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Empowering Care. Empowering girls in residential care against violence against women



Funded by the  
European Union

# EMPOWERING CARE PROJECT

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EMPOWERING  
CARE

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

Underage girls in residential care, under the legal responsibility of public authorities are an extremely vulnerable group. There are multiple risk factors of violence (gender, age, parental neglect and reclusion) which intersect. Research shows that high numbers of these girls have experienced violence and abuse, which seriously damage their wellbeing and self-confidence. Empowering girls in residential care against violence against women is a 2-year European project funded by the Daphne III Program of the European Commission. The project was developed under the coordination of SURT. Fundació de Dones (Catalonia), by a multidisciplinary and transnational partnership with organizations from Bulgaria (Animus Association), Cyprus (Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies), Finland (University of Oulu) and Italy (Tampep).

The Empowering Care project aims, , at increasing knowledge on the prevalence and characteristics of experiences of violence and abuse against girls aged 14-18 who are in residential care and under the legal responsibility of public authorities in 5 EU Member States: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Italy and Catalonia/Spain. At the same time, the project aims at empowering young girls in residential care to protect themselves and their peers from violence whilst building in a culture of prevention as well.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

The partnership of the project carried out a qualitative research on the experiences of violence and abuse, perceptions of gender roles and intimate relationships of 14-18 aged girls in residential care in Catalonia, Bulgaria, Italy, Finland and Cyprus.

Girls from all countries mentioned to have suffered all different kinds of violence, i.e. physical and psychological aggressions, sexual abuse, humiliation and being neglected. The impacts of the violence suffered were strong and diverse. Most of them had low self-esteem and had great difficulties to establish healthy and trustful relations with others. Moreover, some of the girls had physical and psychological health problems due to the violence suffered. In parallel, traditional gender roles have shown to be pervasive among them, which also facilitates that some of them become involved in unequal and even violent sexual and affective relationships. All these elements, if not dealt properly, may lead to further violence against young girls at a critical stage of their sexual and affective development.

This empowering programme was designed to provide resources to professionals working in residential care institutions so that they are able to help young girls break the cycle of violence from which they came and to encourage them to search for new and different choices in their adult lives.

With this aim in mind, the general objective of the programme was to promote a process of development of emotional competences and personal empowerment of girls living in residential care institutions. The intention was to raise girls' awareness about their rights, rights that safeguard their safety, development and general wellbeing within an overall aim of promoting the recognition of self-authority and self-confidence to achieve their own purposes and life expectations.

The specific objectives of the programme were:

- › To support girls' empowerment by providing them with tools for gaining autonomy and self-authority so they become able to define realistic and desirable life expectations and hence to take control of their own lives.
- › To raise awareness in girls in terms of gender equality and to enable them to explore the impact that rigid gender norms have on their own identities, behaviours and life's expectations.
- › To improve young girls' knowledge and understanding of the nature of violence against women and girls in terms of causes, consequences and impacts. The intention is that the young women become more able to protect themselves and improve their capacity to engage in positive relationships based on gender equality.

The Empowering Care Manual is a comprehensive resource for professionals who work directly with girls in residential care. It contains comprehensive information on the theoretical and practical framework of the Empowering Care Programme alongside session plans, activity resources and evaluation tools. The programme can be implemented as a whole or can be adjusted and incorporated independently depending on the needs of each training programme and the target group. In either case, the Empowering Care Manual makes an important contribution to the fight against gender-based violence and constitutes an invaluable tool for front-line professionals working with girls in residential care.

## THE EMPOWERING CARE PROGRAMME

## THE EMPOWERING CARE MANUAL