent.*
- *I have more information on possible things to do.*
- *I gained more awareness.*
- *I understood that acting alone is not enough to exit a violent episode and that it is necessary to get help from friends or from experts.*
- *I know how to distinguish the various forms of violence, to recognize them and what to do.*
- *I am stronger now*
- *My way of thinking has changed*
- *I have always been competent on how to face violence but now I am more competent.*

The usefulness of the training programme can be deduced also by the high percentages of the disposability to participate in other similar workshops or to recommend it to friends (see table 10). Thanks to the positive experience and the richness of the training programme the participants taught what a peer educator means obtaining new skills and 74% showed the willingness to act as peer educators in issues regarding gender based violence.

**Table 10 QUESTIONS ON THE WILLINGNESS TO CONTINUE WITH THE EXPERIENCE**

	Certainly Yes	Most probably Yes
Would you like to participate in another similar workshop in the future?	51%	44%
Would you recommend to a friend of yours to participate in a workshop like this?	59%	35%
Would you be willing in the future to act as a peer educator of your classmates in issues related to gender-based violence?	30%	44%
Do you think that such kind of workshops should be conducted by teachers during the school curriculum?	58%	36%

## 5. The Peer Education Approach

### 5.1. Young people as Peer Educators

#### Observations by facilitators

Young people showed enthusiasm and strong motivation to become peer educators. In total, there were 14 peer educators trained during this programme. All the trained peer educators expressed a real interest to get engaged in this role more actively in the future. Other students asked to be trained as peer educators but unfortunately it wasn't possible. For a good implementation of the peer training a maximum of 2 peer educators for each class was decided. The schools didn't provided enough

number of classes for the peer training to satisfy all the students who expressed the desire to become peer educators.

It was astonishing to teachers to see that students usually not interested in any school activities were willing to participate in this part of the training programme.

All peer educators terminated successfully their training. All of them appeared comfortable and relaxed and did not show any performance anxiety. It was evident that they considered their role as peer educators seriously. They encouraged participants to express themselves freely and openly trying to guarantee respect between them while discussing their points of view and ideas on GBV. The informal and slang language used throughout the training helped participants to express themselves more freely and easily. They also used a lot of humor that facilitated the confrontation in the class.

During the training the peer educators feared that their peers would have not paid attention to them or considered them seriously. Some of the peer educators were afraid of having not enough experience in GBV to be in the position to answer questions. The presence of the facilitators during the peer education training provided a sense of safety to the peer educators as ensured that all questions could be answered and any misunderstandings could be clarified.

Peer educators were surprised to realize that their fear was groundless and that they were taken into consideration by their peers. The intervention of facilitators was minimum during the training.

The following two sections derived from the focus group discussions.

### **Evaluation of peer participants**

All participants considered participating in the peer education training as a great and significant experience to them. They used words such as 'necessary', 'innovative' 'excellent', 'positive', 'not boring', 'stimulating', 'I recommend it', 'enriching' to describe their experience with the peer education training.

'It is nice having youngsters from our school and not an outsider explaining us the phenomenon. We know who these persons are as we meet them every morning.

'We feel more intimate, close'.

'The peer education is very useful: a boy of the second year pays more attention to what is said by a boy older than him rather than an adult.'

The enthusiasm showed was really significant and brought a large share of participants to express the desire to continue this kind of training also next year in order to give the chance to other students attend as well.

'More projects ought to be done in every school and every class.'

'The school ought to show more willingness to participate in this kind of projects. They can be introduced in the afternoon lessons.'

### **Self-assessment of peer educators**

Young people were completely enthusiastic of their experience as peer educators.

'I enjoyed a lot the experience as peer educator: the students were very willing to participate, narrated their life stories, made questions, and showed interest'.

'A lot of discussions raised, some of the phrases were chilling and I had to strive in order to be calm. '.

'I realized that this experience had positive impact, finally a girl talked with you and this means that the message arrived'.

'I appreciated that even the boys showed interest. '.

All peer educators were so motivated after the peer trainings that they expressed a need for the programme to continue so that they could repeat the experience next year.

### **5.2. Empowerment through Peer Education**

Participants considered that it was easier to discuss with peers because they 'speak the same language as you', they can understand you better and use 'language and examples that are close to your reality'. Considering that there were no teachers

present the participant felt not 'subjected to authority' and this brought them to feel more comfortable to express themselves freely and talk openly about their experiences. The participants and peer educators felt protagonists and grown up expressing their will to expand their ideas of GBV among other students in the school during the next school council.

The peer training was undoubtedly an empowering experience for the peer educators.

'The students narrated to us their life stories that were sometimes absurd and we had to keep calm as you did with us. This was the part that mostly strokes me: you were neutral. There were prejudices in us at the beginning but you were an example to me stimulating the willingness to do my best with the others and I succeeded.

## **6. Conclusion and recommendations**

In conclusion the experience of training in all its parts resulted positive both for students and for teachers. Students' training seems having produced changes in the previous perceptions and attitudes on the issues discussed, felt engaged and at ease. Also the participants stated that training stimulated new learning about violence and gender roles, and students felt empowered and competent on how to face gender based violence.

Peer education experience was 'positive', 'stimulating', 'innovative' and was felt from peer educator like an opportunity to 'do something concrete' against GBV.

This work has highlighted how teenagers hardly know the GBV and what they hardly know about what to do if they live a similar situation.

Working with teenagers was interesting and stimulating, because this activity doesn't allow involving only adolescents as peer educators but also a large number of students.

## Recommendations

It is important:

- Underlying that the participants felt more confident talking with friends about violence experienced rather than with their parents or teachers. In particular they don't see teachers as a source of help, so it could be important try to involve more teachers, maybe even doing some of the workshops together.
- Earthen account in the future of multicultural classes and second generations of immigrants entering some stories about the foreign girls.
- Think about having both male and female educators.
- Listen the request of students to have more projects like these, maybe even putting them in the afternoon classes.